

Resource Guide

Preparing for an Academic Disruption.

There's a tendency to think of disruptions to the academic calendar in the extremes. At one end is the global Covid pandemic that forced a fast pivot to online instruction for several months beginning in March 2020. At the other end is a snow day that causes a pause in classes or a pivot to Zoom for one or two days. However, there are many other potential disruptions—both known and unknown—that could force a pivot in course format for an indeterminate amount of time. The key to minimizing the stress and confusion that comes with such disruptions is to prepare ahead of time.

Types of Disruptions.

Global pandemics and snow aside, disruptions can happen at any scale (major or minor), any location (locally, regionally, globally), and impact any number of people (just one individual, whole rosters, entire communities). Disruptions could relate to extreme weather events, political unrest, civil unrest and protest, terrorism, technological outages, public health, infrastructure disasters, and campus facilities. There are also the personal and familial life circumstances, including physical and mental health, of instructors, students, and colleagues. Any of these disruptions could last hours, days, weeks, months, or even longer.

Preparing *before* the Disruption.

Consider what practices or procedures you can *already* have in place to make the disruption as seamless as possible. Here are some suggestions and things to consider:

- **Use Canvas as much as possible, even for in-person format courses:** Think of your course Canvas shell as the information hub for your course, and make use of many of the existing features of Canvas, including:
 - **Announcements:** Use the Announcements Tool to send all communication. This allows instructors to quickly share information with *all* students at the same time. Ask students to set up their Canvas preferences so they are notified (via email or text) every time a new announcement is posted. The course Canvas shell also stores all Announcements so that students can easily review previous announcements they might have missed.
 - **Assignments:** Use the Assignments Tool for students to submit as many assessments (papers, quizzes, reports, etc.) as possible. This allows for assignments to have a time stamp for when submitted and for instructor to record feedback in addition to rubrics.

- **Flexible Deadlines:** Include Flexible Deadlines in (most) Assignments whenever possible, depending on the type of assessment. When creating the assignment, include settings for Due Date and Availability Dates so students know the window for submitting an assessment without late penalty. Adjust as needed for the disruption.
- **Modules:** Use Modules to “store” all course materials including slides, reading assignments, and video links.
- **Make a “In Case of Emergency” Page in Canvas:** Include whatever information you want explaining backup plans you have in place in case of disruption. Leave this page unpublished until you need it.
- **Create a Zoom link ahead of time:** Schedule a recurring meeting during class time in Zoom, copy the link into the “In Case of Emergency” page in Canvas so that it’s ready for use should the need arise.
- **Have a “Disruption Buddy”:** What happens if you or a family member suddenly become ill and it’s impossible for you to pivot to a synchronous or asynchronous format? Chat with a colleague who would be able to step in if you are unable to teach and agree to return the favor should they experience a disruption.

Preparing for “Known” Disruptions.

Review any upcoming “known” disruptions that will happen in your life circumstances over the next semester. Maybe you are welcoming a new member to the family, or there is a scheduled medical procedure during the semester. Or maybe you will be attending an out-of-town conference and will miss a week of classes. What is your plan for dealing with these things from the start of semester? Can you record a lecture for students to watch asynchronously during your absence? Will you give the students worktime or a project to do on their own during the absence? Can your “Disruption Buddy” cover a class or two for you?

It's impossible to prepare for everything that the future holds but putting as many practices as you can into place will mitigate confusion and stress for everyone during disruptive times. If the above suggestions aren't feasible for your course, think about what might work for your course, and your students.

Resources:

For more information on Instructional Continuity, please visit the Reinert Center’s Resources “[Distance Teaching and Instructional Continuity](#)” and the Office of the Provost’s “[University Guidance for Instructional Continuity](#).”

For more information or to discuss how you might incorporate these ideas into your courses, contact the Reinert Center by [email](#) or submit a [consultation request form](#).