Continuity of Operations
Frequently Asked Questions

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1. Does the University have an emergency planning goal?

Yes. The goal of emergency planning at UMaine is to be fully prepared for immediate and effective response to, and recovery from, emergencies. These efforts are guided by the University's priorities to (1) protect life and safety, (2) secure critical infrastructure and facilities, and (3) resume teaching and research programs. It is our goal to have teaching and research "back in business" **within 30 days** of any interruption. Clearly, the most severe disasters might make this goal unattainable, but our leadership regards fast recovery as essential to the preservation of the University. A long interruption in teaching and research is unacceptable. Closure for a semester would have long-term consequences.

2. Who should do Continuity of Operations (COOP) planning?

The effectiveness of COOP is dependent upon the development of a comprehensive central plan and individual department plans. All colleges, schools, and departments, that conduct teaching,

research, or service should have a COOP plan. Central service units that provide essential administrative support should also have a COOP plan. If a function performed by your unit would contribute significantly to restarting teaching, research, or service during the month or two following a major disaster, you should have a COOP plan.

3. Should you appoint a departmental COOP coordinator?

Yes. The process strongly benefits from appointing one key person (COOP Coordinator) who would coordinate a departmental team to complete the tasks identified during the planning process.

4. How long does it take to create a COOP plan?

Our experience is that longer time frames do not produce better plans. We have developed a basic COOP template to help you create a COOP in short order. For departments that have previously prepared emergency and COOP information, the timeline should be somewhat shorter. The complexity of your department will also determine the length of time required to develop a plan. Once the plan is completed, it is recommended that each department conduct a review with key staff and conduct an annual review.

5. Who should be on the COOP team?

Your COOP team should be comprised of people who have the knowledge, expertise, and authority to plan for and oversee response to and recovery from an emergency (e.g., Department Chair, Lab Managers, key faculty/staff). These are people who have access to the operations and who understand how the organization operates. Keep the group size manageable. If your department is an academic or research department, faculty/researcher input is essential. Try to enlist at least a couple of faculty members to participate in your group.

6. How does the COOP team operate?

The group will typically meet and discuss, with little-or-no "homework." In many cases, the COOP coordinator will use the UMaine COOP online tool (usually apart from the meetings), providing the team with printed materials for review or discussion. In some areas, it may be more appropriate to have the unit manager, researcher, or faculty member enter their specific information. The COOP coordinator interview key people for information. There is no single "right way" to use this online tool. It really will depend upon each department. Even the coordinator's role should not require a heavy time commitment. For discussion purposes, the UMaine COOP online tool can be brought "live" into the meetings (using a data projector) and filled out as the group discusses. This has been done successfully, but requires a cohesive, focused group.

7. **How detailed and complete does a COOP plan need to be?**

Your COOP plan will never be "complete" because you can't know what disaster you are planning for. The UMaine COOP online tool will prompt you for the appropriate level of detail, and most of those details will be things that your team already knows or can readily determine.
Successful recovery from disaster will hinge largely on the ingenuity and energy of the folks on the spot. Your job in planning for emergencies is to help them by gathering data, identifying resources, and developing possible strategies. If you find yourself puzzling whether an answer is thorough enough, declare victory and move on! **Visit the SEM website where you can also access a sample COOP.**

8. **Should we develop a plan for an entire college or school, or a plan for each unit within it?**

It is the responsibility of each department to develop and maintain an individual COOP plan. A COOP plan should be developed for each department within a college or administrative unit. This ensures that critical information and resource data will be collected for each department, thus ensuring effective, efficient business resumption in case of an emergency. This same data will be *very important* in the event that a unit must make decisions around shutting down operations or prioritizing critical functions.

9. **What assumptions can we make about what the University will do for us after an emergency?**

As part of the UMaine COOP and Emergency Operations Center, the University has designated several key departments that are responsible for providing essential services needed during an emergency event. Those units are: Office of the President, UMaine Public Safety, Facilities Management, Safety and Environmental Management, Information Technology, UMaine Health Services, Human Resources, Purchasing, Student Affairs, University Relations, and Dining Services. These units have developed emergency plans to provide for the campus during an emergency.

Here are some reasonable assumptions:

- **Access to buildings.** If University officials have reason to suspect that a building is hazardous to enter, they will immediately close the building and call in trained Environmental Health and Safety personnel. In the worst case (a major incident with damage to many buildings), the response and inspection process alone could take weeks, with hazmat cleanup and repairs taking much longer. *You may be unable to enter your building for an extended period of time.*

- **Locating temporary space.** This will be a major challenge for the University, *so any arrangements you have made ahead of time will serve you well.* For example, make an agreement with another department in a separate building or with colleagues in another institution; anything

you can do within your own unit will be to your benefit, such as sharing labs and offices that remain accessible.

- **Computing infrastructure.** Restoration of the University's many centrally supported IT applications and administrative systems will be of highest priority after any disruption. Examples include e-mail, Internet connectivity, Oracle, HR/Payroll, as well as the physical campus data network. Many resources continue to be directed toward hardening UMaine's IT systems to minimize damage and aid quick recovery. Definite predictions, of course, are not possible. *Within your unit, you should work with your management team—who in turn should work with UMaine IT Department to take steps to back up data and make plans for restarting your own servers and applications.*

- **Communications protocol.** During an emergency, general communications with students, faculty, staff, and the public will be handled by the Emergency Operation Center and University Relations. This will be tightly managed so that messages are consistent.

  As your department resumes functioning, communications of an operational nature to your constituents (staff, faculty, students) will be your responsibility.

- **Contacting your staff.** This will be a departmental responsibility. Departments should maintain staff emergency contact lists and institute a call-down tree as a best practice.

- **Care of staff and faculty.** Many staff and faculty issues arise during disaster recovery: pay, temporary leave, temporary alterations of assignment, safety, benefits, work-at-home, stress, and family issues. *You should assume that Human Resources will be available with guidance and mechanisms to assist departments in these complex areas.* Conversely, departments should seek guidance from HR when uncertain how to act in these matters—both before and after an emergency.

10. What help and money can we expect from the state and federal governments?

Outside assistance for disaster recovery will be forthcoming from both state and federal governments, but it is impossible to say before any disaster exactly what form it will take. It is important to know that the federal government never advances funds to institutions like ours for disaster recovery. Reimbursement is the path, and it is always a long one.
To qualify for state reimbursement, the Governor must declare a state of emergency. For federal reimbursement, the first step is a state declaration. The federal government will then decide what level of assistance the state will receive. The decision is based on the damage the state has suffered to infrastructure (roads, bridges, etc.) and individual homes, as well as the overall economic impact, etc. The University of Maine would qualify only if public assistance is granted under a federal declaration. The University of Maine will be reimbursed for repairs and reconstruction costs, but it will take years of negotiating with the state and federal governments. Many real losses may not be reimbursed. So the more capable we are, individually and collectively, of taking care of ourselves, the better off we will be.

11. The instructions say to identify our critical functions, not processes. What's the difference?

Processes are the steps needed to accomplish a *function*. For example, the function "provide meals for residents of University housing" is accomplished through the *processes* of "food buying, food storage, cooking, serving, and cleanup." COOP focuses on major functions, because processes are too specific and detailed for this level of planning. However, it is important that you develop redundant systems to ensure that processes can be completed in an emergency.

12. How can we craft a plan to handle unknown circumstances?

The methodology that we employ for COOP planning mostly avoids discussion of particular causal events that could interrupt our mission. All such causal events (inclement weather, fire, pandemic, human sabotage) will affect our functioning in similar ways: temporarily prevent us from using resources to which we have become accustomed. These resources include:

- space (our classrooms, labs, and offices)
- infrastructure (power, water, sewer, networks, phones)
- people (our staff)
- equipment (libraries, computers, etc.)
- funds (our income stream).

Our planning focuses on:

- identifying the resources that are critical
- safeguarding critical resources against loss (backup of systems and data, safe storage of research items)
- actions that will lessen the impact of losses (pre-arrangements with other departments, schools, or sister campuses for mutual aid)
- replacing resources quickly (contracts with vendors)
- performing critical functions without some of those resources (teaching via distance-learning technology)
- providing our people with the information they will need, post-disaster, to get the University back in action.

At best, a COOP plan is not a step-by-step cookbook, but rather a jumping-off point for ingenuity. In addition to capturing essential information about critical functions and resources, planning is about establishing contacts and relationships. When an emergency occurs, what's on paper will not be as important as the processes, conversations, and relationships developed during the emergency planning process.