



After the Fact | When the Electric Grid Goes Down, One Campus Stays Powered

Originally aired May 8, 2026

Total runtime: 00:08:38

TRANSCRIPT

David Good: This is the easiest roof to access. And that's also one of the more scenic ones.

Benny Martinez: Welcome to "After the Fact." I'm your host, Benny Martinez. You're hearing David Good, director of energy, utilities, and sustainability at Gallaudet University. He took us on a tour of the campus to see their microgrid. But what's a microgrid? Let's listen to learn a little bit more.

David Good: From where you're standing, you could probably see the Library of Congress. And obviously you can see the historic part of campus. Gallaudet University was founded in 1864. We're the only university in the world that really just focuses on educating deaf and hard of hearing students. What you're looking at here is one of our seven solar arrays on campus. We're able to generate about 1.7 megawatts of electricity.

Benny Martinez: The Solar Energy Industries Association estimates that 2 megawatts of solar energy can power more than 300 average U.S. homes. And that's the data point that's driving today's story. David also talked to us about the added benefits of the system beyond the long-term savings on energy costs.

David Good: When you lose the grid, when the grid goes down, since we have the solar and the CHP and a battery, we can pretty much, in most circumstances, be 100% operational on campus.

Benny Martinez: Pew's been spending a lot of time looking at how the electric grid needs to evolve to keep up with growing and future demand. And we're not the only ones paying attention. Over the past few years, state lawmakers across the country



have been taking a closer look at their own grid infrastructure, with some even passing new laws to strengthen it.

And here on the pod, we've been following this trend, highlighting bright spots where common sense policies meet technical innovation. And today, "After the Fact" producer Emily Chow is here to walk us through one of those stories.

Emily Chow: Interest is growing across the political spectrum on finding a solution to our increased energy demand. Pew is leading an effort to create a roadmap, if you will, of how people, localities, and states can be a part of an innovative solution.

Pat Wood III: The first part of my career was really facilitating the growth of the big grid, the big transmission backbone that covers the United States. But we haven't spent enough time and mental energy and just muscle on what I call the "little grid."

Emily Chow: Pat Wood is part of that effort known as the DERs advisory council. That name-stands for distributed energy resources.

Pat Wood III: Distributed energy resources are the small, quiet transformers of our future.

Emily Chow: Traditional large power plants generate energy and transmit it-over long distances. Instead, DERs generate and deliver energy close to where it's needed. When demand is high, DERs can help provide more energy to the entire grid or limit the amount of energy used.

Pat Wood III: Let's figure out how to unlock all that treasure and use it as a viable resource so that we have a resilient power system across our country.

Benny Martinez: You can find one of those grids at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. Gallaudet's story is a powerful example of sustainability in action. Their system not only keeps the lights on, but it also sparked a new career path for one bright mind who helped keep it running.

Graham Lodwick: Once I started the internship, I got to learn more about what the energy industry looked like, and I found it to be really, really interesting. I think I actually will shift to that field, and you never know where it could go.



Benny Martinez: Emily sat down with Gallaudet University student Graham Lodwick about his internship working on the microgrid. Graham said he helped the university keep the microgrid up and running even in the face of extreme weather, like heat waves.

Graham Lodwick: It was a very stressful week.

Benny Martinez: Our conversation took place through an American sign language interpreter whose voice you'll hear throughout the interview.

Graham Lodwick: For the summer I worked with Gallaudet University as the asset management intern, every week we would do data analysis. We would look at different reports, financial reports, where I was able to work remotely from a laptop. Just check all of those different reports and those levels to make sure everything was running smoothly. So, for example, there were five different properties. We were looking at the working load and I mean, we never know what would happen from day to day.

Emily Chow: That's a lot to take on as an intern.

Graham Lodwick: Yeah, it was.

Emily Chow: You mentioned you're considering maybe changing your major.

Graham Lodwick: My major is government with a concentration in law. I'm still majoring in government, but I'm interested in also going into the environmental field.

Emily Chow: What are some of the other highlights from the summer?

Graham Lodwick: I would have to say that there were three or four different times in June, I think it was the 23rd through the 26th, that was when we had a really bad heat wave in this area. All of us were watching the generators onsite to make they didn't hit max capacity because there was such a heavy load on them. We didn't want students to experience a power outage on campus.

So, it was a very stressful week trying to manage all of those generators. And I remember my supervisor at the time just saying, well, we're here, working hard to keep the lights on. So we literally worked hard to make sure Gallaudet kept running that week.



Emily Chow: Walk me through what it is that you're doing when you're monitoring the generators.

Graham Lodwick: What I would see is kind of the real-time live reporting of how much electricity is being generated and how much is being consumed in real time. I can see the different grids and the different charts and I can choose from them and be able to compare in real time.

Emily Chow: You mentioned making sure you could keep the lights on for students during the heat wave. What are some of the other benefits that the grid provides to the student community and the neighborhoods around Galludet?

Graham Lodwick: Well, it definitely kept the students happy and they didn't even actually know really what was happening. I don't think this program has, you know, it's still kind of new, and students aren't fully aware of its existence, and Gallaudet University's kind of more, broad transition to clean energy, which is a good thing just because it's saving the university a lot of money.

But also, we do export our electricity to the wider community, and it's called the Community Solar Program. And so, if you live in an apartment building, for example, you're not able to access green energy, just because you don't have a roof.

So, what you can do is you could sign up for this program.

Emily Chow: Yeah, so Gallaudet is really serving as like a hub for people that may want to get involved in some other type of energy.

You learned a lot during this internship program. If you had to tell your friends about what you were doing or your family, what would you want them to know?

Graham Lodwick: I would have to say that the green energy industry is very inventive and very innovative. So, for example, solar energy. Whenever you think of solar, oftentimes people think of solar panels. But there's also lots of different types of solar energy. There's certain types of technology where we can replace windows with solar windows or roofs. We can switch over to a solar tile or a solar roof.

If you're interested in solar energy or considering contracting with solar energy, I would encourage you to do so because it's a really beneficial energy source and you can save a lot of money. It has saved Gallaudet University a lot of money, for example.



If there is something that happens in the D.C. area, let's say we a really serious thunderstorm and it ends up affecting Pepco's system, we actually have the capacity to use "island mode." And in island mode, even though we're connected to Pepco, Gallaudet University can be a standalone energy source.

If we didn't have that and Pepco lost power, we would lose power and that would have a really, really big impact on the student population. Classes would not be able to be held.

And as well we have a large population of deaf-blind students on campus that would lose a lot of access to navigating the campus because of the loss of electricity. We wouldn't have Wi-Fi. Really the whole university would be put on shutdown. Island mode is really good because we could continue operating indefinitely and it wouldn't impact the students at all.

Benny Martinez: I don't know about you, but my version of "island mode" includes me on the beach with a piña colada. Thanks again for listening, by the way. And if you're interested in learning more about microgrids and our broader electric grid, be sure to listen back to our episode, "Keeping the Lights on in the Age of AI," from July 2025.

And, of course, make sure you're subscribed to "After the Fact" wherever you get your podcasts. I'm Benny Martinez. And this is "After the Fact," from The Pew Charitable Trusts. Until next time.