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Links, planning save snow days on campuses

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1

By **Matt Rocheleau**

GLOBE STAFF MARCH 02, 2015

Local college administrators and professors are scrambling to make up for missed class time after the recent blast of snowstorms caused many campuses to shut down for five days.

But some faculty said that they have been able to, for the most part, keep their students on schedule, by planning ahead and using new technology.

Stephanie Kellar, an assistant professor of music business/management at Berklee College of Music in Boston has continued to teach students during snow days by using an online video conferencing service called Zoom.

“It’s really kind of saved the day in this situation where the Mondays have been canceled left and right,” said Kellar. “I’ve been able to keep up with the curriculum and my students are not behind.”

At Pine Manor College in Chestnut Hill, Dean Diane Mello-Goldner said that during a recent snow day she asked students in her sports psychology class to take photos of



themselves doing yoga poses they had learned in previous classes and then e-mail the “selfies” to her for extra credit.

“It was an easy way to keep them thinking about the class,” she said. “I got some interesting photos, and they seemed to like doing that.”

Mello-Goldner said other professors at the college have used online video communication services, such as Skype, to connect with students or have had students participate in discussion forums on the Web.

“We want to make sure our students are getting enough engagement time and that any type of intellectual momentum is continued,” she said. “I can’t remember missing more than one class ever for a snow day in a previous semester, so I think this winter is making us be a little more creative, and technology helps a lot with that.”

Several years ago, administrators at Anna Maria College, which is just outside Worcester in an elevated area of the state that regularly gets buried in snow, asked faculty to “weather-proof” their syllabi, said Christine L. Holmes, associate vice president for academic affairs and dean of the education school there.

Professors developed backup plans for teaching if the campus shuts down due to weather. Holmes said they are even asked to consider options that can be executed if professors and students lose electricity.

She said the idea is to make it “clear to students that even if we’re not face-to-face, we have the ability to carry on and do our readings and so on.”

Holmes said some professors at Anna Maria have made up for recent snow days by taping video or audio-only lectures ahead of time and posting them online. Others connected with students via Skype or other online video conferencing services.

Faculty who aren’t as comfortable with technology have called students individually to make sure they’re staying on top of their projects, said Holmes, while others are taking the old-fashioned approach of simply rescheduling class meeting times and assignment due dates.

Colleges often give professors discretion about whether to make up class time and how to do so. Some schools have been making special accommodations this year to give faculty more opportunities to catch up.

Suffolk University opened on Presidents’ Day and is discussing how to make up additional class time.

Boston College earlier this month moved its Monday classes one week to Thursdays because the majority of the

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school's snow days affected courses that meet on Mondays.

Northeastern University has set aside two dates that faculty can use to make up class time: Patriots Day and the day before final exams at the end of April.

Classes at Boston University will be held on a pair of upcoming Saturdays, and the school is allowing faculty to add makeup time to evening classes this semester.

“By adding these class days, we want to ensure that the critically important work of the semester can proceed so that the learning goals established for each class can be met,” BU Provost Jean Morrison wrote in a campuswide memo last week.

“While ultimately it is up to each faculty member to decide if he or she will hold class [on Saturdays], we anticipate that most will because we have lost so many class days to snow closures.”

Morrison said professors should excuse absences for students who have conflicts such as work or religious observances.

Professors said that, when trying to make up for lost time, they prefer teaching students in person to any alternative.

“Nothing for me will replace being in the classroom and having that face-to-face,” said Kellar.

Kellar said she would rather interact with students virtually, however, than have them fall behind, a scenario she said puts stress on students, teachers, and administrators as they scramble to make up the work.

Holmes said that even during weather-related shutdowns of the Anna Maria campus, one section of the library stays open: a common area that features computer stations, conference tables, and small study group rooms.

During the recent storms, that part of the library has been packed with students who, instead of taking a day off, were catching up on assignments.

“It looked like it was exam time,” said Holmes. “I think students see clearly that we’re all in this together. They’re here to get an education and are motivated and we are, too.”

Kellar said she’s received several e-mails from students thanking her for not canceling class.

On the one hand, the messages surprised her a bit. On the other hand, it made sense. “They’re paying top dollar for an education,” she said.

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