

Systems Allow University Community to Stay in Touch

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As members of the Tulane community prepared to leave town as a precaution against the threat of Hurricane Gustav, they went with some peace of mind knowing they could stay in touch, said Paul Barron, vice president for information technology and chief information officer.



Paul Barron, vice president for information technology and chief information officer, says the Tulane website and e-mail systems have backup operations to keep them functioning in emergencies. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Barron's job is to make sure that Tulane's communications systems ? including the Tulane website, e-mail system and telephones ? stay up and running throughout any weather.

He's also responsible for the safety of computer equipment, especially the major servers at the university's two data centers, and the protection of indispensable records of the major enterprises of the university, including student records and

payroll.

“We are incredibly prepared,” said Barron.

Although he admitted to feeling “nervous” in the days before the storm decided where it eventually would make landfall, Barron said that the emergency planning of the technology services team paid off.

By midday Friday (Aug. 29), a “mirror” Tulane website was in operation in Philadelphia, ensuring no disruption of the Tulane emergency website ? a vital source of information for students, faculty and staff.

The Tulane e-mail system may be accessed from the webmail link on the university website. “People can access Tulane web-based mail from any network,” said Barron.

The e-mail system as well as the telephone system functioned as normal throughout the emergency, Barron added.

If the e-mail system should go down for whatever reason, within a half an hour, a “failover” system takes over, allowing faculty and staff to use Tulane e-mail, Barron said.

As for protecting the computer equipment of the major servers at the data centers on the 14th floor at 1555 Poydras St. and the mezzanine at 1440 Canal St. on the downtown campus, Barron said that backup generators are always at the ready to provide power for the computers and air conditioning.

Essential records of the university were backed up and taken off site to a data storage company, said Barron. “I think we are prepared for anything.”

In addition to the emergency website, the university has a voice and text messaging system for rapid dissemination of information to landline and mobile telephones. The system allows the university to broadcast in one “blast” within 30 minutes 400,000 messages to the entire Tulane community. Debbie Grant, vice president of university communications, leads the office responsible for these emergency communications.