



A Guide to Academic Continuity Planning

Recommendations for UMass Amherst's Academic Departments in Preparation for Crises that Impact the Academic Core of the University

OVERVIEW

Academic Continuity is the process of preserving the functions of the academic core of the university. This includes teaching and learning, as well as those processes that impact faculty life, namely appointment, promotion, and tenure.

Crises in higher education impact different aspects of the university and warrant institutional responses in a variety of ways, depending on the type, scale, and level of crisis. According to crisis management literature, a crisis is a low-probability, high-impact event that threatens the viability of the institution, and is characterized by ambiguity of cause, effect, and means of resolution, as well as by urgency of decision-making. At a minimum, a crisis presents operational disruptions that may require emergency action to protect human life, academic core functions, and physical assets.

Crisis management moves beyond emergency preparedness or reaction plans for specific occurrences and is a systemic way to avert crises or manage those that do occur, and if done effectively, should avert potential crises or result in more successful outcomes. A strong, institutional crisis management plan should address a broad range of crises, and emphasize communication, transparency, and learning from self and others.

Academic Continuity Planning, then, focuses on mitigating risk and reducing the potential damage if an event were to occur, in order to prepare the university and its units to resume essential university operations more rapidly than if such a plan did not exist. It should be noted that academic continuity planning differs from crisis management planning in that it encompasses a greater range of crises, and focuses on how crises might specifically impact the academic functions of the institution. The academic continuity planning process should serve to prepare for a more proactive response and mitigate the harsh impact of ad hoc responses to campus crises. However, it does not supersede the approved process for financial exigency planning nor does it establish a different set of criteria for such financial exigency planning.

Impact of crises that can have implications on the academic functions of the university:

- Prolonged campus closures or quarantines
- Extensive damage to campus buildings and equipment
- Disruption of computer systems operations
- Acts of violence that necessitate focused closures and security measures for human safety

PURPOSE

The purpose of this guide is to provide a general framework to guide planning and decision-making as it pertains to the academic functions of the university in the case of a campus crisis. The focus here is not on the university's overall response to an institutional crisis, but to raise questions and address issues related to the academic core of the institution which need to be considered in any crisis response plan. This plan hones in on issues related to teaching, learning, promotion, tenure, and faculty appointments.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES FOR PLANNING

The following serve as principles which should be considered throughout the planning process to help guide considerations for academic continuity planning.

Communication

A strong communication plan needs to be in place. Internally, institutions must be prepared to communicate effectively and in a timely manner with all faculty, staff and students across the university or on a specific campus. Such communication links are essential in making appropriate and responsible decisions as the institution moves forward. Teams need to be designated so that when a crisis occurs the locus of decision making is already in place and can be quickly communicated to all those who will be impacted by the decisions. Particularly with academic core decisions, having vertical lines of communication flowing from the campus academic leadership through to deans and department chairs will be important. Effective and efficient communication systems, which consider the unavailability of resources which is likely in the event of crisis, must be in place beforehand. This system of communication should include the identification of key individuals who will serve as primary contacts in times of crisis, and include a line of succession should these individuals not be available. Moreover, a strategy for external communications with constituents and stakeholders is also an essential component to be considered ahead of time.

Timeliness

Timeliness is of upmost importance in responding to crises. When planning and carrying out planning decisions, specific guidelines for timeframes must be considered for different situations so as to ensure prompt response in addressing issues posed by academic crisis. However, equally if not more important, the integrity of different functions and processes of the academic core of the university are to be preserved and maintained.

INSTRUCTION

Principles and Guidelines for Planning

Teaching, research and instruction are the primary activities and responsibilities of the university, and are most susceptible to interruption during crisis. The following serve as primary principles and guidelines to be considered during the development of your unit academic continuity plan.

- Communications to students should be written clearly and should include the components of effective communication, such as date, title, author, subject, rationale, and lists of sources to gain answers or further information. Such communications need to be done in a timely manner.
- Flexibility will be a vital piece in continuing with academic function of the university in the time of crisis. The following guide accommodations which should be considered during planning:
 - Academic units and faculty alike should be flexible to allow students to make up missed time/coursework in the case of certain students being affected by a crisis and others not.
 - Alternative course offerings should be considered whenever possible, either through the use of technology, alternate teaching space, etc. These decisions should be situational and empower faculty to consider creative solutions to upholding student learning as a principle priority.
 - Clinical courses/student teaching/fieldwork — Schools will inform students participating in courses which meet at locations other than campus classrooms what procedure will be used to determine if the student should attend the offsite experiences. Attendance expectations at offsite locations may differ from the decisions for campus buildings and are outside of UMass control. Each school having students enrolled in clinical or off-site courses should review its existing policies about clinical make-up rules in light of a possible crisis. Consideration of accreditation and graduation requirements should be factored into planning and decisions.

- In order to preserve academic integrity, the following guidelines should be considered when taking into account instruction time lost due to campus crisis:
 - Beginning of the semester – if students miss the first couple of classes, can the faculty adjust workload in the course by altering assignments alone and not change class face time? Changing face time is subject to classroom availability and notification to the class. Posting make up assignments and lecture notes are one possibility. Deans/department chairs need to confer with faculty in courses that are affected by absences in making these decisions.
 - Second quarter of the semester – interruption during the second quarter should be dealt with by workload/assignment adjustments, not adding additional class face time. Faculty can post make up assignments and lecture notes.
 - Midterm –interruption coming at midterm will require exam flexibility on the part of faculty and make-up exams will be needed.
 - Last quarter – Faculty should entertain the idea of giving incompletes – other options are giving a make-up exam later or giving the grade earned to-date in the course. Faculty and units need to redefine what it takes to be done with the course in light of performance to date in this scenario. If there are projects that are not completed, can faculty extend deadlines and still get grades out by the end of the defined semester?

Issues and Considerations

The following topics and subsequent questions are to aid in the planning process. They should be considered throughout your unit planning and addressed within your final academic continuity plan.

Accreditation

- Is there any direct, immediate impact to campus or program accreditation?
- Will the accreditation calendar need to be adjusted to reflect time lost to crisis or management of crisis?
- Do accrediting bodies need to be informed of the crisis and the university's plan to respond?
- Who is responsible for filing appropriate notification with campus, school, and/or unit accrediting bodies?

Academic calendar

- What percentage of the course time must be lost in order for a semester to be unsalvageable?
- Is there a point in the semester after which some consideration should be given to awarding a grade based upon performance to date?
- How will the academic calendar be adjusted in order to reflect time lost?
 - Shorten scheduled vacations
 - Eliminate scheduled days off
 - Extend semester calendar
 - Lengthen remaining class periods
- Will accelerated degree programs, condensed summer courses, or 8-week courses require different considerations if significant time is lost?

Alternative Space and Preservation of Materials

- What are the procedures needed in order to secure alternative space for administrative offices, academic services, and classrooms?
- Are there any flexible spaces on campus or within the institution that are suitable for classes, offices, or service spaces that aren't currently being used for these purposes?
- Who might be able to work from home or on different time schedules? (i.e. some offices might be able to work in shifts)

- What steps are needed to prepare academic units to operate in alternative locations including off campus sites?
- Are procedures and practices in place to preserve unique course related materials including exams and course evaluations?

Course Offerings

- What transfer opportunities will be in place among UMass campuses, Five College Consortium and with other institutions?
- Is there a priority for which courses would be continued?
- What are some alternative modes of course delivery if classrooms are inaccessible and what classes could be offered in this way?
 - Online, distance learning
 - Alternative course schedule and locations
 - Blended courses that share existing classroom times

Other Academic events

- Which ceremonies cannot be canceled and must be held every year? (Traditions, messages conveyed, etc...)
 - Commencement
 - Founder's Day Events
- What external groups are using the campus at any given time? Do we have a master list of these people and where they are on campus?

Identification of additional faculty

- How will campus, schools, and units respond in the instance where an entire academic unit is completely unavailable as a result of crisis?
- What options do units have in the instance where the entire faculty is inaccessible for extended periods of time?

Operational considerations for classes:

- Schools will maintain a list of courses and their faculty of record and will prepare a list of back-up instructors in the event faculty of record become affected by the crisis. We realize back up instructors may not be available for some specialty or graduate courses. Each school needs a policy about how it will communicate class cancellation to the students in the course, including who is responsible to do this.
- When laboratory sections of courses cannot be prepared due to a crisis – lab classrooms may have to close even though classes in general do not. Each school with laboratory courses must have a policy on how the decision to close labs will occur. There are generally no additional lab times for make-up labs due to laboratories being at capacity on most campuses, so affected schools will need to make decisions about how to grade laboratory components in such an event. Consider if another campus might assist with laboratory classrooms for a short time.
- When gatekeeper operational support offices need to be shut down due to impact of the crisis on key people, alternative plans for student support for those functions need to be in place as reflected in business continuity plans. Examples of such offices include school advising centers, math assistance center, writing center, etc.
- Additional issues will need to be addressed at the point of decision making. For example, the triggers for shutting down extra-curricular student events, especially big gatherings and for closing public gathering places, such as a campus/student center. Everyone who needs to be involved in the decision will be consulted at that time.
- Depending on the timing of a crisis within a semester, units will need to give some thought to what constitutes completion of a course. This is a curricular decision that must be made in the school based on student knowledge needed to enroll in subsequent courses, and other such factors.

Sabbatical

- What is the process to address interruption of sabbaticals due to a crisis?

Teaching

- How can the academic time required for the course be altered?
 - Can course material be condensed and prioritized in the event that teaching time is lost?
 - What alternatives if any are available for courses with laboratory requirements?

Does suitable alternative classroom space exist?

- Do alternatives exist for faculty to utilize other Five College Consortium Colleges or courses for continuing to provide instruction to enrolled students?
- Are there any flexible spaces on campus or within the institution that are suitable for classes, offices, service spaces that aren't currently being used for these purposes?
- Do acceptable spaces exist in the community that surrounds the campus?

Are alternative modes of course delivery appropriate and is it possible to develop strategies for these in advance?

- Online
- Podcasts
- Other modes which require faculty to adjust traditional way of teaching.
- With courses delivered online (distance education, online courses, asynchronous, hybrid courses), if technology system unavailable, how might faculty adjust to alternative approaches?

Are there alternatives for addressing class times?

- Shift time of day classes are offered in order to accommodate lack of air/heat, lighting, etc
- Lengthen course meeting times to make-up for loss of class periods.

OTHER ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Library Services

The UMass Library provides strong collections, quality service and instructional programs, and leadership in the application of information technologies. In the time of crisis, particularly one which has long-term effects on the operations of the university, library operations will be important to consider.

For instance, if a campus library is closed, will there be a way to utilize the interlibrary loan services to request book delivery without needing a campus library as a delivery point? How might students and faculty be able to access books and other research materials during interruption of operations? Will some materials still be available and accessible while others are much more restricted?

Financial Aid

The campus office of financial aid serves a vital role in supporting and advising students. However, awarded state, federal, and institutional aid are embedded with various stipulations and nuances. How these are to be navigated in order to protect students needs to be addressed by a different committee which is knowledgeable in these areas and experienced in navigating the financial aid system.

Research and Grant Management

While grant agencies are usually sympathetic to universities during times of crisis, peer-institutional research has shown that complaisance is often given in the form of no-cost extensions. These extensions allow faculty to finish their research, however do not account for faculty, researcher, and graduate student salary and benefit costs which are defrayed by grant monies. How this might addressed in order to preserve the integrity of the research function of UMass UMass must be considered..

“Whatever the emergency or event, UMass' goal is to be "Ready" so that we can continue our teaching, research and public service mission with minimal interruption”

For More Information Contact the Office of Emergency Management

Jeffrey Hescock

Director of University Emergency Management and Business Continuity

Office: 413-545-7431

jhescock@ehs.umass.edu

or

Robert Laford

Assistant Director of Emergency Management and Business Continuity

Office: 413-545-2682

rflaford@ehs.umass.edu