

Instructional delivery utilizing a blended format

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ABSTRACT. Current trends in technology and new strategies in curriculum design have yielded a new methodology for content area course delivery. Blended learning is now being utilized in many colleges and universities to deliver instruction with a balanced approach in mind. This format provides new avenues in curriculum design and instructional delivery. Blended learning unites the best of both worlds in a post-secondary instructional model. It combines the face to face classroom experience with a digital education environment. The blended learning format also promotes a shift from the traditional lecture format to a more interactive learning environment for students. Overall student engagement tends to increase using the blended learning format. From an instructional perspective, blended learning tends to be regarded in a very positive light. It has been widely embraced by many contemporary, post-secondary educators as well as the student body. The 21st century student requires a flexible learning path that is individualized and available on demand. Utilizing a blended learning instructional format addresses that need.

KEYWORDS: *21st century learning, Blended learning, Classroom design, Instructional delivery, Post-secondary, Technology*

Instructional delivery utilizing a blended learning format

Current trends in technology and new strategies in curriculum design have yielded a new methodology for content area course delivery. Blended learning is now being utilized in many colleges and universities to deliver instruction with a balanced approach in mind. Blended learning unites the best of both worlds in instructional delivery. It combines the face to face classroom experience with a digital education environment. Recent studies indicate that this method of instruction is noteworthy. According to a US Department

of Education study (Means et al., 2010), the combining of an on-ground, face to face classroom experience with an online instructional environment resulted in distinct benefits over a total face to face instructional delivery model or a complete online instructional environment. The balance of pedagogy, curriculum, and learning in a blended environment has been embraced by the contemporary, post-secondary student body.

The college student of the 21st century has a distinct set of needs that is a challenge for the current post-secondary education model to address. Online learning offers the opportunity for a student to acquire knowledge at any time and almost anywhere. This flexibility has attracted many post-secondary students who expect learning opportunities to be personalized, individualized, and be available with unlimited access. In contrast, the traditional face to face format of on-ground classes offers a humanistic approach to learning. Students receive immediate feedback and support from the instructor during class as well as in response to graded assignments. The face to face format has a rigid schedule which becomes a problem for a student with limited availability.

According to Frey, Fisher and Pumpian (2013) blended learning is a viable format for instructional delivery of a particular educational program. Learning is accomplished to some extent on-line and in part on ground in a classroom setting. The majority of the learning happens in an actual brick and mortar building with follow up instruction supported through technology. Students have some discretion and choice in regard to the direction and pace of the learning. In addition, there is some flexibility in designating a time and place for the learning to occur. A blended learning format expands the boundaries of instructional delivery beyond the traditional face to face classroom model and offers technology based opportunities to learn and enhance new skills and concepts.

Blended learning characteristics

A blended learning environment unites two distinct elements of instructional delivery to form an educational platform that is conducive to the contemporary post-secondary student. The two elements of blended learning that are combined are on-line instruction and a face to face, traditional classroom model (Vaughn, 2007). The combination of online and face to face learning models allows for in depth learning that requires research, evaluation, synthesis and application on the part of the student. Instructors using the blended learning design have the ability to utilize a variety of instructional methodologies and techniques. The blended learning format promotes a shift from the traditional lecture format to a more interactive learning environment for students. Overall student engagement tends to increase using the blended learning format.

Pros and cons of blended learning

Instructional perspective on blended learning tends to be very positive. In a study conducted at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee; instructional staff overwhelmingly chose to continue in a blended learning format after having piloted the program (Vaughn, 2007). The instructional staff cited the reasons for this enthusiastic response to blended learning as the following:

- A high-level of interaction between the students and the instructor

- Greater flexibility in offering the student a conducive academic environment coupled with the appropriate form of instructional delivery
- A pronounced increase in student engagement with regards to the learning process
- Overall support for ongoing continuous improvement

According to this study done at the University of Wisconsin, some of the main obstacles in teaching in a blended learning format were the following:

- Increased amount of time needed to plan and execute instruction for a blended course as opposed to a course offered in a traditional “on ground” format
- Curriculum revision and redesign to complement the blended learning format
- Additional professional development opportunities for instructors to successfully implement the blended learning format
- A fear on the part of the instructor about losing autonomy over course delivery, instruction, and evaluation (Vaughn, 2007)

Students at the University of Wisconsin that have experienced a blended course format tended to have a positive attitude toward their experiences. Some of the benefits cited were:

- Flexibility with time to complete coursework
- Learner’s ability to be self-directed and control the pace of the curriculum presented
- The convenience of having options for the scheduling of classes
- A decrease in the amount of time spent traveling to and from campus for classes (Vaughn, 2007)

Some of the challenges these students faced with a blended learning format were:

- Students view fewer on ground classes to mean less course work. They did not equate time spent on line with time spent in class listening to a lecture. This phenomenon was true even if the amount of time working online equaled the time spent in a traditional classroom setting
- Time management also became a challenge for the college student since blended courses required that certain online activities be completed during intervals from one face to face class meeting to the next
- Assuming responsibility for the learning process was difficult for many newer college students. Many students were accustomed to a traditional learning environment, in which students assumed a passive role in the learning process. Many of these students were ill prepared to take on the role of an active, engaged learner necessary for the successful completion of coursework in a blended learning format
- Logistical concerns related to technology were also a factor for a student enrolled in a blended course. Many times there were obstacles with website addresses, login information, computer hardware, and other issues related to technology that are needed to complete the online portion of the blended course (Vaughn, 2007)

Administrators at the University of Wisconsin tended to embrace the blended learning model. They

believed that it offered opportunities to enhance the overall educational organization for both students and faculty. The following were some of the benefits of utilizing a blended learning format to present curriculum and deliver instruction:

- Enhanced an institutions reputation by improving and diversifying the instructional learning environment for students
- It allowed for a university to offer a greater number of course offerings in various disciplines of study
- Provided cost reduction measures by reducing the necessary funds for course allocations while allowing the student enrollment to increase
- Allowed for course savings in the reduction of instructional classroom space
- When partnered with technology, blended courses offered cost reductions in the following areas: course management, on-line assessments, tutorials, common shared resources, and staffing flexibility (Vaughn, 2007)

These administrators cited several areas of difficulty when attempting to implement the blended learning model as a course delivery option:

- Aligning instructional objectives and priorities
- Resistance to institutional reorganization and change by faculty and staff
- Lack of experience with collaboration as members of a learning community for students, faculty, and administration (Vaughn, 2007)

Conclusion

The purpose of blended learning is not to completely replace on-ground classroom instruction with online educational experiences. However, the goal is to offer the college student the best features each instructional format has to offer (Frey, Fisher, Pumpian, 2013). The blended learning format provides new avenues in curriculum design and instructional delivery. This methodology utilizes a contemporary technological platform. This format truly facilitates the student to become a self-directed learner. Research shows the utilization of blended learning, which encompasses face to face and digital platform instruction, results in positive perceptions for both the learner and the instructor. In contrast, there is a negative view on the part of the learner when instruction is delivered in a pure on-line format (Adam and Nel, 2009). Further research on the dynamics of blended learning will guarantee that the instructional design and implementation of this innovative learning design will address the academic needs of the post- secondary student (Percival, Muirhead, 2009). The 21st century student requires a flexible learning path that is individualized and available on demand.

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Sintesi

Gli attuali trend tecnologici e strategici nella progettazione curricolare evidenziano la crescente necessità di una metodologia aggiornata nell'erogazione dei contenuti didattici. Attualmente il Blended Learning viene utilizzato in numerosi College e università per erogare corsi in base ad un approccio bilanciato. Questo formato apre quindi nuove prospettive nella progettazione dei programmi universitari e nella gestione della didattica. Il Blended Learning può unire il meglio dei due mondi che compongono la formazione post-secondaria, combinando l'esperienza in presenza nella classe, con quella virtuale in ambienti di apprendimento digitali; e promuove l'evoluzione dal modello classico della lezione frontale verso un modello più vario e ricco sul piano dell'interattività e della multimedialità. Dal punto di vista didattico, la valutazione del modello Blended è generalmente positiva, ampiamente adottato da molti educatori a livello universitario. Esso inoltre è apprezzato dagli studenti, che cercano sempre più forme di apprendimento di qualità che siano anche flessibili, individualizzate e disponibili on demand.