

Converting a Face-to-Face Course to a Hybrid Course

A research paper by

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Introduction

Hybrid courses blend the best of face-to-face classes with online learning. With it, instructors can achieve their course objectives more successfully than they can in either a fully face-to-face or fully online course. Young (2002). However, in order for a hybrid course to be successful, a complete course redesign is necessary. Garnam & Kaleta (2002). This paper will explore strategies on how to best go about redesigning a course to realize the benefits of hybrid courses.

What is a Hybrid Course?

The literature includes several definitions of hybrid courses. Garnham & Kaleta (2003) define hybrid courses as “courses in which a significant portion of the learning activities have been moved online and time traditionally spent in the classroom is reduced but not eliminated.” This definition eliminates courses that simply use online content to compliment face-to-face courses, since online learning actually replaces some of the time in the classroom. Sudzina, Garnam & Kaleta (2003). In addition, hybrid courses “attempt to combine the best elements of the traditional face to face instruction with the best aspects of distance education.” Id. Some elements that go online include “information transfer, exchange of ideas, testing, essay writing, etc.” Sands (2002).

Advantages for institutions. Hybrid courses offer several advantages to institutions, faculty and students. Institutions see the advantage of reduced seat time. If a Tuesday/Thursday class meets only one day a week instead of two, then two classes

are able to share a classroom. One administrator notes, "this may be the only way colleges and universities can keep up with the continuing population growth and demands for lifelong learning." Young (2002). Another institutional benefit is parking. Many colleges note that parking is a huge student complaint and the savings in commute time and time spent hunting for parking is time that can be used for study. Aycock, Garnam, & Kaleta (2002). Finally, student retention is higher in hybrid courses than in traditional or completely online courses. Garnam & Kaleta (2002). Indeed, one institution experienced a 100% retention rate in the three courses that made up the study. Martyn (2003).

Another advantage for the institution is that faculty members seem to be more open to the idea of hybrid courses. Even faculty who are very skeptical about online teaching believe that there may be some merit in hybrid courses. Young (2002). This could be useful on campuses where there is a great deal of resistance to changing the traditional face-to-face model.

Advantages for Faculty. Faculty members also benefit from hybrid learning. The primary benefit is improved student learning. Hybrid instructors report that students in their hybrid courses learned more, "wrote better papers, performed better on exams, produced higher quality projects and were capable of more meaningful discussions on course material." Garnam & Kaleta (2002). Studies have shown that hybrid students get better grades than students in traditional face-to-face courses or completely online

courses. Id. Instructors admit that it does take longer to prepare a hybrid course, but note that it allows them to gain class time to delve into things they did not have time to do in class before. Id. Because face-to-face contact is preserved, the hybrid course model is less controversial among faculty than fully online courses. Young (2002).

Advantages for Students. Students are also a great beneficiary of hybrid courses. In addition to improved learning and grades, students gain valuable technology and life skills. Many come into hybrid courses unable to manage their time well. Students gain time management, technology and communication skills that will serve them well outside of the classroom as well as inside. Garnam & Kaleta (2002), Spilka (2002). Some students do not learn well from the lecture model and hybrid courses offer an alternative way to learn. Young (2002). It allows quieter students to find a voice and the range of communication formats appeal to a variety of learning styles. Id.

Hybrid courses also lead to greater engagement and interaction by students, a bonus for the student and the faculty member. Sudzina, et al. (2003). It is this increased interaction and engagement that leads to better student learning.

How it works. There is no one model for successful hybrid courses. Aycock, et al. (2002), Sudzina, et al. (2003), Williams & Murphy (2002). Courses vary from 10% online to 90% online. Some examples include:

- Meeting face-to-face with the first and last class and online for the rest. Martyn (2003).
- Meeting face to face one day a week and online for the rest Aycock, et al. (2002b).
- Shorten class time Id.
- Once a week for two weeks then totally online for a week. Id.
- Meeting face to face for a few weeks while students learn the concepts and then online for the rest of the course while student work on a major project. Spilka (2002).

The challenge for faculty in selecting an appropriate model is to “find the optimal mix of online and face to face instruction that will leverage the major advantage of asynchronous learning (any time, any place), while still maintaining the quality of faculty-student interactions”. Martyn (2003).

Questions for Redesign

Hybrid courses require that a face-to-face class be completely redesigned. Garnam & Kaleta (2002), Sudzina, et al. (2002). One institution recommends that faculty members “start early and plan very carefully; hybridization is a lot of work”. Aycock et al. (2002a). Others suggest starting start small and easing into hybrid teaching. Sands (2002). It is fine to experiment and learn along the way. Sudzina, et al. (2003). The best way to get started is to break down the course by its goals and objectives. Once

the course is broken down, one can design online learning activities to meet the objectives.

The following questions are a basic starting point for faculty considering converting a traditional face to face course to a hybrid course. These questions and related comments are based in my own experience as a faculty technology trainer, as an online and face-to-face instructor.

1. What are your course objectives? The first step in redesigning a course is to determine what the course objectives or goals are. In this way, one can insure that the course redesign is focused on pedagogy and not on technology. Aycock, et al. (2002a), Sudzina, et al. (2003), Williams & Murphy (2002). The key question here is "what do I want the students to know when they finish the class?" Sands(2002). One example of an objective for my American Government class is that I want the students to have a complete understanding of the balance of powers between the three branches of government.

2. What are you doing in the classroom to meet each of your objectives?

For each objective, there are probably several things that an instructor might do to help the student understand the topic. Typical things that I would do to assist students in understanding the balance of powers includes:

- Assigned reading in the text

- Answering reflection questions at the end of the text
- Assigning an Internet project – if one were to visit the website of one of the branches, where would they go? Why? What did they find there?
- Small/ large group activity - small group: list all of the powers of your branch of government and how your powers trumps the other branches.
Large Group: have a series of scenarios and have the groups compete to see which branch of government is most powerful.
- Video on the three branches of government with a reflection paper on the video
- Written exam or quiz.

These are just some of the activities I could do in the classroom to convey this point. As you are putting together your list of activities, take this opportunity to toss out what isn't really working and add in those things you've been meaning to try but have not had the time to explore. This list will form the foundation of you course redesign. Don't worry at this point about what will go online and what won't. Teaching portions of the course online opens up the classroom for new and interesting things, so list everything that you find useful. Young (2002).

3. Which of those activities can best take place online? There is no one answer about which course activities are best online and which ones are best in the classroom. It depends a great deal on the course, the students and the instructor. However, there are some ways of thinking about the class to come up with what might work in a particular situation. One suggestion is to ask yourself,"

What isn't working in (my) course that could be done differently or better online?" Aycock, et al. (2002a). Another idea is to think of interactivity rather than delivery. Sands (2002). Ask how the student will interact with you and each other in learning the course material.

This might be a good time to do some research as well. Meet with your colleagues who have taught hybrid courses to see what they are doing. Talk to your instructional designers and faculty training staff. In addition to offering useful ideas, they will be able to offer advice on how to accomplish the activities you are thinking about. They can also give you feedback about the technical limitations of your average student. Most students prefer working from home on the online portion of their hybrid courses. Aycock, et al.(2002a). Because of that, faculty members need to keep in mind the technical limitations that the student might experience. Examples include slow dial-up modems, e-mail accounts that filter out attachments and limited tolerance for computer glitches.

When thinking about moving portions of a course online, it is important to have some pedagogical reason for doing so. Adopting technology for technology's sake leads to disconnectedness between the online and the face-to-face components of the course. Because of that, you might want to have a focus for the online portion of your hybrid class. Your focus reflects the main goal that you hope to achieve in the online activities. Examples of a focus might be to encourage more student-to-student collaboration or to use discussion to enhance

critical thinking skills. Williams & Murphy (2002). With the focus, you can have a kind of filter to determine whether the activity really benefits from being online within the context of your particular course.

Below is a list of sample activities that work online or in the classroom. You will note that several things are in both lists. This is because there is no one right or perfect way to do things. Discussions are one example. You could start off with a post and response discussion online in small groups. After that conversation has a chance to develop, you could bring the small groups together in a face to face setting to build a single position and then have them discuss/defend the position with the larger group. In this way, discussion can work well both online and in the classroom. Which activities you use in which setting completely depend on you, your class and your students.

The way you divide between what will work best online and what should be in the classroom should drive your decision on which of the many hybrid models you choose. The time in the classroom versus the time online need to match the pedagogy of the course, not some random selection of times.

| Activities that work well online | Activities that work well in the classroom. |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussions. Williams & Murphy (2002). • Case studies. Garnham & Kaleta (2002). • Tutorials. Garnham & Kaleta (2002). • Self-testing exercises. Garnham & Kaleta (2002). • Essay writing. Sands (2002). • Simulations. Garnham & Kaleta (2002). • Online group collaboration. Garnham & Kaleta (2002). • Independent project work and peer collaboration. Spilka (2002). • Information transfer (lecture). Sands (2002). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecture • Discussion • Presentations • Lab activities • Group collaboration • testing |

4. How will the online activities integrate with the face-to-face activities?

Integration is essential. The online components of the class must be connected to the face-to-face components of the class and not simply added on. Aycock, et al.

(2002a), Williams & Murphy (2002). Without integration, you end up either having two mini-classes (one online and one on campus) or a face-to-face class with lots of extra work online. Id. Either way, students will find the online components to simply be busy work if they are not well integrated with the face-to face class. One idea for integrating is the "entrance ticket". Garnam & Kaleta (2002). With this method of integration, students have to become familiar with the course content prior to coming to a face-to face discussion. Many instructors have found that the basic delivery of information is a good activity to have online. Young (2002). That information then forms the foundation for a face-to-face discussion. Another idea is to collect one or two student discussion postings and use them as a bouncing off point for in class discussion. Sands (2002).

General Strategies for Success

Although there is no single way to teach a hybrid course, there are several tips which can improve the success of a hybrid course.

- **Take advantage of training:** Nearly every report on hybrid courses emphasizes the importance of teaching faculty how to teach effectively online. Sudzina, et al. (2003), Williams & Murphy (2002). Training can help faculty with several required skills, including:
 - How to assess student's online work. Sudzina, et al. (2003). If one is used to studying the faces of the class to see if they "get it", online assessment will require different methodology. Martyn (2003). In some

ways, the ill prepared student will be much easier to see because it is so much harder to hide online.

- How to integrate face-to-face with online teaching. Sudzina, et al. (2003).
- How to use the technology. The ability to use technology comfortably and strategically generally takes some training. Interestingly, technology is not necessarily a limiting problem for those who have tried teaching hybrid courses. Aycock, et al. (2002a).
- Collaboration. Training workshops also give faculty the opportunity to learn who else on campus is teaching hybrid courses and what is working for them. The exchange of ideas makes all of the faculty stronger teachers. It can also inspire them with collaboration projects for their students.
- **Use existing resources.** Sudzina, et al. (2003). Creating online content is time consuming. An instructor can avoid reinventing the wheel by making wise use of existing resources. Many textbooks come with test banks and discussion questions. Others come with “plug-ins” for Blackboard and Web CT, if a campus is using those course development platforms. These plug-ins have text specific content for use in online classes. There are also repositories of learning objects from organizations like MERLOT (www.merlot.org) which one can use to find useful content. Sudzina, et al. (2003). Additionally, instructors frequently have materials they have developed themselves that, with a little tweaking, are perfect for the online portion of a hybrid course.

- **Manage student expectations.** Sudzina, et al. (2003). Make sure that students understand what is expected of them. Students often think that meeting less means doing less work. Aycok, et al. (2002b). Thus, it may be necessary for the faculty member to help student learn to manage their time and expectations. Garnham & Kaleta (2002). Additionally, some students, contrary to popular belief, are frightened by technology. A part of managing expectations is assisting students in becoming comfortable with the necessary technology. Garnham & Kaleta (2002), Sands (2002). Finally, learning online is as new for the students as teaching online is for the faculty. Even if they are really comfortable playing games and surfing the net, that does not mean they are skilled at learning online. When faculty provide clear explanations of expectations, students do well online.
- **Don't do it all yourself.** The online environment is ideal for bringing in outside specialists who may not have had time to attend a face-to-face class, or were hampered by distance. Martyn (2003). One campus has even hired several "global virtual faculty" members who live in other countries. Young (2002). Also, teaching assistants and students from previous quarters can provide excellent help in guiding the online learning experience. Williams & Murphy (2002).
- **Repetition is good.** Online presentation makes it possible to expand the ways that one delivers content to students. In this way, the same information can be presented in multiple ways, making it easier for students to find a way to learn

that works with their own learning style. Young (2002). This “buffet style” of learning makes learning “appetizing” to a broader range of students. Id.

- **Keep it flexible.** One reason that students rate hybrid courses so highly is that the flexibility “fits their attention spans and their lifestyles.” Young (2002). This includes plenty of time to respond to postings on discussions and time to arrange library research visits around full time work and child care schedules. However, it can’t be too flexible. Courses without due dates or sanctions for missing the due dates resulted in significant numbers of students simply turning everything in at the end of the term. Williams & Murphy (2002).
- **Focus on Assessment:** Assignments for students should be regularly scheduled, with specific due dates and sanctions for not meeting the due dates. Williams & Murphy (2002). As noted earlier, it is important to make expectations clear and to give students guidelines on how to meet the expectations. The more specificity in assignment expectations, the more likely it is that students will meet those expectations. Additionally, the expectations for performance need to be tied to assessment. As one group discovered, “(a)ctive participation requires incentives”. Id. Students tend to do what is needed for the grade and not much more. By showing how various expectations are tied to grade results, students will be more likely to better.

Conclusion

As more and more institutions experience hybrid courses, faculty and students are realizing the benefits of increased flexibility and the ability to have the best of both worlds. Teaching a successful hybrid course requires that faculty go through a careful planning process to redesign a course to fully take advantage of both media. The skills and insights learned through teaching a hybrid course tend to impact the way faculty members teach their other courses, expanding even further the amazing benefits of hybrid courses. Aycok, et al. (2002b). The implications for higher education are extensive – better learning, more critical thinking, increased computer skills, more mobility and flexibility, new visions of teaching and collaborating. Given the potential of hybrid learning, it is no wonder that some predict that 80% - 90% of classes could become hybrid classes in the future. Young (2002).

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