Hybrid Courses

Overview and Definition

Many people, both inside and outside of academic circles, are unfamiliar with the concept of hybrid courses. One accepted definition of a hybrid course mandates that a significant amount of the instructional material is assisted by the use of technology, thereby reducing “seat time” in the course. A broader definition might simply point to the blending of in-person and technology-assisted instructional techniques to offer learners greater flexibility. While definitions and terms vary greatly among institutions, there is little debate that the concept is starting to get its fair share of attention.

Negative feelings towards technology-assisted learning in the form of online classes, or partially online classes, tend to be generated by poorly designed courses. It takes a great deal of thought and careful planning to deliver a quality learning experience regardless of the mode of delivery. The challenge is to understand the relationships among users, technology, instructor and participants. Online learners may expect interactivity that closely resembles traditional classroom based education. Unfortunately many of the instructional techniques employed in traditional in-person courses do not translate well to an online experience without modifications. It can be difficult to know how to transition an in-person course to a successful online experience.

The goal of a hybrid class is to blend the best features of in-person instruction with technology-enriched online experiences to create an educational atmosphere that promotes active participatory learning. By supplementing traditional in-person methods with web-based activities and resources, the course is made more accessible and interactive and cultivates increased student interest and self-exploration.

Those who advocate online learning tend to be pioneers who are eager for an educational experience that is available regardless of time or location. Many institutions are looking for ways to capitalize on resources and are interested in finding ways to deliver quality education that is meaningful to students. Ever since the beginning of the widespread use of microcomputers, educators have been interested in using technology for teaching. In more recent years, the blended or hybrid model has begun to gain popularity, resulting in commercial development and academic adoption of Learning Management Systems (LMS) as a means for instructors to organize and deliver their content to the forefront. While these systems do not magically make an online course good, with careful planning and preparation, they provide a framework for instructors to organize content. Many of them integrate evaluation and communication tools that facilitate an ease of exchange among the students.

Schrum, L. and Hong, S. Dimensions and Strategies for Online Success: Voices from Experienced Educators. JALN, July 2002; Vol. 6, Iss. 1; pg. 57, 11 pgs. http://www.aln.org/publications/jaln/v6n1/v6n1_schrum.asp

Hybrid Course Design

Ideally, the design of a hybrid course should allow students to customize the experience to meet their goals and complement their personal learning style. 1) students who already know the power of a classroom experience will not easily abandon that model for something new; 2) because humans have “certain, predictable preferences and capabilities in learning”, some principles of learning span different academic methods. They offer seven simple, yet valuable ideas that should be incorporated into the design of hybrid courses:

- Learning is a social activity. Group activities and communities aid in the effectiveness of the learning experience because of the basic nature of human beings as social creatures.
• Integrate learning into life. Making connections to a student’s work or life outside the classroom is critical because it provides a context in which the acquired knowledge can be used.
• Enable learning by doing. Practice is the best way for a student to truly gain mastery of a subject or concept.
• Encourage learning by discovery. Research indicates that people retain information longer when they are given the opportunity to realize ideas and solutions from their own understanding.
• Remember that individuals have different mental receptors for material. Coherence of new material somewhat depends on what a student may already know. This can both help and hinder learning, and an instructor needs to be cognizant of this fact when delivering material.
• Make it fun. Students who are engaged and involved are obviously more open to the learning experience. Fun is not just for children because a playful non-threatening environment also helps adult students benefit from the experience.
• Build in assessment, but don’t delude yourself into thinking you can measure learning. Quantitative assessment becomes more difficult with increased content complexity. Also, some learning may take time to digest and is not accurately measurable within the temporal course. [2]


The Hybrid Model

In a competitive environment where budget and quality conscious educational experiences are crucial, institutions are looking for cost-effective and innovative solutions to delivering engaging courses.

Why the Hybrid Model?

Hybrid courses can be beneficial to students, instructors and administrators alike. When certain conditions are met, the student benefits greatly from the hybrid course. Three major challenges can be identified for the designer to consider: quality delivery of the course content, creating a sense of online community, and encouraging students to become independent learners. Others also support the importance of communication in a course. “Successful online instructors realize that building a sense of “community” in the classroom is necessary for successful online outcomes.” and also that “…community doesn’t just happen but is created through a variety of verbal and nonverbal communication cues.” The online component can be designed to build a sense of community and increase communication through chat sessions and message boards. (Encouraging and optimizing participation must accompany these communication opportunities.) Online collaboration opportunities offered in a hybrid course simulate real-world classroom communication environments but give more introverted students an opportunity to participate freely in online discussions. The case for using message boards and other types of online communication can bring content life.

Since online content is accessible at any time, from anywhere, this added convenience accommodates the schedules of busy students and instructors alike and could also positively impact transportation and parking issues. Students acquire useful technology and computer skills that are reinforced through use of the online media. These skills are readily transferable to other areas of study and professional development. Self-initiated learning experiences help promote improved responsibility and time management skills necessary to survive in today’s professional environment. Special media features are designed to make learning engaging and fun.

The hybrid model can also provide an excellent return on investment for the instructor. A successful hybrid instructor’s teaching can benefit from a class’s increased interaction, learning opportunities and retention.
Who is Using the Hybrid Model?

Many institutions are already using the hybrid model. Hybrid courses are becoming popular in many nations around the world, especially in regions where accessibility to a traditional classroom is limited.

The power of the hybrid course model is its flexibility and pedagogical effectiveness. Because it can emphasize active learning techniques, it increases student interaction with other students and the instructor. This theory is also supported by the Concord Consortium in the article Online Courses that Work and Some that Don't, which states that, "Online activities can be designed to foster authentic, embedded collaboration among participants, whether they are students, teachers, or employees. The resulting learning is powerful and memorable."

When using the hybrid model an important consideration in designing any learning experience should be that the designer needs to account for the different types of intelligence that potential students may have. "The best way to ensure that you're engaging as many learners as possible is to use as many different ways to appeal to those multiple intelligences as the technology will allow." This can be accomplished in a hybrid course with careful considerations of how to use the available technology. For example, students who have a strong visual/spatial intelligence may benefit from a demonstration of key points with graphics or visual effects, or viewing a video that pertains to the course. Those who lean towards kinesthetic intelligence might enjoy game-like activities that require hand-eye coordination or quick reflexes, or projects that allow them to create something and share it with class. With some creative thought, exercises that focus on the various types of intelligence can enhance the student experience.

Success of hybrid courses rely on many factors such as, “faculty development for design of blended programs, technology and instructional support in the design phase and faculty and student preparation (development) for success in teaching in and learning in blended programs, and technology support in initial roll-outs of blended programs.” Another resource identified the key to success by stating that “instructors must reexamine their course goals and objectives, design online learning activities to meet those goals and objectives, and effectively integrate the online activities with the face-to-face meetings.”

- Schrum, L. and Hong, S. Dimensions and Strategies for Online Success: Voices from Experienced Educators. JAEN, July 2002; Vol. 6, Iss. 1; pg. 57, 11 pgs. http://www.aln.org/publications/jalen/v6n1/v6n1_schrum.asp
- Sloan-C Blended Learning Workshop, www.blended.uic.edu
Preparing Students for the Hybrid Experience

You put a great deal of effort into organizing and planning your hybrid course, so another important step is to create an orientation so that students have the opportunity to get the most out of your efforts.

An orientation should include both practical and technical components. The practical orientation will outline how you plan to conduct the course, including ground rules, your expectations and how students will be assessed. This orientation can go a step farther than the typical syllabus, and explain in further detail how you designed the course for student use. The technical orientation should walk students through the technology used in the course and include such topics as navigating the LMS, required plug-ins that students may need to have in order to use multimedia components and other tips that will make the student's interaction with technology smoother.

Course Previews

Course previews provide the student with information prior to the start date and allows them to review and prepare. Students can then buy required text and set up any technical requirements needed for the course.

Gauntlets

Gauntlets provide a useful method to ensure students have the tools and skills to begin taking the online portion of your course. Most instructors would prefer to not spend the first week dealing with technical and access issues.

You can set conditions which require the student to pass the gauntlet with some specific score in order to even enter the course.

Don't forget to include contact information on where and when students can get help. The LC&T hotline is an excellent reference for students and instructors because they have the widest variety of experience with problems that students encounter. They also route problems that can't be solved immediately directly to the appropriate resources.

Common Hybrid Questions

Why hybrid?

• What is a hybrid course/how can my hybrid course fit within the university definition? MSU views hybrid courses as those which reduce classroom "seat time" and use instructional material associated with the use of online technology. The classroom time is then re-designed to blend the best features of in-person instruction and technology- enriched online experiences to enhance and promote active, participatory learning.

Hybrid design

• How do you decide what goes online and what is done in person? There is no definite answer to this question. Some things you will need to determine are how to present what, when, the order of things, how they relate to each other and choosing a linear vs. nonlinear structure.
• What resources does an instructor need to develop a hybrid course? Depending on the course design, the technology and other resources needed will vary greatly.
• **What resources are available to help with pedagogy? with technology?** vuDAT offers assistance to instructors with online and hybrid credit courses. There are also many resources available on the web for reading more about hybrid and online course topics.

• **How long does it take to develop a hybrid course? How do you begin?** The development time also varies greatly depending on the complexity of the course, your technology comfort level and whether the course is brand new or is being adapted from a traditionally-delivered course. Many instructors start developing their courses in the semester before the course is scheduled to go live.

• **How do you enhance online lessons to make them more interesting and attractive (visually & substantively)?** There are many options for making both in-person and online sessions more interactive.

**References**


Schrum, L. and Hong, S. *Dimensions and Strategies for Online Success: Voices from Experienced Educators*. JALN, July 2002; Vol. 6, Iss. 1; pg. 57, 11 pgs. [http://www.aln.org/publications/jaln/v6n1/v6n1_schrum.asp](http://www.aln.org/publications/jaln/v6n1/v6n1_schrum.asp)

Sloan, -C. *Blended Learning Workshop*. [http://www.blended.uic.edu/](http://www.blended.uic.edu/)

University of Wisconsin Learning Technology Center’s Hybrid Course Project Website. [http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/LTC/hybrid.html](http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/LTC/hybrid.html)


Other Resources

Weblinks to great examples of course enhancements on the web

Origins of humanity: http://www.becominghuman.org/

Virtual tour of Israel: http://web.birthrightisrael.com/VTour/index.htm

Hebrew alphabet: http://web.birthrightisrael.com/aleph/aleph.html

Shakespeare, subject to change: http://www.ciconline.org/bdp1/


Discovering Mudcloth: http://www.mnh.si.edu/africanvoices/mudcloth/index_flash.html


"You stole my letters!" Group collaborative environment: http://web.okaygo.co.uk/apps/letters/flashcom/index.htm

Learning object repositories: http://elearning.utsa.edu/guides/LO-repositories.htm

Lewis & Clark: http://www.lewisandclarkexhibit.org/

Boston's Big Dig: http://cache.boston.com/beyond_bigdig/main.swf

Monticello Explorer: http://explorer.monticello.org/


Interactive Exploration of Pedagogical Concepts and Theories: http://web.scps.nyu.edu/colp/pedagogy_overview.html

The Dynamic Earth: http://www.mnh.si.edu/earth/main_frames.html

Timeline Creator: http://timeline.cer.jhu.edu/art/art.html


Visual Thesaurus (not free, can buy the disk, or subscribe on the web): http://www.visualthesaurus.com