Guidelines for Hybrid Courses

Hybrid courses (also known as blended courses) involve the effective use of online learning activities combined with face-to-face classroom experiences. At Stockton, a hybrid course offers at least 30% of class time learning online. Research indicates that many students prefer learning in a hybrid course and faculty appreciate the ability to retain features of the face-to-face classroom while taking advantage of unique learning opportunities afforded by an online learning environment.

Classroom and Online Learning

In an effective hybrid course, face-to-face learning time promotes engaged student learning with hands-on activities, application tasks, problem-solving, and team projects with students working together, asking questions, and receiving faculty guidance. Basically, the face-to-face experience supports collaborative, social learning. The online portion of the course provides fact-based learning including lectures (this describes a flipped classroom too), overviews, discussions, and quizzes. In online class experiences, faculty facilitate students' abilities to activate prior knowledge and consider new ways of thinking. The online experience may be synchronous (faculty and students online at the same time) or asynchronous (faculty and students complete online tasks at a convenient time). Teaching a hybrid course requires effective planning appreciating the benefits and limitations of online and face-to-face pedagogy.

Course Syllabus

The syllabus from a face-to-face course requires careful consideration and revision to be effective as a syllabus for a hybrid course.   Sample syllabi are available on the CLD website. Faculty may use the Carnegie Unit to plan a course and syllabus. Basically, each student has 1 hour of class time for each credit of a course. This means a 3-credit course meets for 3 hours, a 4-credit course meets for 4 hours. Class time is either face-to-face or online instruction (the two are added together for total meeting time). Additionally, for each hour of class, a student is expected to complete a minimum of 2 hours of additional work per credit hour outside of class (readings, assignments, etc.). This means that a 3-credit course is expected to involve 3 hours of face to face and/or planned online instruction (measurable as meeting time required) and at least 6 hours of outside work. So, a 3-credit course involves 9 hours a week of student work/time. A 4-credit course is 12 student hours of work per week. An excellent tool for estimating student workload is found at this link. It's best to share this expectation and explain course structure in the syllabus. Be explicit so students understand course expectations.

Basic Best Practices for Teaching Hybrid Courses

✓ Establish meaningful, measurable learning outcomes for your students (use Bloom's taxonomy). Use backward design principles to select materials, assignments and technology tools that support student achievement of course learning outcomes.

✓ Select course materials that promote learning at low cost (consider free materials such as Open Educational Resources), meet accessibility requirements, and do not violate copyright law.

✓ Create learning activities for the course learning outcomes that promote active, engaged student involvement in learning and encourage the following interactions: student to course material, student to student, and student to faculty. Design the course so that the connection between in-class learning and online learning is clear and easy for students to understand.

✓ Develop and implement a practical assessment plan to measure student achievement of learning outcomes. Provide proof that students are learning (achieving outcomes) from the course.

✓ Make sure students are engaged and accountable for completing learning activities from required readings to assignments (use low or high stakes assignments, quizzes/exams, discussions, writing, polling, and other activities to apply and use required readings, lecture or other materials).

✓ Create an online environment (as well as a classroom environment) that is supportive and safe for learning. In the online environment, organize materials are provide support to navigate the online materials or use any required technology.

✓ A hybrid course should be designed at least 3-6 months in advance. Asking a peer to review the course or using a self-assessment rubric can help ensure that the course is well designed as an effective learning experience.

✓ Recognize that just as faculty (teacher) presence is important in the classroom. It is equally important in the online environment where faculty need to create a sense of community. Teacher presence is easy to establish when people are physically in the same place. In an online environment, you must engage students so that your presence in the course is observed and evident. This is accomplished with faculty frequently checking the online course (at least daily) and making contributions to the discussion or learning activities to facilitate student learning. Faculty can model expected online behaviors to socialize students to online participation. Do not expect the online component of the course to run itself because that discourages active student engagement in online learning.

✓ Students need timely, meaningful and personal feedback on their work. Let students know when they can expect your feedback (allowing time for meaningful comments). If commenting on discussion posts, be sure to demonstrate that you read the post by taking personally meaningful information from the post and including it in the feedback. Avoid generic feedback like "great job".

✓ Monitor the online course and email frequently. Student will expect a response to emails or questions within 24 hours (unless faculty explain a different policy).

✓ Offer student support for any technology used in the course. If you expect students to use Google Docs, it is important to provide instructions or links to tutorials. It is never a good idea to assume students know everything about any educational technology or tool.

✓ Clearly explain your expectations for students in the course. Be sure the syllabus is a clear outline of the course structure. Make expectations explicit in multiple ways and seek student feedback. Offer a general discussion board that allows students to ask questions or make comments (available for all students to use). Take surveys to find out student feedback on the course. Review feedback and adjust as necessary; do not wait to collect feedback only at the end of the course. You are not limited to end of the semester IDEAs. Choose or create tools to assess student perceptions of course learning at several points during the semester. Make regular adjustments to the course based on feedback.

✓ Be explicit about assignment expectations. Consider providing rubrics or scoring guides for assignments that students can view prior to completing the assignment. Clear expectations and guidelines should result in better assignments which equals less intense grading.

✓ Provide students with clear guidelines on assignment due dates and other expectations. Make a faculty schedule that permits timely provision of grades and feedback.

✓ Keep your course simple to promote optimal learning. Do not overwhelm students with information or resources that are not of primary importance. It is important to edit the course using learning outcomes as the benchmark for determining what content is necessary for the course.

Stockton's Center for Learning Design has staff available to assist any faculty member or program with designing effective courses and considering best practices for face-to-face, hybrid or fully online courses. If you want assistance from the Center for Learning Design, please email cld@stockton.edu or make an appointment.