INTRODUCTION

Technological advances and widespread access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) have facilitated the rapid growth of blended learning approaches in both higher education and corporate training contexts. In 2002, the president of Pennsylvania State University expressed his belief that blended learning was “the single greatest unrecognized trend in higher education” (Young, 2002, p. A33). At the same time, the American Society for Training and Development also identified blended learning as one of the top 10 emergent trends in the knowledge delivery industry (Finn, 2002). Since then, the visibility of blended learning environments has increased dramatically in both formal education and corporate training settings. At the third annual Sloan-C Workshop on Blended Learning and Higher Education, Frank Mayadas, the program director for the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, predicted that “by 2010 you will be hard pressed to find a course that is not blended” (Mayadas, 2006). There is increasing interest in the concept of blended learning as evidenced by greater numbers of books, journal articles, and trade magazine articles that directly address issues related to blended learning. This article will provide an overview of current models of blended learning and provide references to the most recent resources in this emergent area of research and practice.

BACKGROUND

Definition

The use of the term blended learning is relatively new in both higher education and corporate settings. In higher education, the term “hybrid course” was often used prior to the emergence of the term “blended learning,” and now the two terms are used interchangeably. Because term is relatively new, there are still ongoing debates regarding the precise meaning and relevance of the term (Driscoll, 2002; Graham, Allen, & Ure, 2003; Laster, 2004; Masie, 2005; Oliver & Trigwell, 2005; Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003). However, the most commonly held position is that blended learning environments combine face-to-face instruction with technology-mediated instruction (Graham, 2005; Graham et al., 2003). This definition highlights the ongoing convergence of two archetypal learning environments: the traditional face-to-face (F2F) environment with the distributed (or technology-mediated) environment (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Blended learning combines traditional face-to-face and computer mediated instruction

Purposes

There are many reasons why a blended approach to learning might be selected. The three most common reasons for blending listed in the literature are:

- To increase learning effectiveness
- To increase convenience and access
- To increase cost effectiveness

Often educators adopt a blended approach in order to explore tradeoffs between more than one of these goals simultaneously (e.g., increasing the convenience to students afforded by an asynchronous distributed environment without completely eliminating the human touch from the F2F environment). While blended learning is appealing to many because it enables one to take advantage of the “best of both worlds” (Morgan, 2002; Young, 2002), blended learning environments can also mix the least effective elements of both F2F and technology-mediated worlds if not designed well.

MODELS

The concept of blended learning is simple and elegant. However, there are numerous ways that blended learning
Blended Learning Models

Blended Learning Models can be implemented in a wide variety of different contexts. For this reason, it is important to share successful models of blended learning so that all can benefit. Sharing models of blended learning can help to facilitate the purposeful and disciplined adoption of appropriate blended learning strategies. This section of the article will present several models of blended learning. Because of space constraints it is not possible to share all of the details of the models, but additional details for the examples of interest can be found in The Handbook of Blended Learning (Graham, 2005) and The Encyclopedia of Distance Learning (Graham & Allen, in press).

Because there is such a wide range of possible blends in the different contexts, it can be helpful to think of three major categories of blends: enabling blends, enhancing blends, and transforming blends. Table 1 contains a description of each category and specific examples for each.

The distinctions here are particularly important when considering the impact of blended learning on learning ef-