

Students turn to web for communication post-Sandy

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If your phone reads “searching for signal,” you're not alone.

Approximately [25 percent](#) of cell towers in regions affected by Hurricane Sandy were knocked out, according to the Federal Communications Commission.

The disruption in service proves problematic for many NYU students, as many are unable to call or send reassuring messages to parents, family and friends. Students took to the Internet. Even though cell service has been lost, Wi-Fi connections have been found in several locations, including the Kimmel Center for University Life and Bobst Library.

Social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook typically serve as springboards for social and political commentary, socialization or top-of-the-head musings. But during disasters, the sites are proving to be part of a bigger picture of connectivity. One Tweet and you've reached a multitude of followers. One Facebook post and you let people know you're alive.

Phoebe Laughlin, a Gallatin sophomore, said her cell phone was barely functioning when she tried to use it in her dorm room in Brittany residence hall and again near Washington Square Park. Around noon on Tuesday, she was able to find a computer in Kimmel to make contact, in the form of a post on her sister's Facebook.

“The post just said that I was safe and doing fine, and I tagged my mom, dad and brother in the post as well in case any of them found a way online,” she said.

Laughlin said she was surprised not only to see an almost immediate response from her family but to hear reactions to her circumstances from others.

“I was really surprised to hear that a lot of my friends – students at other colleges – as well as my sister had no idea that New York was so affected by the storm,” she said.

Social networking played even a bigger role for CAS sophomore Andrea Marlana Isles.

“My whole family in Mexico City had been in a panic because I hadn't posted on Facebook or tweeted for 12 hours,” she said.

Isles had been keeping in constant contact with her mother and grandmother on

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Skype throughout Monday until she lost power around 9 p.m. As soon as she found signal in Union Square the next day around 1 p.m., she was able to call a cousin near Columbus Circle. She also answered a text message from her mother, who had been in England, before reception died again.

“Once at my cousin's place, at 4 p.m., I saw my aunt's post on Facebook and called her,” Isles said. “My dad also contacted me on Facebook. I think social networks make checking on someone's safety so

much easier.”

“Posting is much more convenient than trying to get a call to go through when everyone is calling at the same time,” Isles added.

But students may have to get used to spotty service for longer than expected. Damage was reported to have decreased to 20 percent on Wednesday, but restoration may be [slow](#). FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski said [outages](#) could get worse before they improve, particularly in areas heavily damaged by flooding, including Lower Manhattan. Cell towers rely on local electricity, which was cut off during the storm. When the local electricity is gone, it resorts to backup batteries. Once the batteries are drained, more cell phones are forced out of service.

Providers [AT&T and T-Mobile](#) announced that they will provide service to users on either networks in Sandy-affected areas to expand the field of available operational networks. If you do attempt to use your phone, Federal Emergency Management Agency [advises](#) you to stick to brief text messages — they're more likely to be carried across a crowded network than a call.

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