

Snow Cancellation Policy for the School of Arts and Sciences, the School of Engineering, and the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

History

On January 28, 2011 Jean Ayers, Director of Web Communications, sent the following messages to communications staff in A&S&E.

“The question was how to handle specific delayed opening information from each school regarding classes, clinics, seminars, etc. For example, Thursday morning the Dental School announced that the morning dental clinic session was canceled. We posted this on the Announcements page under the general University announcement: <http://inside.tufts.edu/announce/index.php?t=id&id=866>

The problem with doing this is that it might cause confusion about the status of clinics, seminars, etc. at other schools. If a school isn't included on the page, does that mean they're not canceled or delayed? It would also be difficult to field and post all the different messages from all the schools. To avoid confusion, it would make more sense for Web Communications to add a message to this page under the general announcement that directs people to the individual school sites and/or phone numbers for specific school-related information. We also ask that you do not contact Web Communications to handle the posting and dissemination of your school-specific closing or delay.

Patricia Campbell will ask each EAD to propose how they would handle delayed opening for their school, in consultation with their Dean. They can then have a canned approach to use in their own e-list or web posting.”

What This Means for the Schools of Arts and Sciences and of Engineering

Our interpretation of this new policy is the following.

The decision to send staff members home will still be made at the central level and staff will be informed by HR. Often the decision is left up to individual managers, and this will not change. However, the decision as to whether or not to hold classes or evening events will be addressed at the school level. The collective deans of A&S&E decided that the decision to cancel classes would be made independently of whether or not staff members were being sent home. The rationale for a dual policy rests in the

notion that the majority of undergraduates students are on campus or live near campus and thus the weather would pose no threat to them. Additionally, it was likely that many faculty members would also be on campus. Considerations such as when during the semester the storm is occurring and how many snow events have already occurred, as well as the severity of the storm itself, would influence each individual decision. Thus, any suite of communications protocols needs to be flexible enough to adapt to multiple scenarios for cancellation.

If all of Tufts is to be closed or if there is a delayed opening in the morning hours, the information would not be school-based but would come from the central administration and would be communicated via the usual sources (website, radio, etc.). These decisions would more than likely come before the start of the work day or, under extreme conditions, the evening before.

In all cases, the deans would want faculty members and students alike to use common sense. If their personal circumstances put them in any untoward danger, a singular decision in deference to their safety should come first.

Principles of the Proposed Communications Plan for Arts and Sciences and Engineering

There are four principles that guide communications teams charged with communicating emergency or time-based information to key constituencies. These principles are reflected in the strategic planning processes—both for the short- and the long-term.

1. Communications should involve the fewest number of people in the chain. Centralized, automated communications is the goal—even in our environment that includes multiple schools and constituencies. The fewer the number of people the less the margin of error and the faster the information gets to the intended audiences.
2. Sufficient time must be allowed for recipients to reasonably receive and act on the information they are receiving.
3. Recipients should not receive duplicative or redundant information unless the information is being carried on more than one channel.
4. Both the safety of recipients and the liability of the institution need to be protected in the communications.

PROPOSED PROTOCOLS

The team quickly concluded that of the three potential methods for contacting faculty and students (email, text messages, and telephone), the most efficient and effective mode was most likely to be text messaging, driving recipients to a web link for more details if necessary. Email has the advantage of being able to provide all the information necessary in one communication, in addition to providing a web link, but students, in particular, are not looking at, let alone reading, their email regularly. For a time-critical message such a class cancellation, a text message is the preferred vehicle. However, we do not currently have access to the addresses we need to send text messages. Since this strategy cannot be put immediately into effect it is considered a protocol for the long term. Steps toward implementation are discussed below.

For your information, a survey of what other schools plan to do reveals a plan to drive students to their respective websites via email.

SHORT-TERM PROTOCOLS

Until access to text messaging addresses is arranged, the following process is recommended.

1. The Executive Administrative Dean of Arts and Sciences (Leah McIntosh), the Executive Associate Dean of Engineering (Scott Sahagian), and the Dean of Undergraduate and Graduate Students (John Barker) learn from Central that staff will be sent home at a particular time. They are the core team that will subsequently determine if classes will be cancelled and, if so, the time of the cancellation. However, a quorum of only two of these three people is necessary to make a decision at any given time.
 - a. Students and faculty require notice two (2) hours in advance (minimum), ideally three (3) hours from the time that they RECEIVE THE COMMUNICATION. Thus, if the decision is made at 1PM but the communication is not sent out until 1:30, the earliest classes can be reasonably cancelled would be 3:30PM. This will take some finessing as the team gets proficient with a process. Eventually the whole process should not take more than fifteen (15) minutes.
 - b. Care needs to be taken not to cancel classes based on hours/minutes but rather blocks. Staff members are released according to time but a release at say 3:00 PM might come in the middle of block. Classes cannot be cancelled while they are in session (unless a state of emergency has been declared and everyone is to be sent home immediately).

- c. Five messages have been prepared to cover these requirements and for decisions made at 10AM, 11:30AM, 1PM, 2:30PM, and 4PM. For each of these, specific blocks are released, based on the day of the week. Each message drives students to the Tisch Library website for additional information specific to the Library and to relevant websites relating to evening activities.
2. The EAD of Arts and Sciences (Leah McIntosh) (or in the absence of the EAD, the Director of Finance, Marc Miller), will communicate to the Executive Assistant to the Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences (TBA) on behalf of the three schools. The Secretary of the Faculty (Jillian Dubman) will serve as backup to the Executive Assistant. The administrative assistant to the Dean (Lisa Dacundo) will serve as backup to the Secretary of the Faculty.
3. The Executive Assistant will send the appropriate email,* based on the timing of the decision, to the A&S&E faculty and affiliates list and distribute it to all A&S&E students (undergraduate and graduate). This list will live with ITS and be generated from SIS and HR-generated data.
4. The ITS team will automatically activate website messaging upon receipt of the email sent by the Executive Assistant.
5. ITS will update the Weather Advisory web pages on Engineering, A&S, and GSAS sites through ITS (webupdates@ase.tufts.edu; will.hilley@tufts.edu).
 - a. Update school home pages with link to “Weather Advisory” pages with a date of the advisory: For example, Weather Advisory, 2/2/2011
 - b. Prepare an advisory message for the following pages.
 - i. <http://engineering.tufts.edu/about/weatheradvisory.htm>
 - ii. <http://as.tufts.edu/about/weatheradvisory.htm>
6. Once the weather advisory has ended, ITS will restore the “Weather Advisory” pages to the Default Message.
 - a. DEFAULT MESSAGE
School is currently in session and classes are being held on schedule. Please check 617-627-INFO or www.tufts.edu for further updates.
7. In any case, an email will be sent to all A&S&E constituencies late next fall telling them where and how class cancellation information will be communicated. We would take the opportunity to remind these audiences that this information can now be found on local sites and to watch their email for important updates in the event of a serious winter storm.

*** CLASS CANCELLATION MESSAGES**

There are five messages, appended to the end of this memo. Given the minimum two-hour window required for adequate warning between cancellation notification and the actual cancellation of classes, the team identified five (5) time guidelines.

- a. 10:00AM decision/Noon Release/Email 1
- b. 11:30AM decision/1:30PM release/Email 2
- c. 1:00PM decision/3:00PM release/Email 3
- d. 2:30PM decision/4:30PM release/Email 4
- e. 4:00PM decision/6:00PM release/Email 5

With the exception of Email 3, all blocks will either have ended or not have begun at the time of cancellation. That IS NOT the case for decisions made in the early afternoon and affecting classes that begin at 3PM. Blocks 5-9 and 5+-9+ are labs that have already begun and are scheduled to last beyond the cancellation time. We have proposed that these classes continue as scheduled BUT that students are free to leave without penalty at the time of cancellation and that faculty members are free to cancel at that time, as well. We call for common sense and deference to travelling members of our community.

LONG-TERM STRATEGIES

As discussed earlier, the team believes that a combination of text messages and email strategies will optimally meet the specific communications needs regarding class cancellation.

1. Text Messaging

The team recognizes that the short-term plan takes advantages of only one communications channel—email—and that this vehicle is no longer the most effective and most timely way to reach our students and many of our faculty members. We immediately agreed that we need the capacity to send text messages, in addition to emails, to ensure that our constituencies get information about class closings as closely to the time the decision is made as possible. We have the technical capacity to text messages through Outlook: we are only hampered by not having access to the students and faculty actual text message addresses. The team discussed how it could best get access to text message addresses (SIMS addresses). The first option was to try and collect this information from people and have them opt in to our list. We realized almost immediately that this would not be a successful enterprise. We concluded

our best option was to work with Public Safety—which already has the information we need, routinely updated and securely maintained.

Will explained that from a technical point of view the information we require could be automated and sent to ITS on a regular schedule. He spoke with Geoff Bartlett who declined to provide those addresses to us.

Leah and Anne spoke at some length with Geoff Barlett who explained that it would not be possible to separate out the addresses for A&S&E constituencies from out of the current Tufts Alert system. In addition, for current emergency alert system is predicated on usage restricted to a level of emergency at the central level. Understandably, class cancellations at the schoolwide level do not reach that level of emergency. However, Leah and Anne were successful in describing for Geoff the business case on the part of A&S&E for access to the text addresses for its students, faculty, and staff. Geoff has agreed to take under advisement our schools' needs for these addresses.

2. Automation

ITS hosts all A&S&E lists: full- and part-time faculty, staff, and students. ITS developed the requisite programs so that appropriate emails and text messages can be activated from any location. Email language has been prepared and can be auto-filled; discrete language can be input that is relevant to the occasion. (Text messages will need to be created if and when we have access to IM addresses.)

3. Other Uses of the Data Sources and Protocols

The team recognizes that under almost all emergency scenarios, the community would be notified by Public Safety by the Central Administration. However, it is also true that the deans of A&S&E, undergraduate and graduate, often need to send out emails to the community as a whole. In the past, doing this has required piecing together a combination of mailing lists: the process has been time-consuming and a lot more complicated than it needs to be. As a result of pulling together the protocols, the team believes that the deans now have the timely access they require to a single source for comprehensive, relatively up-to-date listing of A&S&E faculty, staff, and students. In addition, there now exists. (or could exist if these protocols are accepted and formalized), a process by which information could be swiftly communicated to the A&S&E community. Although the messages that we have now relate only to weather, that need not be the case in the future.

The Team: Anne Fishman, Julia Keller, Will Hilley, Divya Narayanan, Bob Bocknak, Jillian Dubman

Email #1/DECISION MADE AT 10AM for a NOON RELEASE

Dear Arts and Sciences and Engineering Community,

The safety of our community is a top priority. Due to the current storm, classes in the School of Engineering, the School of Arts and Sciences, and the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences are cancelled for today as of 12:00PM (Noon). Please check the listing below to determine which blocks and all subsequent blocks that are affected today. Please check the Tisch Library website for updated information about access to the Library. Some evening activities may continue as scheduled: please check the relevant websites for specific information. Please check 617.627.INFO or www.tufts.edu for further updates. And stay safe.

The Deans of the School of Arts and Sciences, the School of Engineering, and the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Monday

G, G⁺, 5, 5⁺

Tuesday

F, F⁺

Wednesday

6, 6⁺, 7, 7⁺

Thursday

F, F⁺

Friday

F, F⁺

Email #2/DECISION MADE AT 11:30 AM for a 1:30PM RELEASE

Dear Arts and Sciences and Engineering Community,

The safety of our community is a top priority. Due to the current storm, classes in the School of Engineering, the School of Arts and Sciences, and the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences are cancelled for today as of 1:30PM. Please check the listing below to determine which blocks and all subsequent blocks that are affected today. Please check the Tisch Library website for updated information about access to the Library. Some evening activities may continue as scheduled: please check the relevant websites for specific information. Please check 617.627.INFO or www.tufts.edu for further updates. And stay safe.

The Deans of the School of Arts and Sciences, the School of Engineering, and the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Monday

G, G, ⁺ 5, 5⁺

Tuesday

H, H, ⁺ 6, 6⁺

Wednesday

G, G, ⁺ 7, 7⁺

Thursday

H, H, ⁺ 8, 8⁺

Friday

G, 9, 9⁺

Email #3/DECISION MADE AT 1PM for a 3PM RELEASE

Dear Arts and Sciences and Engineering Community,

The safety of our community is a top priority. Due to the current storm, classes in the School of Engineering, the School of Arts and Sciences, and the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences are cancelled for today as of 1:30PM. Please check the listing below to determine which blocks and all subsequent blocks that are affected today. *Students in classes in blocks indicated in PARENTHESES continue as scheduled. However, students are free to leave without penalty after 3PM and faculty members are free to cancel the remainder of these labs/seminars after 3PM. Common sense and deference to the safety of travelling members of our community should be considered.* Please check the Tisch Library website for updated information about access to the Library. Some evening activities may continue as scheduled: please check the relevant websites for specific information. Please check 617.627.INFO or www.tufts.edu for further updates. And stay safe.

The Deans of the School of Arts and Sciences, the School of Engineering, and the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Monday

I, I⁺, (5, 5+)

Tuesday

J, J⁺, (6, 6+)

Wednesday

I, I⁺, (7, 7+)

Thursday

J, J⁺, (8, 8+)

Friday

I, (9, 9+)

Email #4/DECISION MADE AT 2:30PM for a 4:30PM RELEASE

Dear Arts and Sciences and Engineering Community,

The safety of our community is a top priority. Due to the current storm, classes in the School of Engineering, the School of Arts and Sciences, and the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences are cancelled for today as of 1:30PM. Please check the listing below to determine which blocks and all subsequent blocks that are affected today. Please check the Tisch Library website for updated information about access to the Library. Some evening activities may continue as scheduled: please check the relevant websites for specific information. Please check 617.627.INFO or www.tufts.edu for further updates. And stay safe.

The Deans of the School of Arts and Sciences, the School of Engineering, and the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Monday

K, K⁺

Tuesday

L, L⁺

Wednesday

K, K⁺

Thursday

L, L⁺

Friday

Not Applicable

Email #5/DECISION MADE AT 4PM for a 6PM RELEASE

Dear Arts and Sciences and Engineering Community,

The safety of our community is a top priority. Due to the current storm, classes in the School of Engineering, the School of Arts and Sciences, and the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences are cancelled for today as of 1:30PM. Please check the listing below to determine which blocks and all subsequent blocks that are affected today. Please check the Tisch Library website for updated information about access to the Library. Some evening activities may continue as scheduled: please check the relevant websites for specific information. Please check 617.627.INFO or www.tufts.edu for further updates. And stay safe.

The Deans of the School of Arts and Sciences, the School of Engineering, and the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Monday

N/M, M, ⁺ 10, 10⁺

Tuesday

N, N⁺, 11, 11⁺

Wednesday

M, M, ⁺ 12, 12⁺

Thursday

N, N, ⁺ 13, 13⁺

Friday

Not Applicable