Introduction to Hybrid Courses

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What is a hybrid course?

Hybrid courses are courses in which a significant portion of the learning activities have been moved online, and time traditionally spent in the classroom is reduced but not eliminated. The goal of hybrid courses is to join the best features of in-class teaching with the best features of online learning to promote active independent learning and reduce class seat time. Using computer-based technologies, instructors use the hybrid model to redesign some lecture or lab content into new online learning activities, such as case studies, tutorials, self-testing exercises, simulations, and online group collaborations.

What is the Hybrid Course Project?

During 1999-2001, the University of Wisconsin System Curricular Redesign Grant Program funded a collaborative project involving UW-Milwaukee and four UW-College campuses (Rock County, Sheboygan, Washington, and Waukesha). Coordinated by UWM's Learning Technology Center, the project developed a Web resource of hybrid courses, created a model faculty development program for teaching hybrid courses, and supported 17 faculty in their efforts to design, develop, and teach their first hybrid courses.

The instructors represented a wide variety of disciplines, and the courses they converted to hybrid ranged in size from less than 15 students to over 200 students. These courses covered all undergraduate levels, i.e., freshmen through senior, and the students enrolled included both traditional college-aged and older adult students.

The faculty adopted very different approaches to the hybrid model, based on their instructional styles, course content, course sizes, and course goals. Instructors employed different patterns for reducing their class time by 25% to 50%, such as eliminating one class per week throughout the semester, meeting for several weeks and then not meeting for several weeks or cutting non-productive time from a longer evening course. Many developed online learning activities that required their students to become familiar with content prior to coming to a class discussion. Use of "entrance tickets," i.e., handing in assignments to gain permission to attend an in-person class, was popular.

Why offer hybrid courses?

Hybrid courses offer a number of advantages over face-to-face teaching and totally online courses. Instructors reported that the hybrid course model allows them to accomplish course learning objectives more successfully than traditional courses do. Most faculty noted increased interaction and contact among their students and between the students and themselves. A communications professor teaching a large enrollment class states unequivocally, "The amount of student to faculty contact is going to increase in the hybrid format. Students are more engaged in learning activities and therefore will seek out more assistance." (View Professor Johnson describing his interaction with students in his hybrid course, and read Jack Johnson's article on his experience with the hybrid format in this edition of **TTT**.)

The hybrid model gives instructors more flexibility with their classes. For example, a professor of technical writing was better able to approximate a "real world" writing environment for her students by using the hybrid model (Listen to Professor Spilka describing her course, and read Rachel Spilka's article in this edition of **TTT**.) An archaeologist transformed lectures on artifact classification into online learning activities and, as a result, gained in-class time to allow his students to handle and experience classifying objects. (View Professor Andrew Collins describing his hybrid experience).

Both students and instructors liked the greater convenience afforded by the hybrid course model, which allows coursework to be scheduled flexibly and decreases time spent commuting and finding parking. Time flexibility was overwhelmingly the most popular feature of the hybrid courses for the students.

Our faculty participants almost universally believe their students learned more in the hybrid format than they did in the traditional class sections. Instructors reported that students wrote better papers, performed better on exams, produced higher quality projects, and were capable of more meaningful discussions on course material. These qualitative assessments of better student learning are supported by quantitative data from the University of Central Florida, which show that students in hybrid courses achieve better grades than students in traditional face-to-face courses or totally online courses. (See Recent Presentations at http://pegasus.cc.ucf.edu/~rite/ for the Educause NLII 2001 presentation, "The Payoff for Systemic Evaluation of University-Wide Distributed Learning", slide 6.) Data from the University of Central Florida also show that student retention in hybrid courses is better than retention in totally online courses and equivalent to that of face-to-face courses. For more about University of Central Florida research into distributed instructional models see DL Impact Evaluation at http://pegasus.cc.ucf.edu/~rite/.

What did the instructors say?

All of the project instructors reported having positive experiences with the hybrid model. They also agreed that developing the hybrid course had required more time than developing traditional courses, primarily because of time and effort required to redesign the course, learn new teaching techniques, and acquire new technology skills. But they would all do it again.

Some comments from the hybrid course instructors include:

- "My students have done better than I've ever seen; they are motivated, enthused, and doing their best work."
- "I sense a heightened level of enthusiasm in my students."
- "Introverts, who are quiet in the face-to-face class, really participate online."
- "I was tired of hearing myself talk. This gets so much more student interaction."
- "Discussions are good, both in and out of class."
- "The hybrid allowed me to do things in my course that I've always wanted to do and couldn't."

What did the students say?

Students were also very positive in their evaluation of the hybrid course model. However, some students have difficulty adjusting in the beginning because they initially equated fewer class meetings with less work. It is important to provide students with a thorough orientation to this new style of learning; they need to be made fully aware of the expectations of the course, and they may need help learning to manage their time. Consequently, one product of the Hybrid Course Project is a Website resource designed for students who need more information about hybrid courses and how they differ from traditional classes. The Student Hybrid Course Website can be found at http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/LTC/hybridcourses.html.

All participating instructors agreed that the first week of class should be dedicated to technology, especially since some students were concerned that they lacked the necessary technology skills and access to fast modem connections. Some students dropped the hybrid course because of their fear of the technology or their perception that the course would be more work than a traditional course. But the instructors feel that if students survive the first two or three weeks, they can successfully manage a hybrid class.

Eighty percent of the students reported that they would recommend hybrid courses to their friends. Most frequently, they appreciated the convenience and the freedom to work at home and at their own pace. The following are selected questions from surveys administered to students in project courses at the end of spring semester 2001 (n=282 for each question):

	Agree	Disagree	No opinion
I could control the pace of my own learning.	69%	19%	12%
I could organize my time better.	77%	11%	12%
The time I spent online would better have been spent in class.	16%	67%	17%
There should be more courses like this.	61%	16%	23%

What is the KEY to developing successful hybrid courses?

To teach a successful hybrid course an instructor must invest significant time and effort in redesigning a traditional course. Because class seat time is reduced and a significant part of learning is moved online, instructors must reexamine their course goals and objectives, design online learning activities to meet those goals and objectives, and effectively integrate the online activities with the face-to-face meetings. (View Peter Sands describing how he integrates online activities with classroom work, and read his article in this edition of TTT.) In addition, many faculty must acquire new teaching skills, such as learning to facilitate online interactions and assess student online learning; they may also need to acquire some new technology skills.

In order to help faculty with the course redesign process and with learning to teach online, the project coordinators have created a model faculty development program for teaching hybrid courses that can be readily adopted and adapted for use at other campuses. This program is essentially a hybrid workshop, with online resources, independent learning activities, online discussion, and face-to-face meetings and activities. It gives instructors experience in learning in a hybrid environment and models good hybrid course practices. Detailed information on this Faculty Development Model can be found at http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/LTC/fac-dev.html.

Conclusion

The UW Hybrid Course Project created much valuable information, both for instructors and faculty developers interested in hybrid courses. The accompanying Teaching Scholars Forum paper, *"Lessons Learned" from the Hybrid Course Project*, as well as the Hybrid Course Project Website (http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/LTC/hybrid.html), provides more information from the project.

Inside Outside, Upside Downside

Strategies for Connecting Online and Face-to-Face Instruction in Hybrid Courses

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Hybridity is the order of the day, as teachers combine the distributed teaching and learning of distance education with the comfortable interaction of the classroom in an effort to achieve a synthesis of the two. Even a cursory search will turn up evidence of the expectation that hybrid forms of teaching will supplant others, especially for people who may need an alternative delivery format because of their busy schedules, but who also need the support structure of a traditional classroom. (Levine and and Warren K. Wake; Isenhart)

Hybridity in postcolonial studies refers to cultural and racial mixing resulting from forced commingling of peoples. In genetics, hybridity refers to offspring of two genetically dissimilar parents. A hybrid is also a mechanism in which two dissimilar parts produce the same function or result. Hybrid teaching and learning partakes of each of these concepts to some degree.

In the case of the hybrid course, seat time is reduced and some of the course activities--information transfer, exchange of ideas, testing, essay-writing, etc.--are distributed throughout the semester, with students accessing course materials and performing other tasks online. This is often accomplished through an off-the-shelf Course Management System, such as Blackboard, Prometheus or WebCT, but it can also be accomplished via something as simple as email, or as information-rich as streaming video. Because of the highly text-based nature of websites and email, hybrid courses become de facto writing-intensive courses when teachers work carefully to integrate the online and classroom components.

A prominent example from outside the UW System is the work being done at University of Central Florida, where the Center for Distributed Learning (http://distrib.ucf.edu/dlucf/home.html) and the Research Initiative for Teaching Effectiveness (http://pegasus.cc.ucf.edu/%7Erite/) have studied their own very large program that encompasses the range of possible uses of technology from purely online to hybrid to technologically enhanced classroom courses.

Recent research, such as that on "overcoming barriers" to teaching online, has both confirmed previous understanding of what is required for success and added new insights, such as that while the range of problems is interconnected, creating an

"organizational culture or norms favorable to" the program is necessary to minimize the other obstacles (Cho and Berge). This is similar to the insights of the Writing Across the Curriculum movement (McLeod and Soven 5-7, 47ff). Berge and Cho found ten major obstacles:

- technical expertise
- administrative structure
- evaluation/effectiveness
- organizational change
- social interaction and quality
- student support services
- [feeling] threatened by technology
- access
- faculty compensation and time
- legal issues

With some effort, faculty members can address technical expertise, evaluations of effectiveness, social interaction, their own and their students' feelings of being threatened by technology, and the effective use of their time.

Because the online component of the hybrid class is the unfamiliar and time-consuming one, teachers have to pay closer attention to that than to their face-to-face interaction, so long as those face-to-face interactions successfully connect with the online work in the course. Successful hybridity--however that may be defined--requires bringing the two dissimilar parts together so that they work in concert and produce a third result. In the case of effective hybrid courses, there are two dissimilar groups of two that must come together and produce a final result: teachers/students and online/face-to-face classrooms.

Some basic instructional strategies exist that can help teachers tie together the two components of their hybrid courses. Although there is significant published research in various disciplines about teaching in hybrid environments, what follows is a distillation of experience rather than a synthesis of the published studies. Much of what I have to say comes from basic tenets of the Writing Across the Curriculum movement (Bazerman and David R. Russell; McLeod and Margot Soven). Additionally, the lore and research surrounding computers in composition, a branch of English Studies where networked computing has been in use for more than two decades, provides a good background for online teaching in other disciplines (Hawisher, et al.). Teachers interested in teaching online would do well to familiarize themselves with the range of helpful books more directly related to hybrid or online courses, such as *Building Learning Communities in Cyberspace* (Palloff and Pratt) and *147 Practical Tips for Teaching Online Groups* (Hanna, et al).

Here are five simple principles that may help teachers better connect their online work with face-to-face teaching:

1. Start small and work backward from your final goals.

This is a basic precept of course-planning: what do want students to be able to do at the end of the semester? What must we do on the first day, the second day, the third day, to get there? But when planning major integration of digital communications technologies to a course careful attention to learning objectives becomes even more important, helping teachers to avoid a counterproductive focus on the technologies themselves.

2. Imagine interactivity rather than delivery.

While information-transfer may be more effective online, simply putting materials upweb will not guarantee that students engage with and learn from them. For that, you need activities that require students to perform basic academic tasks, such as summary and analysis, and that place them in conversation with each other, such as through responses to each others' summaries and analyses. For every student who says in my course evaluations that they enjoyed or learned from lectures, there are scores who report higher engagement because of interactions with each other as well as the teacher.

3. Prepare yourself for loss of power and a distribution of demands on your time more evenly throughout the week.

Once seat time is reduced and everyone is online but not in the same room, opportunities to monitor and manage interactions move from the geographic space of the classroom to the temporal space of the week (or month, or whatever unit of time intervenes between classroom meetings).

4. Be explicit about time-management issues and be prepared to teach new skills.

Students who have spent the past two decades or so in traditional classroom settings will have to learn new skills to cope with the distribution of requirements over time, and to cope with their new dependence on each other, for if teachers create opportunities for interaction, then each participant becomes dependent on the participation of the others.

In the traditional classroom, conversation is hampered by the academic schedule: if someone has an idea on Wednesday, but their class meets on Tuesdays, that person has to wait six days to discuss with the class and professor. And that's assuming that the class is small enough--or designed--to allow for conversation rather than lecture alone. But in a hybrid model, where classroom time is reduced and students engage each other directly online, a conversation can be sustained over several days and even weeks.

If a hybrid class meets regularly, say once a week for a reduced time, then one of the ways to sustain a conversation is to distribute due dates for reading responses and other writing assignments throughout the week, rather than just on the day of the class

meeting. If your class meets less regularly in the physical classroom, such distribution occurs naturally because there has to be a set of assignments and goals that keep students returning regularly to the online meeting/discussion space.

5. Plan for effective uses of classroom time that connect with the online work.

This is the most important tip. Recall the discussion earlier about the nature of hybridity: bringing dissimilar elements together to perform the same functions and achieve a shared result. If you're thinking about how to integrate the online and classroom components, it is only a short step to increased interactivity in your course. Many teachers bring to class one or two responses from students that were posted online and project those responses using an overhead projector, then discuss them with the class.

Additionally, by sequencing assignments so that they move students from significant discussion/responding online, through written reflections about their responses and the reading, to group or individual projects that are posted to a common learning space, such as a website or discussion board, for discussion and elaboration, teachers can have students engaged in doing, rather than just experiencing or reading.

What many are now calling low-threshold applications, such as email and word processing, are pretty well integrated in students' lives already. Conversely, many students who claim significant computer literacy really only have experience with email, chat and web-surfing, but not necessarily with the full complement of applications we call "office suites."

It is not appropriate to teach all applications in a single class. It may not even be desirable to attempt to teach all applications of possible use in a given class. For my purposes, spreadsheets and databases are rarely useful in a class, although I might use them to keep track of student grades or information that I'm teaching. On the other hand, specialized database software for notetaking or bibliography generation, such as Citation or Endnote, can be of use in my research-intensive writing or literature seminars. Similarly, while email has made such terrific inroads in every aspect of academic life that it has the potential for great use in a class and rarely needs to be "taught," the file-sharing capabilities of the network, of office software, and the humble Internet browser, are rarely familiar to students, and must be taught as skills. The best way to do so, in terms of managing time and information is to teach the skills in the context of a task that must be completed or information that must be learned. This is in keeping with the cognate principles for teaching of grammar and mechanics in context (Kolln; Weaver).

Particularly in a small class, there is pressure to integrate the out-of-class activities with in-class activities. Rather than having students review terms or read lecture notes, have students write definitions of key terms and post them on a class bulletin board for discussion and refinement, then read the postings an hour or so before class, select one or two to be displayed on an overhead or on a computer projector, and prepare the lecture in part as a response to what students write. This is a just-in-time-teaching, or

JITT-style writing and response method that distributes time spent thinking about the course throughout the week and helps the teacher teach material when the students need to know it and are ready to learn it, rather than only at a prescribed time in the syllabus (Novak; Novak, Evelyn T. Patterson and Andrew D. Gavrin).

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