ABSTRACT

Blended learning remains at the top of higher education/technology issues lists despite having been in practice on college and university campuses for 20 years. However, a review of blended learning research literature suggests that innovation in blended learning models has been lacking. This chapter positions innovation in blended learning as a leadership challenge, not merely for the niche concerns of learning technology professionals but as a strategy to fulfill the higher education mission of student success. The chapter authors assert that, while blended learning’s very flexibility often curtails its systemic implementation, when undertaken as an institutional leadership challenge, new configurations of blended learning implemented through cross-institutional partnerships hold great promise.
INRODUCTION

In this chapter, we position innovation in blended learning as a leadership challenge, not merely for the niche concerns of learning technology professionals but as a strategy to fulfill the higher education mission of student success. We assert that, while blended learning’s very flexibility often curtails its systemic implementation, when undertaken as an institutional leadership challenge, new configurations of blended learning implemented through cross-institutional partnerships hold great promise. Specifically, innovation in the design of blended learning, when undertaken as a strategic, institutional leadership challenge, has the potential to increase student success by facilitating progression - especially progression in high drop/fail/withdrawal courses - and eventual degree attainment. Undertaking leadership of a strategic blended course design initiative requires a clear vision for the affordances of blended learning, a commitment to institutional innovation, effective program management, and facile partnership-building among stakeholders at all levels (e.g., faculty and senior administration).

Cavanagh and Thompson (2018) note that leaders must pursue a “delicate dance” of “monitoring [technology] trends” alongside “countervailing forces” in order to bring about desirable outcomes (p. 4) in our higher education contexts. Blended learning remains at the top of higher education/technology issues lists (e.g., EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative, 2018; New Media Consortium, 2017) despite having been in practice on college and university campuses for twenty years (e.g., Hartman, Dziuban, & Moskal, 2000). Blended learning’s staying power as a construct is undoubtedly related to its flexibility in fulfilling faculty pedagogical preferences while also offering the promise of institutional impact via data on student retention, success, and satisfaction (Cavanagh & Thompson, 2015).

Building upon our past work related to leading innovation in online education (Cavanagh & Thompson, 2018) and related to blended learning (Cavanagh, Thompson, & Futch, 2017; Futch, deNoyelles, Thompson, & Howard, 2016; Moskal & Cavanagh, 2014; Wegmann & Thompson, 2014), we begin the chapter with a framing of higher education technology innovation leadership as a need to “solve the big problems” (Cavanagh & Thompson, 2018, pp. 8-9) of which student success (e.g., increased graduation rate, decreased time to graduation) is a prime example. Next, a section on the practice and promise of blended learning (featuring cited data) precedes a section elaborating on the need to improve the designs of strategic “challenging” courses (e.g., those with high drop/fail/withdrawal rates) in order to meet institutional goals and society’s needs for social mobility. The heart of the chapter is a detailed treatment of new models for blended learning (e.g., combined with digital courseware, adaptive learning systems, learning analytics, advising
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