



Dear colleagues,

As we all know, winter in Utah offers stunning natural beauty and opportunities for enjoyable outdoor activities, but it also often comes with extreme weather and natural disasters, including winter storms. The storm we're experiencing now is proof. Over the course of the next few days and the rest of the semester, it may be necessary for campus to operate remotely or even close briefly, depending on heavy snowfall, power outages and related travel impacts.

We are writing to you now to provide you with information about how to handle weather-related emergencies, especially as much of Salt Lake County will be experiencing heavy snowfall this week.

When forecasts call for extreme weather, the University of Utah's Emergency Management Team (which includes members from every area of the university) discusses the forecast and all available information, 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".
 - *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 weather disruptions require instructors to quickly shift teaching mode and lesson plans, which can be chaotic and stressful, especially since some classes require a more specific and nuanced response. Additionally, weather conditions can change rapidly for better or worse—forecasts don't always match what we see outside our window. Even though it can be difficult to know what to do in the face of unpredictable forces, here are some basic steps for instructors operating during weather events:

- Follow the Emergency Alert instructions.
- Follow their department and/or college instructions.
- Use their best judgment and err on the side of caution, to protect the safety of 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 Wi-Fi 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,

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