TIPS FOR INSTRUCTIONAL CONTINUITY

“EMERGENCY-PROOFING” YOUR COURSES

PREPARED BY: DARLENE SMUCNY, PH.D., MASON ONLINE (OFFICE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION)
GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

1/12/16
## Contents

**Acknowledgments** ........................................................................................................................................... 2  
**Introduction** .................................................................................................................................................. 3  
**Steps for Your Instructional Continuity Plan** ............................................................................................... 4  
  - Putting Together Your Communication Plan ............................................................................................... 4  
  - Preparing Your Course for Delivery at a Distance ....................................................................................... 6  
  - Ideas for Potential Activities to Replace F2F Class Meetings (Based on Bloom’s Taxonomy) .................... 7  
  - Identifying & Mastering Alternative Delivery Mode(s) ............................................................................... 8  
  - Mapping Your Course Activities and Assessments to Technology Tools ............................................... 9  
**Instructional Continuity Preparation Checklist** ............................................................................................. 10  
**Online Teaching and Learning Resources at Mason** ..................................................................................... 11  
  - Office of Distance Education (Mason Online) ........................................................................................... 11  
  - Center for Teaching and Faculty Excellence .............................................................................................. 11  
  - Learning Support Services, Information Technology Services .................................................................. 11  
  - Distance Education Librarian .................................................................................................................... 11  
  - One Button Studio in Gateway Library ....................................................................................................... 12  
  - Scholarly Communication and Copyright Office, Universities Libraries ............................................... 12  
  - The Writing Center ...................................................................................................................................... 12  
  - Assistive Technology Initiative ................................................................................................................ 12  
  - GMU-TV .................................................................................................................................................... 12  
**Links to Mason Websites about Instructional Continuity** .......................................................................... 13  
**Links to Selected Websites for Instructional Continuity Planning at Other Universities** ...................... 14
Tips for Instructional Continuity: “Emergency Proofing Your Courses”

Acknowledgments

This guide was prepared using an array of existing resources about instructional continuity, including the following:

1. “Emergency-Proof Your Course” websites from Information Technology Services (ITS), George Mason University. (Please see links posted under Links to Mason Websites about Instructional Continuity).
2. Instructional Continuity resources from other universities, including Eastern Carolina University, Georgetown University, Rochester Institute of Technology, Samford University, Suffolk University Boston, Tufts University, University of Maryland University College and Xavier University of Louisiana. (Selected links are posted under Links to Selected Websites for Instructional Continuity Planning at Other Universities).
Introduction

Dear Faculty,

This document provides tips, information, and resources for faculty to continue instruction in the event of an emergency. Many different scenarios can interrupt instruction, such as weather-related campus closures or shutdowns due to emergency situations. “Emergency-proofing” courses is particularly important in the winter months, but also may apply to any emergency or catastrophic situation.

In such events, faculty should be prepared to continue instruction from a distance. You should prepare an instructional continuity plan for each class that you teach. The plan should include: (1) details for your communication plan with your students in the event of an emergency; (2) prepared course materials to have ready to deliver from a distance; and (3) identification and mastery of alternative delivery mode(s) for your course, if you need to instruct from a distance.

Whether you have extensive teaching experience or you’re just getting started, this document will provide you with some practical tips for preparing your instructional continuity plan. Planning sheets and checklists are included to guide you with your planning. You also will find a list to additional resources at George Mason University, particularly relevant to online delivery.

If you have any questions about the content of this document, or if you have further questions about planning for instructional continuity, please feel free to contact me in the Office of Distance Education (Mason Online).

I hope that your Spring 2016 courses are rewarding, productive, and “emergency-proof”!

Best wishes,

Dr. Darlene Smucny, Assistant Director for Quality in Online Instruction

Email: dsmucny@gmu.edu

Phone: 703-993-1907
Steps for Your Instructional Continuity Plan

Putting Together Your Communication Plan

You first need to be aware of the University’s official status regarding the emergency, so please check your Mason Alert Account and direct students to their accounts as well. Include this IMPORTANT TIP in your syllabus!

**IMPORTANT TIP: Manage Your Mason Alert Account**

*All university students and employees are automatically enrolled in Mason Alert and are strongly advised to register cell phone number(s) and additional email addresses to ensure emergency messages are received in a timely manner. To manage your Mason Alert account, go to the portal found on https://ready.gmu.edu/masonalert/ and change your notification preferences and registered devices. Other emergency management information and resources for George Mason University are found at: http://ehs.gmu.edu/emergencymanagement/.*

You then need to develop your communication plan, i.e., how you plan to communicate with your students and with the university, if an emergency occurs. To prepare your communication plan, complete the following steps (listed under COLLECT, SHARE, and PRACTICE) for each of your classes:

**COLLECT:**

- Identify the primary method of communication with your students to use in case of an emergency.
- Obtain student contact information, including Mason email addresses and one other non-Mason account.
- Keep student contact information in both electronic and paper formats.
- Keep paper copies of student contact information in your office and at home.
- Inform your students to let you know if their contact information changes at any time during the semester.
- Document all Mason contact information in electronic and paper formats. This would include Departmental and other University contacts.
• Prepare templates for messages which may be emailed or posted to Blackboard following, during and after an emergency disruption.

SHARE:
• Provide students with your emergency contact Information, including your mason email address, and non-Mason email. If you have a non-Mason e-mail account but you want to keep it private, set up an additional free account just for emergency use. Make sure that you check this “emergency email” regularly throughout the semester, in case students try to contact you even if there are no class disruptions during the semester.
• Following an emergency situation, have students “sign in” to your emergency email address, so that you know that students are safe and available via email or internet.
• Make sure that your syllabus is available in electronic format and provided to your students.
• Inform students how the course will proceed, if there is a disruption or cancellation. Prepare and distribute a timeline of learning activity expectations for emergencies.
• In your syllabus, provide students with general information for instructional continuity, and then provide more specific details when the emergency arises.

PRACTICE:
• Discuss the communications plan with your students at the start of the semester, and review regularly throughout the semester.
Preparing Your Course for Delivery at a Distance

Course delivery includes multiple components. **During an emergency, how will you address the following AT A DISTANCE?**

- distribute documents and readings
- collect student submissions
- continue class discussions
- provide lecture presentations
- hold office hours
- grade and provide feedback on student assignment

What happens to your course if there are extended power outages or extended closures?

**IMPORTANT TIP: Plan Ahead!**

*Thinking ahead, planning for various scenarios, and being flexible, will help support instructional continuity. Develop a timeline for continuation of course instruction; the timeline should contain all expectations and requirements for communication, content delivery, and assessment. In your timeline, let students know when they can expect to hear from you, and how often you expect to hear from them.*

To start your planning, review the learning outcomes you wish to achieve in your course. Plan course content and activities which will address the learning outcomes for various emergency scenarios. Your course plan should address two different emergency scenarios: (1) scenario in which internet and computer access will be available to most students; and (2) scenario in which students will not have internet or computer access (e.g., in case of extended power outage).

When planning content and activities for instructional continuity, consider the following questions:

- What would you do if you were unable to have your class meet face-to-face for an extended period of time, **beginning tomorrow**?
- What happens to your course if there are **extended power outages or extended closures**?
- What is the **essential content** that students should know?
- How will you develop and make your content available to students?
- What do you want your students to **know, understand, or be able to do** after completing the course activities?
- Can you transform planned **f2f activities** to **alternative (online) activities**?
Ideas for Potential Activities to Replace F2F Class Meetings (Based on Bloom’s Taxonomy)  
*Revised from Suffolk University Boston, Center for Teaching & Scholarly Excellence*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bloom’s Level</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>Encourage students to spend the snow day getting ahead with reading, paper writing, or exam preparation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>Ask students to listen to a podcast on course topic and to provide their own written interpretation on the Blackboard discussion board.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application</td>
<td>Ask students to participate in an online resources scavenger hunt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>Ask students to conduct data analysis on a set of online data and post their results to Bb site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synthesis</td>
<td>Have students develop a wiki with test questions for an upcoming exam as a study guide and post to Bb course site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>Have students participate in an online debate.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Identifying & Mastering Alternative Delivery Mode(s)

For your instructional continuity plan, you need to identify and master alternative delivery mode(s) for your course, leveraging instructional technologies.

Information Technology Services at Mason has summarized the Top Five Ways to Emergency-Proof Your Course (see website at: http://doit.gmu.edu/faculty-and-staff/emergency-proof-course/top5/). These five ways allow you to be proactive in preparing your courses for disruptions.

(1) Enhance your technology skills and expertise by enrolling in Mason workshops.
(2) Identify essential content and coursework to the learning goals of your course; and map assessments and activities to the technologies that allow alternative methods of completion.
(3) Identify the primary method of communication and documents distribution.
(4) Pre-record mini-lectures of main course content.
(5) Create an all-inclusive class syllabus and incorporate your policies for instructional continuity.

IMPORTANT TIP: Build Your Technology Expertise at Mason!

Enroll in Mason Workshops, participate in BYTE Week, review Blackboard Courses Support Website, learn about technologies and online services from University Libraries, The Writing Center, etc. Explore free and open technologies, such as Google Docs, Skype, YouTube, WordPress, for individual and group collaborative work.
Mapping Your Course Activities and Assessments to Technology Tools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic or Learning Outcome</th>
<th>Activity or Assessment</th>
<th>Technology Tools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Instructional Continuity Preparation Checklist

✓ Create your emergency communication plan.
✓ Review syllabus and come up with potential plans for instructional continuity.
✓ Determine technology tools to use.
✓ Obtain any necessary training from ITS for technology tools.
✓ Familiarize yourself with technology resources and practice with new technology.
✓ Discuss instructional continuity with your students to communicate expectations and your preferred communication method
✓ Hold a “fake snow day” to practice new technology with the class (either announced or surprise)
✓ Adjust plan accordingly with lessons learned from fake snow day
Online Teaching and Learning Resources at Mason

Office of Distance Education (Mason Online)
(Web: http://masononline.gmu.edu / Email: distance@gmu.edu / Phone: 703-993-8978)

Mason’s Office of Distance Education (Mason Online) provides resources for effective teaching and learning for online courses, including information about What Does Good Online Teaching Look Like? and What Does a Good Online Class Look Like? Together with the Center for Teaching and Faculty Excellence (CTFE) and Learning Support Services (LSS), Mason Online offers development opportunities for online faculty including Lunch & Learns, webinars, conferences, workshops, training, and consultations.

Center for Teaching and Faculty Excellence
(Web: http://ctfe.gmu.edu / Email: cte@gmu.edu / Phone: 703-993-8652)

Many principles for effective teaching relate to teaching across all delivery formats (f2f, online, and hybrid). The Center for Teaching and Faculty Excellence has created a number of helpful resources for teaching and learning.

Learning Support Services, Information Technology Services
(Web: http://www.doit.gmu.edu)

Learning Support Services (LSS) promote faculty, staff, and student development of information technology skills. The unit offers extensive resources related to learning online, including training, workshops, course tools, and instructional design consultations.

- **Blackboard Courses Support** includes the Blackboard Faculty Quick Start Guide. For further assistance with technical aspects of your Blackboard course, contact courses@gmu.edu. More information about Courses Support and Additional Course Tools may be found at: https://coursessupport.gmu.edu/Faculty/.
- **BYTE (Build Your Technology & Training Expertise) Week** is a series of free onsite and online workshops for Mason faculty, staff, graduate research assistants, and graduate teaching assistants to build and maintain relevant skills in educational technology. BYTE Week for Spring 2016 will take place January 11-January 15, 2016. For info on how to register for Mason workshops, please check out Wisdomwhere Quick Start Guide.
- **Course Tool Information** may be found at: http://doit.gmu.edu/faculty-and-staff/course-tools/
- **Instructional Design Consultation** information can be found at: http://doit.gmu.edu/faculty-and-staff/instructional-design-consultations/. For instructional design assistance, contact idteam@gmu.edu.

Distance Education Librarian
(Web: http://library.gmu.edu/for/distance / Email: delib@gmu.edu / Phone: 703-993-4038)
The Distance Education librarian assists online students and instructors with any library-related questions.

One Button Studio in Gateway Library
(Web: http://library.gmu.edu/onebutton / Email: gateway@gmu.edu / Phone: 703-993-3471)

The One Button Studio is a simplified video recording setup where you can create high-quality video projects. You only need to bring your flash drive with you and push a single button. The One Button Studio, which is managed by Gateway Library Teaching & Learning Services, is located in Gateway Library 134-I in the Johnson Center. Please schedule appointments for One Button Studio at: http://library.gmu.edu/onebutton.

Scholarly Communication and Copyright Office, Universities Libraries
(Web: http://copyright.gmu.edu/ / Email: copyright@gmu.edu / Phone: 703-993-2544)

The Scholarly Communication and Copyright Office educates the Mason community about copyright and related issues. They provide information to familiarize faculty with the fundamentals of copyright, including course content used in distance learning. The Scholarly Communication and Copyright Office website includes information about proprietary content available to the Mason community for use in teaching and student assignments, as well as information and guidelines for use of creative commons and public domain resources.

The Writing Center
(Web: http://writingcenter.gmu.edu / Email: wcenter@gmu.edu / Phone: 703-993-1200)

The Writing Center provides a variety of resources and services for students (e.g., tutoring, workshops, writing guides, handbooks), including The Online Writing Lab (OWL), an email-based tutoring service. Real-time video tutoring is also being piloted. Faculty can learn more about The Writing Center services at: http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/for-faculty/about-our-tutoring.

Assistive Technology Initiative
(Web: http://ati.gmu.edu / Email: ati@gmu.edu / Phone: 703-993-4329)

The Assistive Technology Initiative (ATI) facilitates accessible text production and accessible media production for university curriculum and related resources. ATI services include video captioning and audio/video description. For more information, consult the Assistive Technology Initiative Guide to Creating Accessible Electronic Materials.

GMU-TV
(Web: http://gmutv.gmu.edu/ / Email: gmutv@gmu.edu / Phone: 703-993-3110)

GMU-TV develops educational content for both online and on-campus courses. Whether it is an entire course taught via video, a single lecture, or simply supplemental video material to be used in your class, GMU-TV can help. Faculty can learn more about GMU-TV services at the following link: http://gmutv.gmu.edu/services/.
Links to Mason Websites about Instructional Continuity


Links to Selected Websites for Instructional Continuity Planning at Other Universities

- **Continuity of Instruction: During a Catastrophic Event**, East Carolina University
  https://www.ecu.edu/cs-acad/eai/continuity.cfm

  Guide focuses on pandemic/catastrophic readiness for potential (extended) f2f class disruptions.

- **Continuity of Learning**, Suffolk University Boston
  https://www.suffolk.edu/academics/58093.php

  Website includes pdfs with guiding questions and helpful checklists for planning instructional continuity. Includes link to downloadable planning documents (pdfs).

- **Instructional Continuity**, Georgetown University
  http://instructionalcontinuity.georgetown.edu/

  Graphically appealing, informative and succinct website with useful information for tips and checklists.

- **Instructional Continuity Planning Guide**, Xavier University of Louisiana

  This planning guide includes Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) and guidelines for implementing technology resources. The FAQ provides guidance for choosing an emergency resource. The Guidelines provide details on tool capabilities.

- **UMUC Classroom Interruption Planning Guide (For Managing Unplanned Classroom Closings)**, University of Maryland University College
  http://www.umuc.edu/faculty/facsupport/facservices/upload/planningguide.pdf

  Guide is organized according to what faculty should plan before, during, and following a classroom interruption; particularly focusing on tips for fully-online and hybrid courses.