The Hybrid Online Model: The Not So Distant Education

The growth of online courses in American colleges and universities is clear and compelling. Online courses offer distinct advantages and, often, challenges to both instructors and students. Increasingly, faculty are asked to develop online courses, of which variation, such as “hybrid” or “blended” courses are a subset. Hybrid online courses retain face to face class experiences while offering online experiences as well. Faculty with experience teaching hybrid courses have suggested that they can be superior to traditional courses (Young, 2002). While various forms of hybrid courses have been developed, this presentation focuses on the blend of face to face course meetings with online instruction.

Limited conceptual and practical information for college and university faculty exists about the particular elements important for providing a high quality instructional experience for both instructors and students. For example, Martyn (2003) offers suggestions for implementing “Seven principles of good practice in undergraduate education” in the context of hybrid instruction. The seven principles, while useful, nevertheless are drawn from much earlier work that predates the conceptual and practical needs of today’s educational environments. Given that faculty are seeking to develop online courses and, in greater likelihood hybrid courses, a need exists to expand conceptually on typical instruction principles and to explore practices that can assist instructors and students in employing hybrid courses.

Three faculty members at the University of South Florida Saint Petersburg have been developing and teaching hybrid courses in order to meet the needs of a diverse student body in an urban setting. The students, typical of an urban milieu, have numerous demands on their time (e.g., work and family), a wide range of technological skill, and typically seek the personal interaction that accompanies face to face instruction. Hybrid courses appear to offer the kind of online experiences that will meet the needs of such a population. The faculty has sought to employ innovative course features that build on traditional notions of good practice, such as prompt feedback to students and contact between faculty and students.

This Roundtable Session will be appropriate for those offering online courses and for those seeking to develop hybrid or blended courses in higher education. It has been noted that many concerns regarding implementation are common across programs (Kyrish, 2004). What follows are sample areas for discussion.

1) The need to develop a common language among hybrid course developers to permit expedited exchanges of course development experiences, instructional design, and collaborative efforts.

2) Reexamining the role of process assessment in order to move from end of course evaluations to continuous progress monitoring that enable course instructional and curricular adjustments in real time.

3) Development of technology embedded instructor time management strategies in order to remain responsive to students, yet work in the context of greater time demands common to the delivery of online instruction.

4) The importance of utilizing course management systems, such as Blackboard or Web CT, and web sites created specifically for student use in obtaining information about the class, assignments, and available resources.

5) Other issues that will be explored: providing direct instructor technological support for students, consideration of available Benchmarks for success in Internet-based distance education, and employing management system data to aid in identifying technologically at-risk students.

The session will conclude with a vignette about a hypothetical situation that might arise in a hybrid course. The vignette is drawn from multitude of experiences encountered by the presenters during development and implementation of the hybrid design. The discussion will be open-ended allowing opportunities for the participants to join in discussion about possible approaches to be taken, pitfalls to avoid, and effective course management techniques.
References


