

Phoenix College e-Learning Failsafe Guidelines

Developed by the eLearning Committee

1. Introduction

fail-safe [feyl-seyf]

Equipped with a secondary system that insures continued operation even if the primary system fails

An important part of a high-quality e-learning environment is a pre-established plan that is well-known by students and instructors for when bad things happen. Whether online, or in the classroom, when teaching with computer technology it is vitally important to always have a backup plan B (and C and D too).

These failsafe guidelines are created by the Phoenix College e-Learning Committee to support faculty as they develop and deliver online and hybrid courses using a course management system (CMS).

2. Kinds of Problem Events and Typical First Responses

Effective communication is the key to any high-quality teaching and learning relationship. All problems that occur boil down to some sort of breakdown in the lines of communication. The following items are ways in which lines of communication can be broken, and which will be the focus of the failsafe guidelines in this document.

- (a) CMS is unavailable.
- (b) Student's computer fails.
- (c) Student unable to detect if it is their own computer, or the CMS.
- (d) Student unable to contact instructor.
- (e) Instructor not replying to student.

3. Guidelines for Students

- (a) Before you do anything else, figure out how to communicate with your instructor in the event of a technical problem. Make a print copy of your instructor's "disaster plan" information, including the alternative forms of communication she/he provides for you.
- (b) Do not use technical difficulties to simply stop your studies. Contact your instructor immediately using the alternative forms of communication established by your instructor at the beginning of the course or in the syllabus.
- (c) Retain copies of all assignments for your records.

4. Guidelines for Instructors

- (a) Make every effort to minimize student panic in the event of a communication breakdown. "Drill" students at the beginning on what they should do to maintain communications with the instructor in the event of any technical problems.
- (b) At the beginning of the course and in the syllabus, establish alternative forms of communication that the students can use to contact you in the event of any technical problems. Options include, but are not limited to communication by phone, email outside of the CMS, or even using Google or Yahoo group tools.
- (c) Gather student contact information.
- (d) Create backup copies of all scores/grades often.
- (e) Be flexible.
- (f) Encourage students to download and save copies of their syllabus, course schedule, or any other essential course document.
- (g) Provide appropriate contact information to students.
- (h) Encourage students to read and download the "[Student Emergency Guide](#)" available on the [Student Resources - Blackboard](#) web page.

5. Student Instructions

The following text provides a sample disaster plan that faculty can adapt for inclusion in their syllabus.

IMPORTANT: You need to be prepared to continue your studies in the event of a technical problem such as a network outage or a problem with your own computer. When a problem occurs, please refer to the following "Emergency Plan." Print this plan and keep it with your other course materials.

Kinds of Events You May Experience

1. CMS is unavailable.
2. Student's computer fails.
3. Student unable to detect if it is their own computer, or the CMS.
4. Student unable to contact instructor.
5. Instructor not replying to student.

Follow these steps to prepare ahead of time, in case of an emergency:

1. At the beginning of the semester, find your instructor's email and phone number. Write them down and keep them where you can get to them later.
2. Download/Save a copy of your course Syllabus and Course Schedule (if posted separately).
3. Read the syllabus to review any emergency planning items that may be listed within the document.
4. Retain copies of all assignments for your records.
5. Do not use technical difficulties to simply stop your studies.
6. Contact your instructor immediately using the alternative forms of communication established by your instructor at the beginning of the course or in the syllabus.

Follow these steps when you encounter technical problems:

1. Don't panic.
2. Continue with your studies.
3. Communicate with your instructor according to course guidelines.
4. Follow their instructions.