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Hybrid Classes:

Incorporating Technology and Lectures to Improve Teacher Education

Abstract. *Hybrid courses are designed to integrate face-to-face and online activities as a way to complement these two methods in order to enrich the results. In this study, we are observing the best combination of face-to-face and online activities in terms of their strategies and content. We discuss ways of using technology to obtain the maximum results from both approaches.*

Key words: *hybrid classes, teacher education, face-to-face activities, online activities.*

Introduction

Many previous research studies have shown that there are comparable results in cognition factors of online education and traditional classes (Carr, 2000; Russell, 1999; Schoech, 2000; Sonner, 1999; Spooner, Jordan, Algozzine, & Spooner, 1999). However, opinions of instructors and students of online education have not shown the same consistency (Bower, 2001; Hara & Kling, 1999; Stocks & Freddolino, 1998). Hybrid courses have been designed to incorporate the best of online and traditional university courses. A Hybrid course has a combination of traditional face-to-face instruction coupled with online learning in the same course. Recent research results indicated that hybrid courses can provide students with additional benefits to course content which is not always possible in a face to face classroom environment. These benefits may help with an improvement in students' academic performance. "Transition from a traditional lecture format to a hybrid format significantly enhanced student learning; presumably, this increase is due to the fact that students were able to increase their exposure to course content via access to material..." (McFarlin, 2008)

Statistical results have shown the importance of self-regulation. Yukselturk and Bulut's (2007) research found it was evident that successful students generally used self-regulated strategies in the online courses. At the same time, according to Guglielmino and Guglielmino (1991), in any self-directed learning, "problems may arise, such as lack of resources or lack of time" (p.10). Lectures can support and compensate in such situations.

A body of research is emerging that indicates several personal attributes are related to academic success with an online environment. Those attributes include self-motivation, self-discipline, and time management. In short, to succeed in a hybrid course you must take responsibility to be a self-directed learner. Candy (1991) stressed the importance of personal characteristics (in the form of perseverance, dedication, and time management) and self-management as components into which self-directed may be broken. With this research in mind, in this paper we will attempt to describe our experiences with hybrid courses, covering both the positive and negative.



The Structure of a Hybrid Course

The authors' hybrid classes, in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction of Sam Houston State University's (SHSU) College of Education, are set up by the semester which lasts 16 weeks. When we offer a hybrid class, we typically have 9 modules (classroom equivalent lessons) which are completed online and 7 face-to-face meetings in a classroom setting. For the online portion of the course, students must click on each Module tab to see the expectations, their required reading, special instructions, and the assignments for the week. All scores are posted in an online grade book with comments and suggestions when necessary.

We have chosen to have at least 51% percent of the instructional activity offered online. Each of the face to face modules cover an equivalent amount of information as each of the online modules. The face to face meetings last 3 hours. All of our material is offered to the students online at the dedicated course site. We use videos of lectures, online chat sessions, wikis, announcements, virtual office, and discussion boards. All exams are given online. They are offered at a specific series of dates and are available to the students throughout the time period. Once the student logs on, they must complete the exam. They must answer the question, typically multiple choice or true/false, before they can proceed to the next question. Their scores are reported to them immediately upon conclusion of the exam.

Assignments contain a detailed description and rubric by which they will be assessed. We post examples of previous submissions of the assignment when one is needed for students to compare their work. These are good examples, not models. That is, they are not perfect and done only to stimulate the students thinking about how to complete the assignment. Students are encouraged to check daily the Virtual Office site for any postings by fellow students and the faculty. They are required to contact the SHSU help desk (rather than the instructor) for any technical problems.

What other resources are needed? Time! Hybrid classes are especially attractive to students who are busy with work and family and these classes offer flexibility (Aycock, Garnham, & Kaleta, 2002). But because the workload is the same for online and on-campus sections of this course, students must be able to carve out uninterrupted study time every week. Extensive reading and writing are requirements for success. And they take time.

Technology requirements. Students need their own computer – not one used at the office, at a computer lab, or at a friend's house. They need reliable, high speed Internet access. And they need technical proficiency in Microsoft Office Suite (especially Word).

How to get started. Before students begin the class, they should have read a syllabus which outlines the goals and requirements of the course. The syllabus should drive the class. In essence, it is a contract between the professor and the student where it is stated the professor will provide X information and the degree to which the students learns the information determines the grade they receive. We recommend having the students pass a test which is based solely on the content of the syllabus before they can access course materials.

The university needs a platform to deliver the hybrid class. At Sam Houston State University we use Blackboard. Once the students pass the exam on the content of the syllabus, they are expected to browse around the course site to become familiar with all the features of Blackboard. In addition to that activity, we recommend locating sources of help for any issues in technology they may encounter. This help should be located in a dedicated center to provide technical assistance to both students and faculty. It should be open 7 days a week and late into the evening hours.



Findings

The hybrid class offers the self-directed learner another choice of instructional design. Different subjects appear to lend themselves to be more readily adaptable to the hybrid model than do others, although Aycock, Garnham, and Kaleta (2002) advocate there is no standard way to approach a hybrid course. Nevertheless, Grow (1991) points out potential problems when students who are not self-directed are matched with a teacher (or course) in which self-guidance is necessary on the part of the student. We have observed students have problems with technology, time management, and misunderstanding of the course content when they enroll in a hybrid class for which they lack the requirements that have been noted above.

Technology inadequacies are the biggest surprise the authors have encountered. While almost all students are adept at text messaging, a surprising number (20 to 25%) encounter difficulty with mundane tasks such as attaching files to emails, navigating through course drop boxes, and taking the time to find, review, and determine how to follow online directions for class work.

Difficulty following directions appears to be endemic. One of the problems when students do not meet regularly in a classroom is the island they find themselves on when it comes to the need to interact with one another and the professor. The authors have found that the lack of in-class exchanging of ideas is a serious detriment in both online and hybrid classes. Research suggests that "blended courses produce a stronger sense of community among students than either traditional or fully online courses" (Rovai & Jordan, 2004). Questions, while answered in the virtual office, are often not expanded upon by the requisite discussion that is needed. That needed discussion can be found in face-to-face classes.

Another difficulty with hybrid or online classes is class size. It requires more work on the part of the instructor to teach online than face-to-face. Where we often have 20 plus students in our graduate classes, our hybrid class enrollment is capped at 15. This requires more instructors when the programs are well attended.

Hybrid classes have positives as well. They can allow for asynchronous learning and are often sought after by non-traditional students who are returning to the university for professional development or an advanced degree. Langley (2004) argues that on-line learning permits students the autonomy of when to learn and study. We have noted hybrid class students most often access the course sites in the evening and complete their assignments on the weekends. They are employed either as teachers or in another professional position. In addition, universities can charge additional fees for hybrid classes to cover the technology costs. In our experience, another benefit is the potential to expand the geographic pool of students, thus allowing for enrollment increases.

Conclusions

Hybrid classes allow universities to offer the best of both traditional face-to-face and online classes. In addition, they allow for an expansion of a university's potential pool of students. While increasing the utilization of the classroom facilities during times when traditional classes do not meet, it also allows students opportunities to meld learning and studying during times not typically offered by traditional classes. The challenges seem to stem from lack of self-direction on the part of the student, resulting in missing or incomplete assignments, delays in turning in assignments, or not completing assignments to the specifications ascribed by the instructor. As noted by Brockett & Hiemstra (1991), learning difficulties and frustrations arise "when the balance between internal characteristics of the learner is not in harmony with external characteristics of the teaching-learning transaction" (p. 30). Optimal conditions for learning exist when there is a balance, or congruence be-



tween online and face-to-face instruction. In our experience, the positive certainly outweighs the negative as hybrid courses have the potential to be an effective mode of instruction.

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Применение современных технологий для проведения лекций как один из способов улучшения качества образования

Аннотация. В данной статье авторы обсуждают объединение онлайн-технологий и традиционных форм проведения учебных занятий. Авторы подтверждают выводы других исследователей и в то же время подробно описывают недочеты при разработке учебных программ, курсов, преподаваемых с использованием данной модели.

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