



Dear colleagues,

As we all know, Utah is a place of spectacular natural beauty, but also potentially extreme weather and natural disasters, including winter storms. Because of this, over the course of an academic year, it may be necessary for campus to pivot online, or to close briefly, depending on heavy snowfall, power outages, and related travel impacts.

We are writing to you now, before the Spring semester starts, so that you can **pre-plan how you will manage a weather event**, if it becomes necessary.

When forecasts call for extreme weather, the University of Utah's Emergency Management Team (which includes members from every area of the University, including Academic Affairs) discusses the forecast and all available information the night before, and then issues an alert with one of three options:

- Late start and/or early close for classes, childcare centers, and other campus operations.
- Move all but essential functions to remote platforms.
- Or, rarely, cancel classes for a "snow day" (the last was in 2020).
 - *Please know that, with an academic medical center (including multiple health care clinics and a Level 1 trauma center hospital), thousands of students living on campus and childcare centers that students and employees alike depend on, the University of Utah campus never technically "closes."*

We recognize that when weather disrupts classes and operations, instructors must pivot quickly. In addition, we know that University instructions are necessarily broad, and that some classes require a more specific and nuanced response. And, weather conditions can change rapidly for the better or for the worse. In these contexts, instructors should:

- Follow the Emergency Alert instructions.
- Follow their Department and/or College instructions.
- Use their best judgement and err on the side of caution, to protect the safety of their students and themselves.

This means that, even if conditions appear to have improved near campus, instructors should continue to follow the Emergency Alert instructions. It also means that if conditions worsen suddenly, instructors should work with their department chairs to make additional adjustments so long as the decisions are not at odds with the university's [ALERT messaging system](#) and any specific guidance from the College. It is critical that each academic unit has plans in place in case of weather emergencies. In the absence of such plans, or when communications are disrupted, instructors should make decisions for their own courses and sections, and they should then communicate those decisions to the appropriate departmental personnel.

The key principles when considering how to respond to disruptions are (1) safety, (2) flexibility, (3) empathy and compassion, and (4) clear communication.

1. **Safety:** Please be cognizant of campus conditions, as well as surrounding neighborhoods and transportation routes to campus; e.g., campus streets may be passable, but neighborhoods in Davis County to the north, Summit County to the east, or across the Salt Lake Valley may still be digging out. We know many instructors live in these neighborhoods, as do many students.
2. **Flexibility:** Some instructors include “make-up” days in their syllabus to allow flexibility throughout the semester, including for potential weather events. If it is not possible to include make-up days, courses should proceed much as they do when an instructor is sick and no one is available to sub. Some options include:
 - a. Deliver online and recorded lectures.
 - b. Prepare assignments and activities that students can complete remotely.
 - c. Offer flexible deadlines for class work and scheduled quizzes and exams.
 - d. Shift material to alternative days across the semester.
 - e. Classes that require an in-person component—e.g., science labs and arts, architecture, or design studios—might shift timing of activities, use online discussion for that day, or offer a makeup day if resources permit.
 - f. In lab sections that meet once per week, instructors might provide videos of the day’s activity and data in lieu of in person instruction to allow students to complete the required weekly assignment.
 - g. For students in clinical settings, programs should communicate expectations for a given unit/clinic, e.g., readings, telehealth, etc.
3. **Empathy and Compassion:** If students are unable to join a class due to weather, limited WiFi, or lack of access to technology, instructors should provide the same options they would offer if a student were unable to attend class due to illness. **In no circumstances should an instructor penalize a student for missing class activities or assignments because of weather.**
4. **Communication:** Canvas and UMail are the official communication portals for University of Utah instructional activities. Any changes should be communicated to students clearly and promptly, ideally through both Canvas and UMail.

The Covid-19 pandemic changed the way we deliver higher education. While that shift was painful, it also taught us how to do things differently, to think on our feet, to innovate. Let’s use those skills to compromise and be creative about these occasional weather events. If we are nimble and practical, the University of Utah’s response to the uncertainties of weather forecasting will be much more efficient and lead to a quicker pivot back to normal operations.

Sincerely,

Mitzi M. Montoya
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