Turtle Mountain College

Policy on Catastrophic Events and Continuity of Operations

**Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to ensure the safety and well-being of the Turtle Mountain College (TMC) community in the event of a catastrophic event and to establish procedures for the continuity of operations during such events.

**Definitions**

* **Catastrophic Event:** Any event that causes significant disruption to normal operations and poses a threat to life, property, or the environment. This may include but is not limited to natural disasters (e.g., hurricanes, earthquakes, floods), public health emergencies (e.g., pandemics), technological disasters (e.g., cyber attacks, power outages), or human-caused emergencies (e.g., terrorism, civil unrest).
* **Continuity of Operations:** The ability to ensure that essential functions and services of TMC continue during and after a catastrophic event, minimizing disruption to operations and maintaining the safety and well-being of the community.

**Preparedness and Planning**

TMC shall develop and maintain a comprehensive Policy on Catastrophic Events and Continuity of Operations plan that outlines procedures for responding to and recovering from catastrophic events. This plan shall be regularly reviewed, updated, and communicated to all relevant stakeholders.

Key components of the Policy on Catastrophic Events and Continuity of Operations plan shall include:

* Identification of potential catastrophic events and their potential impacts on TMC operations.
* Establishment of an Emergency Management Team responsible for coordinating the response to catastrophic events.
* Development of protocols for communication, evacuation, sheltering, and other emergency procedures.
* Identification of essential functions and services that must be maintained during a catastrophic event.
* Procedures for activating the Continuity of Operations Plan and transitioning to alternative modes of operation as necessary.
* Provide regular training and awareness programs for IT staff and end-users on IT continuity procedures, security best practices, and incident response protocols. Ensure that employees are familiar with their roles and responsibilities in the event of a disaster.
* Training and drills to ensure that faculty, staff, and students are prepared to respond effectively to catastrophic events.

**Continuity of Operations**

In the event of a catastrophic event, TMC shall prioritize the safety and well-being of its community members while striving to maintain essential functions and services to the greatest extent possible.

Key components of the Continuity of Operations Plan shall include:

* Identification of essential personnel and resources needed to maintain critical functions and services.
* Establishment of alternate facilities, equipment, and communication systems to support continued operations.
* Implementation of remote work and distance learning options where feasible.
  + Our learning management system, Canvas (Instructure), will remain in place v to provide distance learning services. Classes will continue as scheduled, but be offered online through Canvas.
  + Instructure’s disaster relief plan can be found here: [Instructure Relief Plan](https://www.instructure.com/sites/default/files/file/2021-01/Instructure-Disaster-Recovery-Jan-2021.pdf)
* Coordination with local authorities, emergency responders, and partner organizations to support response and recovery efforts.
* Regular monitoring and assessment of the situation to adjust plans and procedures as necessary.

**Communication**

TMC shall establish procedures for timely and accurate communication with the TMC community, including faculty, staff, students, and external stakeholders, before, during, and after a catastrophic event.

Communication efforts shall include:

* Notification systems for alerting the TMC community of emergencies and providing updates on the situation.
* Regular updates through multiple communication channels, including website postings, social media, email, and text messages.
* Clear instructions for accessing resources and assistance during a catastrophic event.

**Catastrophic Event disrupting Remote Activities**

If a catastrophic event occurs in which the college is no longer able to offer classes on campus or remotely, the college will nonetheless use its best, commercially reasonable efforts to help students complete course work and achieve academic outcomes for the term during which the catastrophic event continues.

**Use of Technology to Achieve Academic Outcomes and Preserve Data**

If a catastrophic event occurs, the college will, to the extent possible under the circumstances, leverage widely-available educational technologies such as its Learning Management System, Canvas, and other remote-learning and cloud-hosted collaboration resources to assist students in achieving academic outcomes for the then-current term. The college’sIT department actively monitors all outages to ensure that such vendors comply with the uptime/availability requirement. It is the policy of the college that all academic records and data maintained by the college are retained, preserved, protected, stored and backed-up in accordance with all applicable federal and state laws and regulations, including the requirements of accrediting and other external agencies. This policy is maintained to assure that, if a catastrophic event occurs, the college adheres to industry best practices by endeavoring to ensure the integrity, confidentiality, security and long-term accessibility of all records and documents created, received or maintained in the course of the college’s operations.

**Decisions Regarding Continuation of Coursework; Discontinuance of Programs**

If a catastrophic event occurs, requiring the extended suspension of classes either on campus, remotely, or both, the college will promptly undertake to use its best, commercially reasonable, efforts to determine how best to provide for the continuation of coursework and services. The members of the academic leadership team will make such decisions and work with faculty and students in an effort to find solutions, to the extent possible and available, to mitigate the effects of the catastrophic event on student academic outcomes. If it becomes necessary to discontinue a program in such circumstances, the college will address program discontinuances on a case-by-case basis according to the specific needs of each degree or program. This process will allow the college to better serve the needs of individual students by degree and program. In the event that a degree or program must be discontinued, the college will proceed in accordance with guidelines established by the Higher Learning Commission and by any other accrediting organizations or federal or state agencies applicable to the college.

**Financial Considerations**

To the extent possible, the college will use its best, commercially reasonable, efforts to assure that students will not incur financial hardship or loss as a result of the catastrophic event. In undertaking such efforts, the college will comply with all federal and state laws and regulations regarding student financial hardship or loss for academic instruction or facility services that are not provided or delivered by the college because of the catastrophic event.

**Weather or Safety Emergency on Campus**

The college’s safety protocols provide detailed emergency instructions related to evacuation, sheltering-in-place, and other safety measures for students, faculty and staff to try to ensure the physical safety, wellbeing, and protection of person and property during fire, severe weather, loss of utilities, active shooters and other weather and safety emergencies. These policies are communicated personally to students during the academic year and are summarized on the website at [TMC-Campus-Security-Report-159250.pdf](https://www.tm.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/TMCC-Campus-Security-Report-159250.pdf)

### **Student Records in the Event of Institutional Closure**

In the event of a catastrophic event leading to the permanent closure of Turtle Mountain College, the institution will take the following steps to ensure the preservation and accessibility of student records:

1. **Student Notification** – Turtle Mountain College will make reasonable efforts to notify current and former students of the records transfer, providing instructions on how to access transcripts and other necessary documentation. Notifications will be sent via email, posted on the institution’s website (if possible), and shared through official state education channels.
2. **Access to Transcripts and Records** – Students and alumni will be able to request transcripts and other records. Information on how to submit requests, applicable fees, and expected processing times will be provided in the notification.
3. **Compliance with Accreditation and State Regulations** – Turtle Mountain College will comply with all state, federal, and accrediting body requirements regarding the secure transfer and long-term maintenance of student records. This includes adhering to FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) guidelines to protect student privacy.
4. **Financial Aid and Tuition Records** – Records related to student financial aid, billing, and payments will be maintained according to federal and state regulations to ensure compliance with financial aid audits, loan forgiveness programs, and student inquiries.
5. **Contingency Plan for Digital Records** –Student records are stored in multiple cloud servers and backed up daily through Jenzabar, as well as on a physical server located in Texas.. Backup copies will be maintained and transferred to an appropriate repository to ensure continued accessibility. Any proprietary digital record-keeping systems will be evaluated for long-term sustainability, and necessary agreements will be made to facilitate record retrieval.

By implementing these measures, Turtle Mountain College ensures that students will retain access to their academic records, safeguarding their ability to continue their education or verify credentials for employment and other purposes.

**Review and Revision**

This policy shall be reviewed annually and updated as needed to reflect changes in TMC operations, facilities, or external factors that may impact emergency preparedness and continuity of operations.

**Compliance**

All TMC faculty, staff, and students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with this policy and complying with its provisions.

**Adoption**

This policy shall take effect upon approval by the TMC administration and shall be distributed to all TMC faculty, staff, and students.