UC SANTA BARBARA

THE Current

September 8, 2020

Harrison Tasoff

Zoom Backup Plan

On August 24, Zoom experienced technical difficulties that interrupted service across the United States for several hours. Fortunately, the company resolved these issues before the day progressed here in California.

With so much campus activity now taking place remotely, UC Santa Barbara Information Technology (IT) can assure the community that alternative video conferencing options are available should our Zoom services get disrupted.

UCSB uses the Google suite of tools, which includes the company's own video communication service, Google Meet. "It's essentially Google's answer to the video conferencing market," explained Shea Lovan, the campus's director of cloud and identity services. Zoom still offers more features than Google Meet, such as breakout rooms, though the latter service is improving, he said.

If something happens to our Zoom service, transitioning meetings and classes to Google Meet would be fairly straightforward, especially for people using Google calendar, according to Lovan. It would just require sending out a new link.

That said, making sure all participants are quickly notified of the change could be challenging. "If Zoom is down, we can't query Zoom to get a list of all the pending meetings," said Lovan.

Guidance on using Google Meet can be found on the IT website, and an article posted on the GauchoSpace help center is aimed at helping instructors create Google Meet links to share with their students.

A certain amount of downtime can be expected for any service based simply on the mathematics of all the parts continuing to work at the same time. “We’ve got four years of experience with Zoom, and it’s been a very reliable platform over that time,” Lovan said.

“And if there were a major failure within their infrastructure,” he added, “something that caused an extended outage, UCSB has a nearly comparable service in Google Meet that is already available for faculty, students and staff to use.”

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.