

Hybrid Learning Defined

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The blended, adjunct, or hybrid teaching model is a mixture of classroom and online instruction that has an abundance of academics proclaiming its benefits. Hybrid courses blend face-to-face interaction with online learning and customarily involve the delivery of curricular materials, access to resources, submission of assignments, project based learning, activities that support higher order thinking, and online discussions that may be asynchronous or synchronous in nature. In order for a class to be considered hybrid some actual student learning and learning assessment must occur online and a percentage of in-class time is forfeited to make up for the weight put on the online learning activities.

Proponents of hybrid learning proclaim it to be an effective and efficient way of expanding course content that supports in-depth delivery and analysis of knowledge (Young, 2002) and increases students satisfaction (Campos & Harasim, 1999; Dziuban & Moskal, 2001; Rivera, McAlister, & Rice, 2002; Wu & Hiltz, 2004). In the years to come, hybrid learning is poised to cause a paradigm shift in higher education (Allen & Seaman, 2003; Lorenzetti, 2005; Young, 2002).

Graham B. Spanier, president of Pennsylvania State University, was quoted in Young (2002) as saying that hybrid learning presents “the single-greatest unrecognized trend in higher education today.” This benefits of online and hybrid learning have been recognized by the State of Maryland. In a move to stimulate the use of alternative delivery methods, the regents of the University System of Maryland instituted a policy in 2005 that all students take on average 12 of their credits through out-of-classroom experiences and other nontraditional means. Included in the regents’ definition of out-of-classroom experiences are e-learning, internships, student teaching, and a host of other activities. Diana G. Oblinger, vice president of Educause, was cited in Lorenzetti (2005) as saying that the Maryland system is recognizing that some online learning is an enhancement to students’ higher-education learning experiences even when those students are full-time on-campus residents. She asserted that the Maryland initiative indicates, and will result in, tangible growth in the hybrid learning model.

The higher-education classroom has undergone radical reformations in the last decade as a result of technological development, causing academicians across the globe to recognize the importance of technology in higher learning. Technology has illustrated that the classroom does not need to be the nucleus of learning, as networked multimedia are able to extend the teaching and learning experience (McClintock, 1999).

Course websites have proved to be an effective means of delivering learning materials, with students responding positively to the quality resources they make available. Wernet, Olliges, and Delicath (2000), who surveyed students who used WebCT in a social work course, found that all of the respondents considered the online course materials beneficial to their overall learning experiences.

The movement from the traditional classroom to web-enabled learning has been explained as a move from a behaviorist methodology to a constructivist one (Lewis, MacEntee, DeLaCruz, Englander, Jeffrey, Takach, Wilson, & Woodall, 2005). Koohang and Harman (2005) assert that e-learning by its very nature is rooted in constructivist ideology, where knowledge acquisition is a self-directed activity that is facilitated by an instructor. They draw correlations between elements inherent in both constructivism and e-learning including: collaboration, social discourse, problem solving, exploration, anchored instruction, critical thinking, the revisiting of information in multiple perspectives and representations, intellectual discourse, knowledge construction, and scaffolding.

Much of the instructional-technology-based research that has been conducted in the past decade focused on the examination of fully online learning experiences. Significantly less attention has been paid to the blended, or hybrid, learning format. Although the hybrid format has received significantly less attention than its fully online cousin, Allen and Seaman (2003) found that the rate of growth of hybrid courses is exceeding that of fully online courses. They also forecasted that hybrid learning will make a sizable impact on the future of higher education.

Hybrid learning environments have been shown to address the frustrations and limitations resulting from the separation of tutor and tutee commonly found with fully online education (Hodges, 2004). John R. Bourne, a professor of electrical and computer engineering at Franklin W. Olin College of Engineering and editor of the *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, was quoted in Young (2002) as having said, "Within five years, you'll see a significant number of classes that are available in a hybrid fashion.... I would guess that somewhere in the 80- to 90-percent range of classes could sometime become hybrid."

The benefits of hybrid learning are increasingly being realized as an escalating number of courses demonstrate the blended format to be a viable, even exemplary, mode of instruction. Enrollment in hybrid courses remains high, and the reported rates of student satisfaction indicate that learners by and large view such courses favorably. Campos and Harasim (1999) found that the majority of students surveyed preferred mixed-mode learning experiences. Research by Dziuban and Moskal (2001) indicated that hybrid courses yielded success rates equal to and, in many cases, greater than their fully online or face-to-face counterparts. Wu and Hiltz (2004) found that hybrid courses that utilized asynchronous means of communications improved students' perception of learning. According to Bhatti, Tubaisahat, and El-Quawasmeh (2005) who examined the perceptions of female students in regards to hybrid learning, student satisfaction increased with mixed-mode learning while the students' dependency on the instructor for assistance decreased. They explained that online materials provided students with the resources to seek out answers independent of the instructor. Rivera, McAlister, and Rice (2002), who surveyed student satisfaction among the three modes of learning (face to face, fully online, and hybrid), found that student satisfaction was the highest with the hybrid learning model and that test scores were the same for all three methods of delivery. The hybrid teaching method may eventually become the norm in higher education. Young (2002), who examined hybrid and fully online teaching at several universities, concluded that among the three modes of instruction (face to face, fully online, and hybrid) the hybrid model posed the most substantive benefits for teaching and learning.

Are hybrid courses evaluated differently than traditional and fully online learning experiences? Carnevale (2000) found that regardless of the learning format, students took into consideration

knowledgeable instructors, interaction with instructors, and additional features that create a sense of community when evaluating courses for merit. The importance of technological preparedness, willingness, and the overall mindsets of students has also been acknowledged by educators as playing a crucial role in both the hybrid and online learning equations. Sanders and Morrison-Shetlar (2002) cited the importance of student attitudes toward technology as a significant determining factor in the educational benefits of online learning resources and experiences.

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