

Blended Learning

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INTRODUCTION

Blended learning goes by several names, the other major one being *hybrids*. What is meant by these various terms is that more than one delivery system is being used for one course. And in most cases educators are referring to face-to-face learning and online learning being paired in some combination when they use the term blended learning in a technological context.

In 2007, our world has finally ridden the surge into distance learning, with online learning being the predominant format. While distance learning has deep historical roots to Ancient times when messages were carried by carrier from town to town, 20th Century distance learning has spanned the mail-dependent correspondence course, radio transmitted tutorials, and still familiar public TV courses including not only GED classes but also community college course as well. In business, videoconferencing added an additional educational delivery format surge in the midst of this timeline, but was too expensive to be widely adopted in the 1980s-1990s for home users and their own education (King & Griggs, 2007). Since 2005 we have added formats that include Web 2.0 technologies and

more interactive and participatory options for students and teachers alike: blogs, vlogs, podcasts, wikis, and dynamic multimedia of all sorts.

In the first wave of distance learning arriving at the gates of higher education, there was the universal cry of “bricks or clicks?” As is often the case, change was nervously perceived solely as an “either/or” possibility. Universities at first down cried online learning as inferior to face-to-face learning, and then major institutions began to participate in the trend. Fast forward to 2005 and we see some major universities pulling back out of their major investments in online learning (Carlson, 2003). Why? Because they had invested in the either/or perspective when a “both” option was available.

Blended learning can be thought of on a course or programmatic level. That is, a course can be offered partially by distance technologies and partially face to face. In addition, why could not a program of study be offered in a blended format—some courses via distance education and some face to face? At a time in 2007+ when we know students look for options, convenience, and flexibility to adapt their learning to their complex lives, this is a critical point some schools, colleges, and universities continue to by-pass as an option. The details of administering a blended program are not dif-

Figure 1. Blended options

	Face-to-Face	Synchronous Online and/or Videoconference	Asynchronous Online	Prerecorded Video, DVD, TV, Podcast
Blended 1	xx	xx		
Blended 2	xx		xx	
Blended 3	xx	xx	xx	
Blended 4	xx			xx
Blended 5	xx	xx		xx
Blended 6	xx	xx	xx	xx
Blended 7	xx		xx	xx
Blended 8	xx	xx	xx	xx
Blended 9			xx	xx

difficult if you are hosting blended courses; therefore, in the economy of discussion we will focus on blended classes.

Forms of Blended Learning

Perhaps the forms of blended learning might be most easily explained in a chart where you have the variables of technology and time as options and you can see how they can be combined to create all sorts of “blended options.” This chart is only designed to be representative of the principle of blended learning and can never be an exhaustive list as new technologies and capabilities arise each day.

Benefits of Blended Learning

Today you will find blended learning in many more places than you would have just 2 years ago. Indeed, my recent explorations of local colleges have surprised me at the widespread adoption and sophistication of support services for this programs. Given the history of community colleges, their mission, student population, and faculty, it should be no surprise, but given the relative quietness of this blended learning trend in higher education over the last 10 years, it is pleasantly surprising to see the mushrooming development of what has such sound pedagogical and andragogical bases (Baker, Dudziak, & Tyler, 1994).

Among the benefits of blended learning are:

- **Flexible scheduling:** A blended class may meet on campus one day per week and have an online session another day. In this way, students and teachers only have to be at a designated physical location one time per week and can schedule the other time based on their life needs.
- **Decreased classroom space demands:** Related to the flexible scheduling is the fact that blended learning classes meet on campus less frequently per semester, thereby freeing up classroom space for additional course offerings or activities.
- **Academic adjustment strategy:** Blended learning can also be used as a strategy to help students, faculty, and administrators adjust to online and distance learning. Rather than yielding control of classes to an entirely distance delivery, they can start with the combination approach and still main-

tain a sense of traditional control, “face-time,” personal contact, contact hours, or whatever the issues might be that are of concern.

- **Multiple instructional methods:** Because of the multiple technologies used in these formats, a variety of instructional methods can easily be used in a blended learning class.
- **Multiple learning styles addressed:** With more instructional methods being used and more modes of communications, it stands that a greater span of learning styles will be addressed with blended learning. That is, for example, in many cases not only the auditory learner, but also the text and visual learner would be accommodated.
- **Increased 21st century literacy skills:** As students engage in blended learning courses they use digital media and related 21st Century learning skills in authentic ways. Therefore, in addition to the content of the course, they have opportunities to develop information literacy skills and hone their critical thinking skills among many others. In addition, in a society that is digital information based, they both enhance their advanced academic preparation and valued workplace skills through this learning.

These are a few of the prominent benefits of blended learning at this point in time. The list can be quite extensive when viewed from the possibilities and perspectives of social interaction, global partnerships, interdisciplinary study, collaborations, and further advanced yet emerging technologies.

Future Trends of Blended Learning

As stated, since 2005 Web 2.0 technologies have provided more interactive and participatory options for students and teachers alike to be included in the technological aspects of blended learning. These Web 2.0 technologies include: blogs, vlogs, podcasts, wikis, and dynamic multimedia of all sorts. In addition, the inexpensiveness and ubiquity of technology that used to be high-end has changed options for students at home as well. Therefore, they can now, and will in the future, more fully use desktop (and laptop) videocams, microphones, scanners, digital voice recorders, MP3, and portable video players.

For example, rather than these items only being for the more prosperous students, they will be standard

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