

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.

During the week of March 16, 2020, both Blackboard and Zoom began experiencing some degradation of service, primarily with telephone bridge dial-in services. Some University constituents reported busy signals when attempting to dial-in. Both vendors have added additional resources. Users are encouraged to take advantage of the Internet audio option to join meetings, avoid the use of shared video, and stagger meeting times from the typical hour and half-hour start times (i.e., start at 3:50 or 4:10 instead of 4, etc.) to reduce the network load on these systems.

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. Like Blackboard and Zoom, Kaltura began experiencing degradation of service the week of March 16, 2020. This degradation was experienced as slow download and upload times and was improving as Kaltura added additional resources to their system.

- 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. Information on using the help desk is available at <http://eitshelpdesk.uga.edu>. We prefer that community members request support by emailing helpdesk@uga.edu or use the chat

option available on the helpdesk Web site. Users may also call 706-542-3106 though 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.

The platforms listed above will remain available should the University shift to online operations. Designated EITS 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.

- 4. Are there any special considerations to keep in mind regarding the off-campus use of UGAMail and Office 365 for creating and managing documents?*

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. Departments using shared, group mail accounts to conduct business should work with their local IT support staff for information on how to access the shared email accounts through UGAMail on the Web. Off-campus access to UGAMail will require ArchPass authentication at least once every 30 days. Should ArchPass authentication be required, users will be prompted automatically for ArchPass when logging in.

- 5. Are there any special considerations for researchers to consider, particularly those who require access to the VPN for the use of resources through the Georgia Advanced Computing Resource Center?*

Support for the GACRC and keeping it operational is a critical component of the EITS business continuity plan. We have high confidence that this service will be available to employees working from home, though support requests may require additional time for resolution. Faculty accessing the GACRC services should use either the <https://remote.uga.edu> or <https://remote2.uga.edu> VPN service. We encourage researchers to use remote2.uga.edu first before using remote.uga.edu. Communications regarding GACRC services, should circumstances change, will be communicated through the GACRC listserv.

To reserve VPN access for mission-critical functions, we prefer that departments and employees not use the VPN for day-long, always-on access to file storage devices and servers. Employees should transfer files to the OneDrive service, available from anywhere on the Internet without a VPN connection, for access to critical document storage and computer files.

6. *What is the University's overall capacity for VPN (a virtual private network) access for IT services that are not accessible outside of the University's firewall?*

EITS operates the VPN service for remote access to the University network. The VPN service operates using two identical, redundant hardware devices, which are available at <https://remote.uga.edu> and <https://remote2.uga.edu>. Each of these devices can support up to 5000 concurrent connections and 1gb of network throughput. On any typical day, we see about 1,500 connections using 20 – 25% of available network capacity total. Realistically, the VPN service will likely begin exhibiting reduced performance around 3000 concurrent connections each. If users experience degraded service with one of these services, we encourage them to log-in to the other service.

University-wide services such as Banner administrative pages, the UGA Financial Management System, the UGA Budget Management System (Hyperion), and the University's data warehouse all require a VPN connection for access. Critical departmental services for student affairs, enrollment management, development and alumni relations, finance and administration, and the office of research all rely on this essential service to conduct core mission-critical business functions. Should a shift to online operations occur, we expect that this service could slow dramatically, and our goal will be to reserve VPN capacity to support these business functions. We encourage Units to take advantage of services like OneDrive (which doesn't require the VPN service) for accessing and sharing of computer files. Because of the wide variance of residential Internet service, we encourage units to not rely on technologies like desktop sharing and Microsoft's Remote Desktop Protocol (RDP) to access desktop PCs remotely. For most users, this approach will not perform as expected.

EITS is considering VPN alternatives that it could also make available as a part of its business continuity planning, and will update this FAQ should additional capabilities become available.

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

- Access to the University's data warehouse requires the use of a VPN connection and a laptop or computer connected to the University's MyId domain. Typically, this means that the employee can only access the data warehouse through the VPN from a University-owned laptop or computer, which they log-in with their MyID and password. Employees who require access to the University's data warehouse are strongly encouraged to test at-home access in advance. Should the user need assistance, please contact the EITS helpdesk at <http://eitshelpdesk.uga.edu> for support.
- 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 (Asymmetric Digital Subscriber 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.

- UGA equipment and other devices can be used at remote locations to support UGA instruction, research, service, and administrative operations. The policy and procedures for using UGA equipment at non-UGA locations are available in the [Finance & Administration Policy Library](#). A tutorial for recording inventoried assets as off-site in UGA Financial Management is available in the [OneSource Training Library](#). Please contact [Asset Management](#) with questions regarding the procedures or if your unit needs assistance in updating the asset status in UGA Financial Management. For inquiries related to all-risk insurance for equipment, please contact [Insurance & Claims Management](#).

These frequently asked questions will be regularly updated as necessary to reflect the current IT operating conditions of the University. Readers should note the date in the bottom, left-hand corner of each page. Additional resources, including these frequently asked questions, are available at <http://eits.uga.edu/continuity>.