

Back-up

Your IT Department has its own back-up system. And Blackboard has its own back-up system. The kind of back-up we're advocating is the home-grown variety that allows instructors to communicate with students to, primarily, put everyone's mind at rest. That communication actually takes place well before there's ever a problem—and thus it really does serve the purpose of confidence-building in the online program.

We routinely advertise our back-up plan as one that has never had to be used. That also builds confidence in the program. On the next several pages you will find sample language that we use to discuss back-up as well as strategies for back-up that are part of our program's DL Guidelines.

This *Maximizing Bb Tip Sheet* is from consultants Mary Bold and Lillian Chenoweth:

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The public statement ... in syllabi as well as every program Bb shell

The Back-up Plan

First, the good news:

We've never had to use our back-up plan.

What to do if the Blackboard server is down....

1. Confirm that it's not your own Internet access.
2. Wait 24 hours.
3. If BB is still down after 24 hours (remember, that has never happened to us), go to our back-up website for information about this class. We will post instructions about assignments and due dates. Depending on the quality of our contact list (based on your information), we may also e-mail you.

Back-up website for Family Sciences online courses:

www.famsci.com

The back-up website keeps the tone casual. Nothing to worry about.

Instructors will post announcements here if regular course sites are down for more than 24 hours. Do not e-mail professors about downed Blackboard servers, even if a test or assignment is due. Rest assured, they will be working on revised schedules and will prefer to announce one plan for everyone at this site or through e-mail.

Servers going down are a lot like snowstorms: rare but debilitating.

We recommend the playfulness that comes with snow days.

(Of course, if only *your* access to the course is blocked, you should contact an instructor or GA about your loss of access. If you are unsure whether the loss is yours alone, check the University website for announcements about Blackboard or contact the HelpDesk,)

Instructors' and Assistants' Tasks

___ Include back-up plan in syllabus

___ Post back-up plan in Bb under Tech Tips

___ Run e-mail test from Bb to confirm working e-mails

(Our method is detailed starting on the next page.)

___ Collect students' back-up e-mail addresses through online survey

(We use SurveyMonkey to collect this information, as well as mailing addresses that we need to distribute the course CD. Results are exportable to EXCEL, which can then allow a fast copy/paste of e-mail addresses.)

___ Ask that students include an alternate contact on Bb homepage

Checking students' e-mail addresses in Bb

We need to know students can receive our e-mail through Bb. The most common problem is that the students' e-mail program identifies the Bb-generated e-mail as spam. Next most common is a bounce-back message that the students' mailbox is full. Thus, we use a 2-stage check and record the results in the Bb gradebook so that students can know how their e-mail is working.

Our company line is that we prefer that students use their University-provided e-mail address in course work. But having any working e-mail address in the Bb system is more important than what kind it is.

Obviously, if we really did lose Bb for any stretch of time, we would not have access to the e-mail system in it, either. But the attention to having a "working" e-mail address in Bb serves to increase response to our request for a back-up e-mail address, too.

Instructions to students (in syllabus as well as in the Bb shell):

A check on your account will be made on January 23rd. This will be a two-part check, noted in your Blackboard gradebook entry with 2 plus marks if the e-mail check is successful.

- + + means we sent a message on January 23rd that did not bounce back AND you replied (and we received the reply) by the end of January 26th.
- + 0 means we sent a message that did not bounce back BUT we did not receive a reply by the end of January 26th. This could mean that you are not checking your e-mail, or that messages sent through Blackboard are landing in your SPAM folder.
- 0 means we sent a message and it bounced back, indicating that it was sent to a non-working address OR that your mailbox is full.