Hybrid Learning

Scenario 1
Sarah has always taken face-to-face courses in college and has recently accepted a full-time job. Her schedule is preventing her from attending class regularly, and she decided to register for hybrid classes this semester. Rather than going to class once a week, she now goes to class twice a month. Her teacher follows the “flipping the classroom” method, where lectures, presentations, and exams are provided online, and the in-class portion is dedicated to going over assignments and interactive activities. Not only does this work with Sarah’s schedule better because she can complete her homework and studying on her own time, but the face-to-face time is used to go over questions as well as group activities, which allow her to still get to know her other classmates.

Scenario 2
Nick is a freshly graduated high school senior who is deciding on what courses to enroll in. He works better on his own schedule, and decides to look into a four-year hybrid program. Instead of meeting weekly, the program begins with a face-to-face method of delivery, and eventually graduates to solely online courses after two years. Since Nick had never taken online courses before, he was able to slowly get acquainted with the learning model gradually. Nick has now learned to successfully prioritize his study and work time properly without falling behind, because he was able to progressively get acquainted with the method of online learning.

Scenario 3
John has completed his undergraduate degree and has begun teaching at a local high school full-time. He wants to get his Master’s degree, but cannot take time outside of teaching to go to class. He does not teach summer school, therefore he decided to look into a hybrid Master’s program, which still runs over 2 years, however, the majority of courses are held online. This degree is specifically catered towards educators, because the face-to-face portion of the course is held only for 3 weeks for 2 consecutive summers. This allows John to continue to teach his high school class, and work on his own time to complete assignments. Then, during summers when he is not teaching, John travels to the school and attends an intensive face-to-face session that lasts for 2 weeks. Since then, John has graduated successfully, while still being able to continue to dedicate all his time to his teaching profession.

Definition
Hybrid, or blended, education is a multi-modal instructional delivery term where instruction and engagement includes in-person class meetings and online instruction. While “blended” delivery reflects the andragogical nature of teaching and learning through this delivery, UNLV uses the term “hybrid” to remain consistent with NSHE Board of Regents terminology. At UNLV, “Hybrid classes must have the majority of instruction delivered at a distance and the face-to-face component, although reduced, is mandatory and scheduled.”* This definition affords University faculty the flexibility to use teaching methods and the mixed-mode delivery of instruction based on concepts taught, student characteristics, course level, and course type.

Research findings*
• Hybrid courses may result in equivalent or superior performance outcomes in comparison to classroom or entirely online courses.
• Success of any course is dependent on effective instructional design and support, not delivery method.
• Hybrid courses have equivalent or lower attrition rates in comparison with classroom or online only.
• Hybrid courses are effective across different models, content areas, and learner types.

Standards
Standards should be aligned with University policies as established by the UNLV Board of Regents, the Office of the Executive Vice Provost, and individual academic units, regardless of delivery mode. Criteria for evaluating any educational environment should be based upon sound research and contemporary educational theory. Furthermore, the rubrics for evaluating hybrid learning criteria should be aligned with accepted standards in the field of higher education.

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Standards (continued)
The Office of Online Education’s "Course Development Checklist" represents the minimal standards for online components of hybrid learning courses, while the "Online Course Review" rubric provides additional insight and guidance. Both documents are aligned with UNLV policies, based upon sound research, contemporary educational theory, and accepted industry standards.

Models
Although there are numerous instructional design models applied to hybrid learning, it is important to note that the mixed mode nature of delivery is not merely implying that instruction should be delivered as a dichotomous partition between lectures, activities, assessments, or other class functions. Best practice suggests a more blended, fluid approach to incorporate all instructional components holistically based on the contexts (concepts, objectives, teaching style, and learning characteristics) of the instruction to be delivered.* Generally, instruction and participation should be balanced between online and the classroom throughout the semester, as opposed to one part of the semester being online and another part in the classroom.

Best Practices*
- The amount of time students spend engaged in educational activities in a hybrid course should be equivalent to the time spent in an analogous face-to-face course.
- Course curriculum should be thoughtfully planned and developed before the course is offered.
- Classroom and online components should be integrated thoughtfully.
- Learning activities should be appropriate to the mode of delivery.
- Learning activities should be active rather than passive.
- Expectations should be communicated clearly and completely.
- Opportunities for interaction between the instructor and the student should be frequent and ongoing.
- Instructor feedback should be prompt and continuous.
- Opportunities for interaction between students should be frequent and ongoing.

Advantages
Hybrid learning provides the opportunity to take advantage of the affordances offered by different modes of delivery. For example, learners are able to refer to online resources as well as interact with peers and the instructor face-to-face for further support and guidance. Course materials can be accessed 24 hours a day, allowing for more flexibility, and students can begin to become more self-directed, with guidance from the instructor.*

Challenges
Unfortunately, technology has often been utilized solely for content delivery purposes only. Rather than taking advantage of technological affordances to improve teaching, instructors may use it to provide online access to course materials, readings, and lectures. Despite being a hybrid course, instructors need to make a presence in the online portion otherwise the lack of guidance will lead to student procrastination and non-preparation of materials.*

Additional Resources

*Statements are based upon thorough research; for references please contact the Office of Online Education: online@unlv.edu