

CATASTROPHIC EVENT

This policy describes institutional procedures to ensure continuity of online education during catastrophic events, including but not limited to natural disasters, pandemics, cyber-attacks, or other events that may disrupt normal operations. It also outlines student protections and record-keeping procedures in compliance with NC-SARA standards. This policy applies to all online programs, students enrolled in online courses, faculty, and administrative units responsible for the delivery and support of distance education.

The institution is committed to:

1. Ensuring **continuity of instructional delivery** during catastrophic events.
2. Providing **students with the services they have paid for or reasonable financial compensation** should such services become undeliverable.
3. Protecting and maintaining **student academic records** in the event of an operational disruption or institutional closure.

Definitions

- **Catastrophic Event:** Any natural, technological, or human-caused event that significantly disrupts institutional operations or student access to online learning systems.
- **Operational Continuity:** The ability of the institution to maintain learning operations without significant interruption.
- **Instructional Interruption:** Any disruption to scheduled instructional delivery that prevents students from accessing course content or engaging in learning activities.

Precaution and Preventative Measures

The institution:

1. Maintains cloud-based instructional platforms through third-party providers. These platforms are capable of providing 99.99999% uptime.
2. Regularly backs-up critical systems (learning management system, student information system, financial records) and stores backups off site or in secure cloud infrastructure.
3. Conducts regular risk assessments of technology, facilities, and organizational processes that could affect continuity.
- 4.

Response and Continuity Activation

In the event of a catastrophic event:

1. The Technical Services Team (IT), Academic Dean, and General Education Coordinator are notified and mobilized.
2. The team assess the cause and projects the duration of the interruption. Alternate modes of instruction (e.g., asynchronous learning, extended deadlines, temporary platforms) are developed.
3. Faculty receive immediate guidance to support continuity of instruction via the alternate formats.
4. Students are notified through an email which alternate instructional method is being deployed. If necessary, students are informed of changes to course expectations, deadlines, and delivery methods in a timely manner through official communication channels. Email is the designed, official communication channel.
5. Where technology access is a barrier for students, the institution identifies and communicates available resources (e.g., local access points, loaner devices, temporary assistance).
6. If the interruption is extensive, such as a pandemic, the institution provides alternative modes of instruction within **5 business days** of the interruption unless otherwise communicated.

Ensuring Paid Services Are Delivered

1. The institution makes reasonable efforts to provide all services for which students have paid, including instructional content, advising, and support services.
2. If certain services cannot be delivered due to the catastrophic event, the institution will notify affected students within **10 business days** of the interruption.
3. Students who cannot reasonably receive services they have paid for will be offered appropriate remedies, which may include:
 1. Proportional tuition refunds.
 2. Credits toward future terms.
 3. Alternative modes of delivery where feasible.
4. Refunds and compensations will be issued within **30 calendar days** of a determination that services cannot be restored in a reasonable timeframe.

Student Records: Security and Redundancy

Academic and administrative records (transcripts, grades, student financial records) are stored in secure, redundant systems that protect against data loss. See the institution's *Plan for Technical Infrastructure* for complete details.

Institutional Closure Preparedness

In the event of institutional closure:

1. A record custodial plan will be triggered.
2. Student academic records will be transferred to a designated custodian or appropriate state agency (as required by law) within **30 calendar days** of closure.
3. Records will remain accessible to students for retrieval, transcript requests, or transfer purposes.
4. Students will be notified of the new custodian and how to request records.

Communication Plan

The institution shall communicate this policy and any activation of continuity procedures through:

- Email and text alerts.
- Official website updates.
- Learning management system messaging.

Students, faculty, and staff are informed annually about these and any other continuity plans through the institution's *Plan for Technical Infrastructure*.