UC SANTA BARBARA

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COVID-19 IT Response

As classes, research and administration transition to the internet, the campus's information technology (IT) departments have had the monumental task of adapting systems, increasing capacity and keeping the university up and running.

The good news is that the university was prepared. "We had plans, strategies, practice and a solid foundation in place," said Chief Information Officer Matt Hall, who provides oversight for nearly all IT activities on campus. "Practice with remote work during the Thomas Fire and associated floods gave us an advantage by way of a rehearsal."

The teleconference program Zoom has served as the backbone of the university's response to California Gov. Gavin Newsom's stay-at-home mandate. It allows for courses to meet, meetings to proceed and researchers to discuss ongoing projects. What's more, Student Health Services, Counseling & Psychological Services and the Hosford and Psychological Services clinics are all continuing, by way of Zoom, to provide their services to the campus community.

Unsurprisingly, the university has been breaking its Zoom records. UCSB IT facilitated more than 34,000 Zoom meetings in March, with over 24,000 community members creating accounts in that month alone.

To assist the campus community, UCSB IT has loaded its website with training and support materials and publicly accessible information.

The university has taken a variety of actions in addition to expanding Zoom service. UCSB IT has provided 150 laptops, as well as a host of peripherals such as cameras and headsets, to several departments to facilitate remote work. The university has also acquired an additional 250 virtual private network licenses, bringing the campus's total to 775. "We then got a temporary license for 30,000 users to give us time to better determine the actual total demand," said Manny Cintron, director of application and technology services for Enterprise Technology Services (ETS). ETS functions as the core of the university's IT team.

The enhanced collaboration between Instructional Development (ID), Letters & Science IT, and ETS has been crucial to the successful deployment and enhancement of Zoom service. "The first two organizations support academic requirements, while ETS provides the backbone support of the Zoom service," explained Cintron.

Instructional Development along with the Center for Innovative Teaching, Research, and Learning (CITRAL) and Collaborate have assembled a variety of tools and services on their joint website under the mantra "Keep Teaching: Teach and Learn from Anywhere!"

"Fortunately, the campus has put together a pretty complete educational technology infrastructure over the past ten years," said George Michaels, ID's executive director. The system includes, GauchoSpace and GauchoCast, among others. GauchoSpace is the management system for online course materials, assignments, etc., and GauchoCast offers lecture capture and podcasting prerecorded video and audio streaming service.

By the end of the first week of spring instruction, GauchoSpace saw nearly 5 million page views, and more than 8,000 instructional sessions met on Zoom. It seems the campus community is making the most of circumstances as everyone adjusts to the developing situation.

"We can continue teaching, learning, researching, and administrating in a bad circumstance," said Hall. "We've shown we can do it. It's not ideal, but it works."

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.