Chapter 3
Moving Toward a Blended Course Delivery System

Leah Blakey
Drury University, USA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Today’s university students demand a high degree of flexibility in scheduling, as well as a quality educational experience. Many students enjoy the flexibility of online courses, but some have learning styles that make a traditional classroom experience preferable. This chapter draws on the experiences from numerous institutions; however, the particular experiences of Drury University’s transition to blended classes will be at the center of this case study. The issues the schools have faced, as well as the resolutions that were designed and implemented, will be discussed in detail. The goal of the chapter is to provide a detailed, practical guide to the best practices in blended education.

INTRODUCTION

Today’s university students demand a high degree of flexibility in scheduling as well as a quality educational experience. Many students enjoy the flexibility of online courses, but some have learning styles that make a traditional classroom experience preferable. Soules takes this idea further by pointing out that “those students at a distance from the face-to-face classroom often express the suspicion that they are missing something. Not only are they missing what they might learn from any material presented in class that is not included in the online resource materials, they are also missing the learning that comes from participation in discussion and interaction. Additionally, some people feel that it is not as easy to ask questions online. There is validity to these concerns in my experience: students do seem to benefit from classroom discussions, from the clarification of difficult material, and from interaction with an instructor about assignments, and other matters related to the course.” (Soules) All of these needs and desires can be fulfilled through a blended class format. Drury University defines a blended class as a class that has both online and face-to-face classroom components. It is the one presented in class that is not included in the online resource materials, they are also missing the learning that comes from participation in discussion and interaction. Additionally, some people feel that it is not as easy to ask questions online. There is validity to these concerns in my experience: students do seem to benefit from classroom discussions, from the clarification of difficult material, and from interaction with an instructor about assignments, and other matters related to the course.” (Soules) All of these needs and desires can be fulfilled through a blended class format. Drury University defines a blended class as a class that has both online and face-to-face classroom components. It is the one...
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of the best designs for instructional delivery in today’s fast paced, quality driven, highly competitive academic world.

Many schools have turned to blended classes as an optimum response to student demands for high quality and flexibility. (Hybrid Classes, 2002) This chapter draws on the experiences from numerous institutions; however, the particular experiences of Drury University’s transition to blended classes will be at the center of this case study. The issues the schools have faced as well as the resolutions that were designed and implemented will be discussed in detail. The goal of the chapter is to provide a detailed, practical guide to the best practices in blended education. As very little has been written on the best ways to manage blended courses, interviews and personal experience are the basis for this chapter.

Drury University officially began the blended class program in the spring of 2008. Leaders of the program immediately turned to published material to find direction. Unfortunately, there have been very few relevant journal articles written on the subject of blended classes and their administration. Therefore, the leaders turned to colleagues with experience in using a blended format for advice and best practices. From their successes and failures, Drury University built a policy for the program and a training model for its instructors.

There are some common issues facing all schools attempting to use blended classes. These two main issues involve: a) communicating a blended course’s requirements to potential students and b) training instructors to maximize the best of both online and traditional classroom teaching techniques in a blended class.

The resolution of these issues is directly tied to the culture of the individual schools and their respective student bodies.

There are also issues that instructors in blended courses encounter that differ widely, depending on the schools and disciplines involved. To address these issues and evaluate various responses, the experiences of more than twenty people with backgrounds in teaching and learning through blended classes will be considered. The results of these interviews will provide detailed, hands-on approaches and advice for universities and individuals considering a blended class delivery method.

Competition for students increases annually. In order to compete, schools have to devise new ways to meet their students’ demands for flexible scheduling and dynamic classes. Blended classes can combine the best of both the online and traditional classroom to meet these demands. (Hybrid Classes, 2002) By drawing on the experiences of so many instructors who have successfully mastered the blended delivery format, this chapter will help you design and deliver the best possible blended program and class.

BACKGROUND

History

Online education became a reality at Drury University in 1999. Since then, the program has grown at a rapid pace. This chart (Figure 1) shows the growth in the number of classes over the last nine years.

However, the remaining segments of the College of Graduate and Continuing Studies (CGCS), where online education is housed, have not seen similar growth. As Figure 2 demonstrates, enrollment in face-to-face classes has fallen during the same time frame.

Students claim this is because they prefer the online delivery of classes because it fits better into their busy lives. In addition, transportation costs and parking issues are reduced for the students.

While students preferred and thus enrolled increasingly in online classes, the directors of the face-to-face programs struggled to maintain enrollments at a break-even level. Increasingly, face-to-face classes were cancelled due to low enrollment. In an attempt to bring more students