University of Georgia: Critical IT Services for Business Continuity
Frequently Asked Questions for Business Continuity Planning

1. **What are the core technologies for online teaching and learning at UGA, and will they remain available if the University shifts to online instruction only?**

The University offers four technology packages, which together comprise its core platform for supporting online teaching and learning. eLC (otherwise known as Desire2Learn or D2L) provides core learning management functions, Zoom and Blackboard Collaborate facilitate online voice and video meetings, and Kaltura provides capabilities for storing and viewing videos online.

Brightspace, the vendor behind Desire2Learn, has expressed high confidence in their capabilities to support schools with a massive and rapid shift to online learning. All schools and colleges share the use of Desire2Learn within the University System of Georgia (USG). Desire2Learn hosts D2L as a cloud-based service. USG officials have been in contact with D2L, who has advised schools that they expect no impact to operations should there be a significant and rapid ramp-up of online instruction in response to COVID-19. D2L has asked schools to keep them up to date with their business continuity plans so that they could deploy additional resources should this shift occur. UGA will work with USG officials to keep D2L informed of our business continuity plans.

Both Blackboard and Zoom have also expressed high confidence in their ability to support schools should they rapidly shift their teaching and learning operations online. Like D2L, Zoom, and Blackboard Collaborate are also cloud-based services, and they operate via cloud-based hosting. In response to the crisis in China and other parts of the world, Zoom has lifted its license restrictions to provide its primary product free of charge for organizations coping with the COVID-19 outbreak. Blackboard has released numerous planning webinars on how to use its technologies to deal with COVID-19 contingencies.

Similarly, Kaltura has also expressed high confidence that its customers can rely on its cloud-based online platform to support its operations should they transition their teaching and learning activities online.

2. **How will faculty and students receive support for using these online teaching and learning technologies if the University shifts to online instruction?**

The EITS Help Desk will maintain regular availability and operating hours should the University cancel on-campus classes and transition to online teaching, learning, and administrative operations. Mechanisms to contact the help desk will remain the same: by calling 706-542-3106 or emailing helpdesk@uga.edu. Information on using the help desk is available at http://eitshelpdesk.uga.edu. We do expect higher than usual wait times and time-to-resolution for requests managed by the help desk should the University shift to online operations only. Additional information and online tutorials for technologies supporting teaching and learning continuity are available here: https://ovpi.uga.edu/initiatives/teaching_learning_continuity/.

3. **What are the other core technologies for students, faculty, and staff, and how will they be available if the University shifts to work-at-home or online learning?**

Both the University and the University System of Georgia operate within their data centers a variety of software platforms widely used to support University operations. Banner (Athena) and
DegreeWorks support student information management, the UGA Financial Management System (PeopleSoft Finance) and the UGA Budget Management System (Hyperion) support finance and budgeting activities, and OneUSG Connect and UGAJobs support human resource and payroll functions. Three other technologies are also core: Office 365 for collaboration, vLab to provide virtual computing services, and the Remote Access VPN, which allows for remote network access to the University network.

The University’s core platform for collaboration, Office 365, is hosted by Microsoft as cloud-based service and is not expected to see any disruptions related to COVID-19.

Other platforms listed above will remain available should the University shift to online operations. Designated employees will continue to maintain Banner, DegreeWorks, the UGA Financial Management System, the UGA Budget Management System (Hyperion), and vLab and keep them accessible, as they currently do for normal operations. We do not expect that a shift to online courses will dramatically affect the typical usage patterns for these applications. However, vLab is limited to 1,000 concurrent sessions (about 300 is typical during a business day). Most employees and students would likely experience slower connections to these applications from home, given that residential Internet connection speeds vary widely and are dramatically slower than what is available on-campus.

EITS operates the VPN service for remote access to the University network. Banner administrative pages, the UGA Financial Management System, and the UGA Budget Management System (Hyperion) all require a VPN connection for access. The VPN service operates using two identical, redundant hardware devices, which are each rated for 5,000 concurrent connections and up to 1gb of network throughput. On any typical day, we see about 1,500 connections using 20 – 25% of available network capacity. Should a shift to online operations occur, we expect that this service could slow dramatically, and EITS is considering alternatives that it could also make available as a part of its business continuity planning.

4. Are there other factors to consider, as faculty and staff fine-tune their business continuity plans?

Best practices emerging from quarantined areas in China suggest that the varying levels of Internet access available to remote students, faculty, and staff are a significant limiting factor when it comes to online teaching and learning efforts. Residential cable and ADSL lines are quickly saturated when entire neighborhoods are using streaming video. Thus, reliance on long video conference sessions for synchronous teaching and learning activities may fail to operate as planned. Faculty are strongly encouraged to consider asynchronous activities to facilitate their teaching online through the core technologies discussed in this FAQ.