

NEW CHALK TALK

Blended Learning: An Alternate Format for Course Delivery (Part 1)

Gihan Osman, PhD

Assistant Professor of Instructional Technology and Design

Center for Learning and Teaching / Graduate School of Education

“Blended learning” is a term that is increasingly heard on campus these days for good reason. At the faculty retreat in 2012, online learning was identified as one of the University’s strategic goals for the near future. As a variation of online learning, blended learning has become one of several key initiatives endorsed by President Lisa Anderson to support AUC’s endeavors towards increased access, outreach, and educational excellence. But what is blended learning? Why should we as faculty consider it as alternate format for course delivery? What challenges should we as faculty put into consideration? And how do we go about the transformation? This two-part article will attempt some possible answers.

Blended learning defined

Blended learning, also referred to as hybrid and mixed-mode instruction, lacks a unified definition. In very general terms, blended learning is a combination of traditional face-to-face instruction and online instruction. The Sloan Consortium (Sloan-C), one of the leading professional organizations focusing on online education, defined blended learning as: “1) courses that integrate online with traditional face-to-face class activities in a planned, pedagogically valuable manner; and 2) where a portion (institutionally defined) of face-to-face time is replaced by online activity” (Picciano, 2005, p.4). In its yearly report on the status of online learning, Sloan C determined that blended learning courses are those where 30-70% of instruction takes place online (Allen & Seaman, 2013).

This definition differentiates between ‘web-enhanced’ courses in which online tools and activities are incorporated in a supplementary fashion and blended courses in which online components reduce and replace face time to become a highly integrated component of the learning experience. A visual example of integration within a blended course can be found on the University of Central Florida’s website at: http://blended.online.ucf.edu/files/2011/07/holland_venn_diagram.pdf

Why should we consider going blended?

Blended learning is often undertaken as an institutional strategy for three reasons: 1) enhanced flexibility and access for the teacher and student; 2) increased cost-effectiveness and other efficiencies; 3) improved learning outcomes (Bonk & Graham, 2005). As faculty we are probably most interested in the latter. As previously mentioned, going blended does not simply mean enriching a course with technological tools; it is an opportunity to consider course design more deliberately and to try new pedagogical strategies. The process of transforming courses to a hybrid format thus often leads to instructional opportunities that are more aligned to best practices for instruction.

There are, however, some that regard going blended as natural progression for instructional delivery formats sparked by advances in technology that compel integration of online components. Millennial students joining universities today have grown up with technology and regard it an essential medium to communicate and learn about their world through their formal and informal 'instructional' experiences online. Blended learning combines the best of both worlds; the online components that add flexibility and comfort, enhancing access to a wider variety of learners, while maintaining the dynamic social components of instruction that are better achieved through face-to-face meetings (Senn, 2008).

Some challenges of blended learning

Despite its promises and potential, blended courses also present numerous challenges. As a variation of an online course, sustaining students' motivation and commitment might require more attention and effort. It is also important to consider learners' access and comfort with the various technologies employed during the course (More & Kearsely, 2004). For faculty members, redesigning and teaching a blended course might require more time and effort. Additional technical and pedagogical support may be required.

Next week's New Chalk Talk issue will provide a brief introduction to the design and development process for blended learning

References

Allen, I.E., & Seaman, J. (2013). Changing course: Ten years of tracking online education in the United States. Retrieved from the Sloan Consortium website:

http://sloanconsortium.org/publications/survey/changing_course_2012

Bonk, C., & Graham, C. (2005) *Handbook of Blended Learning: Global Perspectives, Local Designs*. San Francisco: Pfeiffer Publishing.

Moore, M. & Kearsely, G. (2004). *Distance education: A systems view* (2nd ed.) Boston. MA: Wadsworth Publishing.

Picciano, A. G. (2005). Introduction to the special issue on transitioning to blended learning. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, 15(1), 3–8.

Senn, G.J. (2008). Comparison of face-to-face and hybrid delivery of a course that requires technology skills development. *Journal of Information Technology Education*, 7, 267-283.