Campus emergency procedures get dusted off, revised

Bob Harty
Institute Communications and Public Affairs

In order to respond to situations akin to the recent winter storm, the Hazardous Weather/Emergency Conditions Plan — whose purpose is set forth in policies, procedures, lines of responsibility, authority and communications necessary to effect a rapid and orderly process for either canceling classes or closing the campus — has been amended to incorporate all available technologies.

As with the Jan. 3 incident, weather or other emergency situations may make it necessary for Tech to declare either “classes cancelled” or “campus closed” conditions. Which declaration is made will determine which employees are required to come to work.

When a “classes cancelled” condition is in effect, all classes and instructional laboratories are affected; students and instructional faculty are not to report to campus.

Administrative and research activities not directly tied to the instructional function will generally continue as normal, unless otherwise instructed by a supervisor.

Other support employees may also be instructed not to report to work at the discretion of the administrator responsible for each major division.

When a “campus closed” condition is in effect, no employees are to report to work, except those previously designated as “emergency essential” by their department, or otherwise instructed by a supervisor.

When the decision is made by the senior vice president for Administration and Finance to declare either “classes cancelled” or “campus closed,” the executive director of Institute Communications and Public Affairs will immediately notify local radio and television stations (see list) and place the campus status decision on the Institute’s main web page. The executive director will also contact the Office of Information Technology (OIT) to place a message on the main campus phone line, 404-894-2000, noting the status of the campus.

Employees may call this number to hear a pre-recorded message.

The Georgia Tech Police Department will notify senior administrators.

Each administrator will then notify appropriate people in their own departments. Every attempt will be made to ensure the efficient and effective execution of this decision.

Every attempt will be made to determine which employees are required to report to work, except those previously designated as “emergency essential” by their department, or otherwise instructed by a supervisor.

Tornado Safety Information

In the Atlanta metropolitan area, the period from March through May is normally the peak season for tornados. Tornado “watch” and “warning” information is announced over radio and television stations and weather alert radios that are automatically tuned to the national weather broadcast frequency.

It is recommended that each vice president, dean, director, department head and lab director obtain a weather alert radio and have it located in an area that is occupied at all times during normal Institute working hours. These radios broadcast information on all hazardous weather as identified by the National Weather Service for the metropolitan area.

If a tornado warning is issued for the Atlanta area, faculty, staff and students should seek shelter in the basement or in the interior corridors, stairways or rooms of the lowest floor of the building.

From punchcard to PPP: exploring the future of voting

Jane Sanders
Research News and Publications

Elections of the future may be more convenient, accurate and faster for both voters and election officials if researchers can improve the technology for voting via the Internet.

Also a factor is whether elections officials can entice voters to use the technology and make it accessible to them.

With interest increasing in voting reform and modernization since the 2000 Presidential election, researchers at the Georgia Tech Research Institute (GTRI) have begun studies of the social and technical issues related to voting via the Internet.

Last month, these researchers hosted a workshop to share information with their colleagues in academia, government and industry.

The group agreed that Internet voting will provide some major benefits — convenience for voters and a more efficient and accurate elections process — but added that its widespread use is many years away.

"People wonder why they can't vote over the Internet if they can buy things over the Internet," said Betty Whitaker, a principal research engineer at GTRI. "But then they consider the possibility of a security breach and its effects. We believe that over time, as the Internet evolves and the research and the hardware and software evolve, researchers will be able to resolve some of the concerns about Internet voting."

The GTRI Internet Voting Research Team envisions that Internet voting will occur in phases during the next decade. Within the next few years, military personnel casting absentee ballots probably will be allowed to vote via the Internet. The Federal Voting Assistance Program conducted a pilot project in November 2000 involving 84 overseas voters. The success of this project provided encouragement for researchers in Internet voting, yet pointed to some problems in the system, such as lost passwords, researchers said.

"We are working to re-engineer the voting part of the elections process, while understanding its impact on the other parts of the process, including the training of poll workers and the tallying of votes," explained Bob Simpson, a GTRI principal research scientist. "Things are more complicated than they appear on the surface."

Tackling social, technical issues

One of the primary social science issues related to Internet voting is access. "It is the 'Digital Divide,'" which we define for now as those who have Internet access from home or work and those who don't," said GTRI researcher Marlit Hayslett-Keck.

Current estimates indicate that half of Americans do not have Internet access, and a much smaller percentage have high-speed broadband access. The question of whether citizens are comfortable with Internet use is an even more
North Campus Parking Deck 'open for business'

Michael Hagearty
Institute Communications and Public Affairs

Tech’s notorious parking deck reopened exactly as planned on Jan. 7. The delay in the opening of the North Campus Parking Deck occurred when an inspection in March revealed cracking in the structural columns and beams. The contractor went back to work over the summer, restructuring the support columns with a jacket consisting of six inches of concrete and steel ties to strengthen the intersection where the columns and beams meet. To enter and exit the deck, permit holders will use their Buzz Cards. According to Weis, this is for two reasons: to help prevent illegal entry into the deck and to facilitate the mixing of visitor and permit parking. Gates in front of entrances will always be down.

North Campus Parking Deck

facility is a much needed parking resource and is now officially open for business."

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No more checks? Payroll shifts to e-deposit

Michael Hagearty
Institute Communications and Public Affairs

Before long, Tech employees may no longer be receiving paychecks. Everyone will still be paid, of course, but the Payroll Office is working to increase the percentage of faculty, staff and students who authorize their salary to be deposited directly into a designated bank account. Doing so, they say, will cut down on the administrative costs associated with printing and distributing paychecks, and paves the way for future improvements to the system.

Currently, roughly 70 percent of monthly payroll employees use direct deposit — a low number in comparison with other state schools. Maryann Fogarty, director of Payroll, noted that both Georgia State University and the University of Georgia have mandated the procedure.

So has Tech. Beginning this month, all newly hired, monthly paid employees will participate in the direct deposit system. The belief is that moving toward 100 percent campus participation will eliminate many of the problems associated with employee paychecks as well as streamline the payroll system.

"It cuts our processing time in half," Fogarty said. "This system guarantees funds deposit, cuts down on our cost of printing checks and the time involved in replacing lost or stolen checks."

"Ultimately, our goal is a uniform method of pay distribution that is efficient and ensures prompt, reliable paycheck distribution to all customers," said Chuck Donbaugh, associate vice president of Human Resources.

For more information, please visit: www.humanresources.gatech.edu

North Campus Parking Deck

It’s a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity." — Andrew Stein, a junior computer science major, on the three-week internship he will spend monitoring and troubleshooting information technology systems at the Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City. (Tampa Tribune)

"This approach does not adequately take advantage of the benefit that would accrue from a full compliment of monitoring activities."
— Melvin Carter, professor emeritus, in a committee report noting the U.S. Department of Energy’s monitoring system, designed to track groundwater laced with radioactive remnants from more than 800 underground nuclear weapons tests, is not adequate. (Las Vegas Journal-Review)

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Fees among Tech's international students after attacks

Although about 40 percent of graduate students and 50 percent of doctoral students at Georgia Tech are international students, there has been little effect on the student population as a result of the Sept. 11 incidents, said Harvey Charles, director of the Office of International Education. Of the 2,482 international students on campus, only one returned home because of family concern over the events involving the United States.

"There was concern expressed among the students when Sen. Diane Feinstein (D-Calif.) announced her proposal to put a moratorium on the issuance of student visas, but that was the only instance in which the students registered any distress," he said.

"I think the situation has been very well handled at Georgia Tech," he said. "The administration has been on top of it from the day of Sept. 11 and have demonstrated great skill to calm the fears and concerns of the students. My office issued statements that things were under control and that students could come talk if they needed to.

Charles said it telling that a meeting convened specifically for international students to voice their concerns was sparsely attended. "It shows that our students felt comfortable enough here not to have to come to that meeting," he said.

Georgia Tech, he said, "has been very well handled at any distress," he said. Barbara Hall, associate vice president of Enrollment Services, said the withdrawal of the student visa moratorium proposal means there will be little difference in the application process for international students.

"There probably won't be that much difference, time wise, in the processing of student visas. There may be an increased screening process, but that will go on before they get to us," she said.

"We are feeling sufficiently secure that there will not be a big change at the undergraduate level in recruiting and enrolling international students," Hall added. "If we have an international student we expect to enroll and they don't register, we report it to the INS, but we have always done that."

Encouraging students to stay FOCUSed on education

Larry Bowle
Institute Communications and Public Affairs

Next week, more than 40 percent of African-American freshmen at Georgia Tech's King Week Ecumenical Service on Sunday, Jan. 20, with keynote speaker Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., holiday, is designed to encourage African-American students to pursue advanced degrees in science and engineering.

FOCUS concludes with Georgia Tech's King Week Ecumenical Service on Sunday, Jan. 20, with keynote speaker Alexis Herman, former U.S. Secretary of Labor. The service will be held in the Robert Ferst Center for the Arts. It is free and open to the public.

Georgia Tech made it a goal over a decade ago to increase the diversity in its student body and create a campus environment of inclusion, respect and community," said Robert Haley, FOCUS director and special assistant to the president. "We are now reaping the fruits of that long-term effort."

Last year, Georgia Tech saw a 61 percent increase in African-American freshmen while at the same time admitting 57 percent more African-American graduate students. In Tech's Ph.D. programs, black enrollment was up 33 percent.

"Georgia Tech has achieved this without affirmative action admission preferences," Haley said. "Minority students take pride in the fact that their achievements are not diminished by perceptions of lower standards."

Fringe benefit

The Georgia Tech Faculty Women's Club is offering scholarships to the children of Tech employees. Awards of $500 to $1,500 are made to undergraduates of all majors based upon financial need and academic achievement. To receive an application form, call Ann Donahue at 770-957-4882 or refer to www.techscolar.org.com.

Pension structure gets new infrastructure

In November, the Teachers Retirement System of Georgia (TRSGA) announced it had selected KPMG Consulting to implement an integrated pension administration services solution to improve customer service as well as link TRSGA with its members and other organizations via the Internet.

Greg McQueen, project director for TRSGA, said, "TRSGA selected KPMG Consulting to lead this project because of their National Retirement Practice's extensive experience with public retirement systems and large-scale systems integration projects."

TRSGA administers the fund from which public school educators and employees of the University Systems of Georgia receive retirement benefits. With more than $38 billion in assets, TRSGA is one of the largest public retirement systems in the country, providing retirement services and benefits to more than 250,000 individuals.

Tech's staff members contribute 5 percent of their pre-tax salary into TRSGA. For more information about TRSGA, visit www.trsga.com.