

College of Liberal Studies

Teaching a Hybrid Course: Tips and Recommendations

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This guide is designed to help you maintain a clear focus on the teaching process and to develop your own set of best practices that will allow you to obtain the best possible results in teaching your hybrid course.

What is a hybrid course?

A hybrid course is a blend of two delivery modes: face-to-face and online. In a hybrid course, a significant part of the course learning is online and as a result, the amount of classroom seat-time is reduced. It is important to keep in mind that there is a difference between web-enabled / web-assisted courses and hybrid courses. While a web-enabled course usually incorporates a companion website, web-based resources, and a discussion forum, its primary modality is face-to-face.

In contrast, a hybrid course is intended to offer learners the best of both worlds, both online and face-to-face. Professors benefit from the ability to speak directly to students, to facilitate group and collaborative learning, and to share their expertise in ways that match both learners' and instructors' preferences and needs.

Teaching a hybrid course requires planning. If you have taught a face-to-face course, you may be tempted to cover exactly the same material as in your traditional face-to-face course, and then add a number of online activities. Conversely, if you've taught online, you may be expecting the learners to do all the same online activities, plus new activities in the classroom. In either case, what results is the "course-and-a-half-syndrome" which occurs when the online and face-to-face activities have not been fully integrated.

If well designed, the hybrid course creates a very strong learning community, where students have the chance to interact online in discussion forums, and then face-to-face in classroom discussions and small groups. High levels of student engagement can be achieved, precisely because new types of interactive and independent learning activities can be implemented. These types of activities were not possible in traditional courses.

With their flexibility, hybrid courses offer many benefits for both instructors and learners.

What are some of the advantages of teaching a hybrid course?

- Provides a convenient way to take courses, since a part of the course is online
- Gives learners a chance to have one-on-one interaction with the professor in a face-to-face setting
- Enables learners to discuss online and face-to-face, and to compare and contrast the experiences
- Accommodates several learning styles
- Motivates and inspires learners by giving them a sense of affiliation and recognition
- Builds a solid and supportive learning community
- Promotes active learning and collaboration
- Creates a place to achieve deeper learning
- Encourages problem-solving
- Connects concept to learners' lived experience

- Gives professors a chance to introduce new material and respond to learner needs

Before the Course Starts: Balancing Onsite and Online

The key to a successful hybrid course is planning activities so that online and onsite interactions are fully integrated. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What do I plan to discuss in each face-to-face meeting?
- How do resources I've posted online help students have more effective discussions face-to-face?
- How are the discussion questions in the discussion board area tied to the face-to-face topic and activities?
- Where can students take what they have discussed online and build on it for 1) an face-to-face discussion; 2) face-to-face group activities?
- How can I use the online course space to create a step-by-step, building block approach to doing research and writing their final papers?

Learning Goals and Outcomes

As you prepare to teach your course, it is very helpful to implement an instructional strategy that balances the online and the onsite components of the course.

- *What do the learners need to learn in this course?
- *How will the learners access the information they need? (Onsite? Online? Where?)
- *How will I know that they have read the material and have thought about the course concepts? (Online discussions? Face-to-face small group work? Individual papers?)
- *What should successful student work and participation look like?
- *If students are getting lost or frustrated, what can I do to help them? (Technical guidance? Time management? Modeling good discussions?)

Top Ten Ways to Have a Positive Hybrid Teaching Experience

- 1---Create an environment of collaboration and sharing.
- 2---Be very clear about expectations, and spell out what students will do online and what they will do onsite.
- 3---Facilitate interaction between students, and with the faculty member. Give students more than one way to be in touch with each other (email, discussion board, phone, text messaging).
- 4---Avoid the "course and a half syndrome" by meshing online and onsite activities in a productive way.
- 5---Focus on creating a solid learning community by having students interact with each other onsite and online. Give pointers and tips on how to keep a good level of energy.
- 6---Maximize student engagement by encouraging them to interact with each other, and to explore multimedia resources that they can then discuss in class.
- 7---Use class time to discuss examples of successful student work and go over the technical details.
- 8---Tips for accomplishing required tasks. Guide students along the way.
- 9---Clear grading policy, maintain up-to-date gradebook.
- 10---Share stories, your own interests. Encourage students to share their own.

Teaching Philosophy: You don't have to give up your ideas and philosophies...

Examine Your Teaching Philosophy. What are your priorities? What do you value? How can you envision translating this to a hybrid course?

1. Interaction and engagement with the professor, fellow students, the material
2. Active learning

3. Synthesis of concepts and ideas in dynamic way, with group and individual learning
4. Group, collaborative, socially-influenced learning
5. Constructivist ideas

What does the learner, need in a hybrid course?

Need for affiliation.

Need for self-efficacy and an “I can do it!” feeling, despite unfamiliarity with technology

Need to have material match learning styles and learning preferences.

Need to have a way to organize the knowledge they’re getting (schema, categories, scaffolding, building on foundational knowledge in logical order).

Need to feel engaged, motivated, and intrigued.

Examples of Ways to Integrate Discussion Board Prompts with Onsite Group Activities.

Example 1:

Course-Spanning Task:

Effective Discussion Board Prompt - Please post your topic and describe why it appeals to you. Where will you look for articles and other resources? List two or three places, and then respond to at least two fellow students.

Onsite Small Group Activities – Choose one person’s topic, and then discuss the issues that will need to be addressed. Make a list (as a group) and then present to class.

Example 2:

Internet Research:

Effective Discussion Board Prompt - Please discuss one challenge, or one surprising thing you discovered when you were working on your assignment that involved online research. Then, respond to at least two fellow students.

Onsite Small Group Activities – Discuss challenges and make a list of the most surprising discoveries. Rank them. Then, present the results to the class.

Example 3: Responding to Readings / Postings:

Effective Discussion Board Prompt - Please respond to one of the readings or works of art / media, and describe your response to it. How did the readings you are doing for the course make you look at the work in a new way? Please describe your initial response, and then your response after relating it to the other readings for this unit. Then, respond to at least two fellow students.

Onsite Small Group Activities – Discuss one reading and list the most controversial aspects.

Keys to Effective Hybrid Course Teaching

1---Make sure that online and onsite activities are integrated in a productive way so that online activities build on discussions in class, and readings create a foundation.

Theoretical support: Scaffolding

People learn from each other and from their social interactions. One key finding that cognitive psychologists have found is that people do not learn well when they passively observe information. Instead, they learn by means of interaction with others. The resulting knowledge has been “constructed” and, as long as people interact, the construction process will continue. Learning and knowledge acquisition are dynamic.

2---Guide students and help them use learning-oriented technology that has at its core interactivity. Incorporate images, graphics, video. Build on the fact that most people are visual learners. Post visuals.

Theoretical support: Multiple intelligences / Multimedia and learning, split-channel theories.

People learn in different manners, depending on their individual learning styles or preferences. Consequently, in order to maximize effectiveness, one must accommodate individual preferences, which include visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, and others. Online learning is often very good for visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic learners, who appreciate hands-on activities and interaction with media. One must be very careful to avoid overloading the learner and creating distractions, which will impede learning.

Please try incorporating a welcome video. The IT team can help you create your own introduction and video podcast.

3---Model effective discussions and intellectual inquiry in class, and encourage students to follow the same procedure online or in independent research.

Theoretical support: Emulatory learning / modeling.

People learn from each other. Not only do they develop a cognitive awareness of the knowledge and the skills they need to have, they are reinforced by the responses of others. A learning setting that incorporates positive reinforcement can provide psychological support. The professor’s behavior can either inhibit or disinhibit learners. It is important to know when it is desirable to help students overcome shyness or inhibitions. At the same time, it is good to know when negative behaviors and attitudes should be corrected. Identifying negative behaviors and attitudes toward learning, technology, and change and then taking positive steps to correct things can constitute a turning point in a student’s academic life.

4---Use the discussion board and student interaction to encourage collaboration, enthusiasm, to allay anxiety.

Theoretical support: Collaborative learning / learner anxiety.

Individuals are able to achieve peak performance and to learn with ease when they feel they are part of a community of supportive fellow learners, and when they feel comfortable, confident, and have a positive set of beliefs about their own abilities.

5---Encourage learners to try new approaches online, including online research, online library resources, sharing drafts. Recognize and reward positive behaviors.

Theoretical support: Learning conditions / stimulus – response / learner anxiety

If an instructor finds a way to reduce psychological barriers and distance, the atmosphere will be more conducive to learning. Many learners feel comfortable once they believe they can trust their instructor, and when the relationship contains elements of mentoring. If the environment is friendly and supportive, learners will feel better about taking risks, exploring, experimenting, and discussing their ideas. If they are rewarded, they will tend to repeat the positive behaviors. Further, if the atmosphere is relaxed, students will tend to observe and interact with fellow students, learn from each other, and communicate more freely.

6--Encourage learners to share experiences. Real-world lessons. Lessons learned approach.

Theoretical support: Experiential learning, plus elaboration.

Adult learners respond very well to assignments and readings that bring to mind their own experiences and life lessons. "Learn by doing" and "hands-on" are very effective for many learners, especially those whose preferred learning style is kinaesthetic. "Learning by doing" applies to online courses in particular because of the numerous skills required in using interfaces to develop computer skills.

At the same time, if learners are able to add information to that which is presented in lessons, connections to personal experience can be established. Adding examples, details, and case studies is a kind of elaboration. It is also a form of rehearsal, which can be very powerful in helping individuals achieve the ability to synthesize, make connections, and analyze.

7--Create a supportive, warm, relaxed environment so that people feel groups...

Theoretical support: Need for affiliation / learner anxiety

According to researchers who have investigated needs, motivation, and how people think of themselves in groups, the need for affiliation ranks high on fundamental needs. It is important for people to feel they are a part of a group. Once accepted into a group, the collaborative activities can occur and many types of learning can take place. Since people learn from each other, it is all the more vital to be a part of a group. If individuals feel safe and comfortable, able to relate to each other, they will feel motivated to engage in the learning process.

8--Take an approach that encourages learners to ask questions, make people curious, pique interest. Maintain learners' attention. Engage the learners' emotions. Use case studies, tell illustrative stories.

Theoretical support: Engagement, conditions of learning / case study

A learning environment that engages the learner, creates learner interest, hold a learner's attention and focus can help keep students' enthusiasm at a high level. Being able to capture the learner's curiosity can help one overcome initial fear or resistance. Effective means of engaging attention include the use of graphics, media, and stories. However, one has to be careful not to distract the learner. It is also very important to maintain focus and to make sure the content is in line with learning objectives and outcomes. While multimedia, design, and catchy discussion prompts can engage students, it is also important to engage students through shared stories and experiences. Focus on maintaining student attention by signaling learners of key points, varying presentations styles, introducing variety in materials, and posing questions that relate to current issues and/or student experiences.

9--Share suggestions about how to break up tasks into manageable chunks, and how to goal-set. Reward yourself when you finish a task.

Theoretical support: Motivation

One major element in keeping learners engaged from start to finish is motivation. There are many ways to motivate students to feel good about completing tasks, participating in discussions, and completing their larger projects. One way is to look at the "rewards" that will occur upon the completion of desired activities. For example, the student may be rewarded by participating in the discussion board by means of a positive and encouraging response by the instructor. Prompt and accurate feedback is another kind

of reward, to which students respond very well. Techniques for maximizing rewarded behaviors and teaching students how to internalize rewards include goal-setting, breaking tasks into small, manageable chunks, and finding virtual “study buddies” for support.

10 --- Provide timely and effective feedback.

Theoretical support: Motivation and need for recognition

Motivating students can be linked to satisfying their needs for accomplishment and recognition. One very straightforward way to accomplish the goal is to make use of gradebooks and dropboxes.