Chapter 4

Blended Learning in a Creative Writing Program:
Lessons Learned from a Two-Year Pilot Study

Chris Morgan
Southern Cross University, Australia

Janie Conway-Herron
Southern Cross University, Australia

ABSTRACT

This case study reports on the results of a two-year pilot study in blended learning in an undergraduate creative writing program at Southern Cross University in Australia. It documents the development and implementation of a blended delivery model that dispenses with outdated divisions between face-to-face and distance modes of delivery, creating a converged, blended learning experience for all students. Findings from the pilot provided important data in relation to student satisfaction, pedagogical considerations, institutional constraints, teaching technologies, faculty workload issues, and costs associated with blended learning. These findings will contribute to a University-wide move to converged, blended learning in 2009.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter documents the results of a two-year pilot study in blended learning in an undergraduate creative writing program at Southern Cross University (SCU) in Australia. The pilot study was conducted over three semesters, between 2006 and 2008, with formative and summative evaluation points, and was completed in July 2008. Drawing from the evaluation data, this chapter will report in detail upon both the successes and problems encountered in the transition to blended learning, along with lessons learned along the way. It will also report on ways forward for this program in the light of pilot evaluation results.

BACKGROUND

SCU is located along the east coast of Australia with three campuses spread over a distance of 600

kilometers. It is a relatively small university with a current enrolment of around 12,000 students. The student population is predominately mature aged and is generally drawn from a comparatively low socio-economic grouping. Approximately one half of the students study via distance education, while the other half attends one of the three campuses for face-to-face education. There is a strong expressed need for flexible learning in a variety of formats to meet the needs of mature students often with heavy competing family and work commitments, and a wide geographic spread.

The subject of this pilot study was the undergraduate creative writing program. The program was established in the mid-1990s and has been offered in traditional 'dual mode' delivery – students either enroll as internal students and attend traditional weekly lectures and tutorials on campus, or as distance education students, and undertake a combination of print-based home study supported by online activities and interactions.

However, the division between on-campus and distance students has not always been entirely clear-cut. On-campus students have always been encouraged to access the distance study materials and online discussion to assist their study, and conversely, distance students have been encouraged to attend classes wherever possible. With the addition of newer technologies, such as videoconferencing, Web conferencing, and lecture podcasting, the boundaries have further blurred, and the duplication of teaching in the separate modes has proliferated (Oliver, Omari, & Herrington, 1998; Samarawickrema & O'Reilly, 2003).

SETTING THE STAGE

It was decided, therefore, in 2006 to blend the on-campus and distance students into one, flexible mode of delivery, offered in the same manner to all students irrespective of location. The learning encounter comprised intensive one day face-to-face traveling workshops held in multiple locations at key times in semester, supported by print-based study materials, Web conferencing, and a variety of asynchronous online activities and interactions. Students were encouraged to make their own decisions about how they would interact with the program, given their own preferences, learning styles, and other life commitments. The weekly traditional on-campus lectures and tutorial classes were significantly reduced.

The pilot project was funded by SCU to explore new models of blended learning and report to SCU community on its methodologies, strengths, weaknesses, obstacles, and potential ways forward for other programs wishing to proceed down this pathway.

A New Blended Delivery Model

Blended learning is often conceptualized as the addition of a variety of computer-mediated learning options to face-to-face teaching (Graham, 2004). In this instance, the 'blending' also ensured that there were no longer any separate internal and distance categories of students, each with their own entitlements. Rather, a new single flexible mode of delivery, with a variety of study choices, was available to all students irrespective of location. Converged modes of delivery have long been the 'holy grail' of distance education providers (Tait & Mills, 1999); yet it has only been in relatively recent years that technologies have become sufficiently pervasive to be accessed by the vast majority of students, regardless of socio-economic status and location (Challis, 2005).

The blended delivery model was designed with the following ideas and principles in mind:

- to eliminate any unnecessary or duplicated teaching activities that were not considered to be particularly productive (e.g., the lecture/tutorial format);
- to develop and strengthen the key pedagogical tools in the program (e.g., the writers' workshop);

Related Content

The Use of Asynchronous Video Communication to Improve Instructor Immediacy and Social Presence in a Blended Learning Environment
Jered Borup, Charles R. Grahamand Andrea Velasquez (2011). *Blended Learning across Disciplines: Models for Implementation (pp. 38-57).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/use-asynchronous-video-communication-improve/52541

Exploring the Challenges of Supporting Collaborative Mobile Learning
Jalal Nouri, Teresa Cerratto-Pargman, Johan Eliassonand Robert Ramberg (2011). *International Journal of Mobile and Blended Learning (pp. 54-69).*
www.irma-international.org/article/exploring-challenges-supporting-collaborative-mobile/60139

Designing and Applying a Moodle-Based E-Textbook for an Academic Writing Course
Heejin Changand Scott Windeatt (2021). *International Journal of Mobile and Blended Learning (pp. 1-24).*
www.irma-international.org/article/designing-and-applying-a-moodle-based-e-textbook-for-an-academic-writing-course/274507

Blended Learning in Higher Education: Challenges and Opportunities
Simon Kang'ethe Ngigiand Elizabeth A. Obura (2019). *Handbook of Research on Blended Learning Pedagogies and Professional Development in Higher Education (pp. 290-306).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/blended-learning-in-higher-education/208361

A Study on the Preview Effectiveness of Learning Contents in ePUB3 eBook-Based Flip Blended Learning Models
Tina Pingting Tsai, Lendy Chaoyu Linand Jyhojong Lin (2019). *International Journal of Mobile and Blended Learning (pp. 50-67).*
www.irma-international.org/article/a-study-on-the-preview-effectiveness-of-learning-contents-in-epub3-ebook-based-flip-blended-learning-models/223155