COVID-19 (Coronavirus): Information and Recommendations from Information Technology Services

One good thing that comes from a time of crisis, is the overwhelming support and unity that we sometimes see. Many of the vendors that we use (and some that we do not use currently) are making their services freely available or enhancing services that we already use. This list addresses tools and services available to us that can be used at New River to help maintain business continuity through this crisis.

There have been some requests for a solution that would enable employees to respond to text messages and phone calls from home without revealing your personal cell number. Our IT staff is recommending that you request a **Cisco Softphones** as a solution. To request a Cisco Softphone, please email dayersman@newriver.edu from your New River email account. We have deployed 29 of them so far.

As you sign-up you provide a number to forward calls from (your office phone number most likely) and they allow you to choose a new phone number (not your personal cell) that you can use to send and receive calls (without revealing your personal number).

A. Recommended Services Available to You

1. **Cisco Softphones** are now available to employees who request them. This is a free application that you install on your computer and it uses your assigned office phone number so you can make and receive calls using your computer. If part of your job responsibilities is to answer the phone, then you probably need a Cisco Softphone.
2. All courses should have an online syllabus in **Blackboard Learn**, even TRAD courses. Adding additional content, assessments, and leveraging this tool to facilitate communication through discussions and course-based email can enable continuity of instruction while we limit personal exposure to others. Blackboard has released guidance to instructors to assist with quickly getting materials online as well as Blackboard Learn 9 – The Basics.
3. As you may know, we use **Respondus** *Monitor* for remote test proctoring and our license is limited to 200 seats. **Respondus** has removed this seat limit to assist us in better responding the global pandemic. We also have licensed **Respondus** *Lockdown Browser* (more information).
4. **Comevo**, the provider of our online orientation, is offering unlimited access to additional modules for the next four months. This could potentially be used with Prospective Students or other groups to provide targeted information.
5. **Blackbaud**, the provider of our foundation's online fundraising and donor database, has provided recommendations for moving fundraising efforts online.
6. **Brainfuse**, our online tutoring service, has expanded the number of tutors available in response to this situation.
7. **SoftChalk**, a tool used to simplify converting instructional information to the online environment, is available as a free download until May 31, 2020.
8. **Quality Matters**, the company that has become the standard to meet for online course quality, has released the QM Emergency Remote Instruction Checklist for higher education (available from the QM portal).

9. Most of our **Cisco** phones are configured to send any voicemails to your email as an attachment. It is also possible to [forward your calls](#) to your cell or home phone number. A few offices have general contact phone numbers typically answered by part-time employees and these may not have voicemail-to-email configured, but we can change that if you request it. And if you need to update your phone Greeting, our FAQ has the steps for doing that.

10. Working from home may mean you need access to confidential information on a shared drive or other system. If you do not yet have a **VPN** account to establish a secure connection to the New River network, we can provide you one ([more information](#)). The new portal has links to most services you need, and VPN is not required for this.

11. The **Zoom** client is [freely available](#) to students and employees. Meetings are limited to 40 minutes unless you have a paid PRO license (we have only 25 of these), but for virtual office hours and even online instruction, meetings, and messaging, Zoom is an excellent videoconferencing and instant messaging service and it is the College's supported system. The mobile Zoom app works great and if someone doesn't have a computer it can provide access to your course or meeting.

12. We also have licensing for **Microsoft Teams** and **Skype for Business**, which can be used for videoconferencing and collaboration. **Adobe Connect**, another videoconferencing solution, has made their product free for 90 days. And the **Big Blue Button** web conferencing system is available to us in Blackboard. While these solutions all work great, we recommend **Zoom** and can best support it.

13. **Scaffold Designer** is a solution for quickly getting courses ready to deliver online provided by [K16 Solutions](#). They have offered free access and it integrates with Blackboard. New River should have this available in the next few days.

14. The **Online Learning Consortium** (OLC) membership will be purchased by WVNET and then shared with our WVVLN.

15. **WVNET** is offering daily Blackboard [training webinars](#) for instructors needing to get online quckly.

B. Connectivity for Those Needing It

While not everyone has access to computers or the Internet, most do have access to smart phones. The Blackboard mobile app and Zoom mobile app are both free and most of our services are mobile friendly. The following companies have made announcements about availing their services during this crisis:

- [FCC agreement](#) stating that providers will waive late fees, not cutoff service for lack of payment, and open hotspots.
- [Comcast COVID-19 response](#): offers free Wi-Fi for 2 months to low income families plus all Xfinity hotspots are free to the public during this time.
- [Charter Free Internet offer for 2 months](#)
- [AT&T COVID-19 response](#): offers open hot-spots, unlimited data to existing customers, and $10/month plans to low income families.
- [Verizon COVID-19 response](#): no special offers, but following the FCC agreement.

- [Sprint COVID-19 response](#): follows FCC agreement, provides unlimited data to existing customers, and, starting Tuesday, 3/17/2020, will allow all handsets to enable hotspots for 60 days at no extra charge.
- [T-Mobile COVID-19 response](#): follows FCC agreement, plus unlimited data to existing customers, and, coming soon, will allow all handsets to enable hotspots for 60 days at no extra charge.

C. Webinars, Training, and Tips for Instructors

(1) WVNET Blackboard Basics
Daily through April 8, 2020 (1-2pm)
Meeting link:
https://wvnet.webex.com/wvnet/j.php?MTID=m5be7e5eec9faebffa16f4dfc1d3bb139
Meeting number: 732 324 521
Password: COVID19

(2) Blackboard Issues with the Mobile App
As you develop assessments in Blackboard you should design your information as if the student is using the mobile app, the lowest common denominator. This universal design approach ensures that all students can have a similar experience, regardless of the device they use.

These test options are **not** supported within the Blackboard app when taking tests:

a. One at a time question presentation is ON
b. Timer with auto-submit is OFF (overtime)

These test options are **not** supported within the Blackboard app when reviewing tests:

a. Provide feedback for individual answers is ON
b. Show score per question is OFF
c. Show incorrect questions is OFF

D. Summary
Please realize, any extraordinary effort to get courses and programs quickly ready for distant delivery during this crisis will certainly be time well spent and a good investment for the College. Your efforts will also be in direct support of the strategic goal of being more accessible to our learners and someday providing full programs to students at a distance.

We have pulled laptops from carts and are making them available for short-term loans to those most in need. Regrettably, we have only about 15 of them. If you have an urgent need, please contact our Help Desk with your request.