**Ensuring Academic Continuity During Emergencies**

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Authors

Dr. Dennie Templeton, Executive Director, Office of Emergency Preparedness, Radford University. dtemplet@radford.edu

Dr. Gary Ellerman, Professor Emeritus and Instructional Developer, Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning, Radford University. gellerma@radford.edu

One of the working groups participating in a conference concerning academic continuity at institutions of higher education during periods of crisis (Schweber, 2007), participants were in agreement that “the continuity of teaching and learning, in particular, is not usually on the emergency management radar screen, despite the fact that this is the ‘core business’ of higher education.” According to the definition provided by the Sloan Consortium, academic continuity is a process that serves to sustain and maintain teaching and learning during a crisis situation, whether a natural disaster, a man-made disaster, or some precipitating factor (The Sloan Consortium, 2008).

When considered in a more holistic manner, academic continuity is essential to maintaining the overall resiliency of an institution. In this context, the concept of resiliency is derived from the business model and relates to the capacity of an institution to prepare for, endure, and recover from any major emergency event that threatens or disrupts normal operations. (Balakrishnan, Sapp, Spangler, & Spicer, 2007) Because teaching and learning do indeed comprise the core mission of any college or university, supporting that mission in a time of crisis is critical to the institution and to the students who are pursuing educational and career goals within a time-focused schedule.

Using a model developed by Farleigh Dickinson University, Radford University has created a web-based resource that is accessible to faculty as a means of providing access to instructional, tools, regardless of the level or understanding and skills they posses with regard to the use of technology. FDU has rightfully garnered praise and recognition throughout the higher education community and from agencies and organizations involved in emergency management in higher education for the work related to implementing strategies and resources to enhance the continuity of academic programs and services during emergency situations at institutions of higher education. Further, the model is designed in a manner which facilitates customization as appropriate to the unique academic mission of any university. Continuing in the spirit of the work completed by FDU, anyone who adheres to the guidelines established by the [*Creative Commons Attribution Share-Alike Non-Commercial License version 3.0*](http://www.creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0)is free to use, edit, and redistribute the content on the Radford University site consistent with specific provisions.

1. **Literature Review**

Systematic research is limited, at present, regarding academic continuity. However, based upon research and best practices with regard to models for academic continuity, there is consensus among faculty and administration that the use of instructional technologies offers some viable options for sustaining teaching and learning even during times in which the institution is partially or totally inaccessible for “traditional” instruction.

In this context, then, it is not surprising that the majority of the literature related to best practices derives fundamentally from established instructional design and development models. For example, a classic instructional design model (Dick, Carey, & Carey, 2005) extensively addresses instructional delivery systems. Further, the authors clearly articulate the distinction between delivery systems and instructional strategies. Specifically, they address the fact that in some instances a major mistake that is made in the design process is to attempt to place too much emphasis on the delivery of the instruction.

In a somewhat similar approach, Morrison, Ross and Kemp (2007) suggested specific heuristics that can be applied to designs regarding instructional delivery systems. With specific reference to the design of instruction that utilizes distributed technologies, the authors speak of the need to:

* “…engage the learner with the content so that it is actively processed rather than passively read”
* Maximize appropriate opportunities for interactivity (instructor and students, students and students)
* Integrate multiple media

According to Schweber (2007), academic continuity and campus resiliency are inextricably linked. Because teaching and learning are core components of the business of higher education, it follows that any emergency preparedness plans must of necessity include specific strategies to maintain academic continuity. Those strategies should be designed to enhance campus resiliency to facilitate the recovery from an emergency or disaster.

A number of institutions and organizations[[1]](#footnote-1) consistently support the use of distributed technologies as a means of responding to emergencies and preserving academic continuity. (Pirany & Yanoski, 2007).

Chelan (2006) stated that, “Disaster or no disaster, the goal is to utilize distance education to improve learning outcomes.” He states further that students enrolled in distributed education courses expect support that is both accessible and flexible.

The U.S. Department of Education (2009) has offered some succinct perspectives regarding emergency planning in higher education. One of the critical tasks cited is that institutions must provide open, systematic communications for all constituent groups associated with the institution. This is particularly essential as a means of providing continuity of instruction and learning.

Finally, the Centers for Disease Control (2009), in response to the potential for a swine flu (H1N1) pandemic, recommended the use of distance learning technologies as a viable approach to stemming the spread of the virus on college and university campuses.

1. **Goals and objectives for the practice session**

As a result of participating in this session, participants will interact with a model for developing resources and training for faculty to ensure academic continuity during an emergency or crisis event. Specific objectives of the session will include the following:

* Describe approaches to creating an interactive web-based resource for maintaining instruction and student contact
* Discuss strategies for acquiring and organizing training/informational content for faculty for academic continuity
* Identify reliable sources of information and best practices for academic continuity
1. **Description of practices to be exemplified**

Discussion and activities will focus on:

* General content to be included in training and resources for academic continuity
* Organization of content
* Creating “buy-in” among faculty
* Evaluation and assessment of the model
* Responses and feedback from participants
1. **Discussion**

Emergencies occur in various forms and at the most unforeseen times. Preparedness for response to any emergency is essential as a means of maintaining and sustaining the core components of any institution of higher education: teaching and learning. While the intent of this proposed session is to present a viable approach for such planning, it must be understood that the application of this model will serve faculty and students well in any situation in which the faculty are separated from their students and need to maintain continuous instruction.

1. **Responses and Feedback**

This site was collaboratively created and is maintained by the Office of Emergency Management and the Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning at Radford University. The authors will appreciate your comments and suggestions related to this site with regard to content, access, usability, and application.

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We would also very much appreciate learning of your work in this area so that we may also benefit from it.

Correspondence related to this site may be directed to the following staff as appropriate:

For information and assistance concerning emergency planning and management at Radford University, contact:

Dr. Dennie Templeton,
Executive Director
Office of Emergency Management

(540) 831-6696

dtemplet@radford.edu

For information related to the content of the site, contact:
Dr. Gary Ellerman
Instructional Developer
Center for Innovative Teaching and L​earning
(540) 831-6555
gellerma@radford.edu

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1. See, for example, the Sloan Semester, the Farleigh Dickenson Quick Start Guide, the University of Maryland University College, and the University of Washington Academic Continuity Toolkit (ACT). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)