

Chapter 48

Blended Learning: The Best of Both Worlds

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ABSTRACT

As institutions look for ways to increase enrollment and students seek greater flexibility in their learning environments, blended learning is emerging as the best of both worlds. This chapter will discuss why both students and instructors choose blended learning (BL) and the benefits of BL pedagogically. The layers of software required to support BL will be briefly described for the purpose of supporting a discussion of the tools used to design online learning. The role of assessment and the need to create communities of practice within a BL environment will be illustrated. With a changing emphasis from software and function to one of learning outcomes, this chapter will present Learning Activities Management Systems (LAMS) and the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) standards which focus on the advancement of instructional design. ISTE will be introduced as a framework for students and instructors to gauge their teaching and learning goals.

INTRODUCTION

The use of blended or hybrid learning in vocational and higher education creates multiple opportunities that are not available in the traditional classroom setting. Dzuiban, Hartman and Moskal (2004) define blended learning as “courses that combine face to face (F2F) classroom instruction with online learning and reduce classroom contact

hours” (p. 2). The reduction of seat hours is the key to this definition because any course could enhance its pedagogical delivery and not reduce time in a traditional F2F format. These authors suggest that blended learning is much less about geography (where the student is sitting) and more about a rich learning experience that combines the best of both worlds.

Young (2002) suggests that currently up to 80-90% of courses contain an online component. The United States Department of Education reports the

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results of a meta-analysis comparing traditional F2F and online learning in k-12 settings:

Online learning has become popular because of its potential for providing more flexible access to content and instruction at any time, from any place. Frequently, the focus entails (a) increasing the availability of learning experiences for learners who cannot or choose not to attend traditional face-to-face offerings, (b) assembling and disseminating instructional content more cost-efficiently, or (c) enabling instructors to handle more students while maintaining learning outcome quality that is equivalent to that of comparable face-to-face instruction (USDOE, 2009, p. 1).

However, the process of planning instructional learning opportunities for students can be daunting and haphazard if not approached using a framework to guide course development. For the purpose of this paper we will use the definition of blended learning (BL) as one that combines any degree of online and face-to-face instruction (Graham, 2004). The authors will also incorporate the work of one organization that has approached blended learning from both a teaching and learning perspective. The International Society of Technology in Education is a premier association for educators that are concerned with advancing the effective use of technology in PK-12 schools and in higher education.

The best of both worlds is achievable when blended learning shifts the paradigm from teacher centered to learner centered. A well-designed blended learning environment increases interactions between student and teacher, student-to-student, and students to resources. Blended learning also increases the ability to assess student progress as well as their products in a more easily articulated manner (Dzuiban, Hartman, & Moskal, 2004).

BACKGROUND

Gen-Xers and Millennials Students

At the turn of the century there was no doubt that the way many instructors were educated was not reflected in the experiences of their students. Oblinger (2003) reports the average age of university faculty member is greater than fifty years old. These individuals were in college in the 1970s and had vastly different experiences than those anticipated by students in the 21st century. She cites the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 1996) reporting that three-quarters of all undergraduates are non-traditional; this is defined as enrolled part-time, working full-time, has dependent children, are single parents and may not have graduated from high school. More current data from the 2009 NCES report states that undergraduate enrollment rose 19% from 2000-2007; increases in enrollment were found for females (over male), full-time (over part-time) and private institutions (over public). Statistical analysis found that 64% of college students were White, 13% were Black, 11% were Hispanic, 7% were Asian/Pacific Islander, 1% Native American and 3% were nonresident alien students. The top 4 granted bachelor's degree were in 21% in business, 11% in social science and history, 7% in education and 7% in the health professions. The statistical information has implications for the blended learning conversation and the question becomes how to increase learning outcomes for these specific majors, and ethnic groups in an increasing undergraduate population.

The labels attached to students such as Gen-Xers and Millennials signal a change in the expectations of learners. Wendover (2005) defines "the age group in their mid-twenties through late thirties is commonly known as Generation X. This is a population that came of age in the midst of social chaos, layoffs, divorce, recession, gas lines, the Watergate scandal, and the advent of latch-key kids. Due to these experiences,

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