DEVELOPING AND TEACHING AN ONLINE / IN-CLASS HYBRID: A DEMONSTRATION

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ABSTRACT

In a hybrid course, some class meetings are held online, and some class meetings are conducted in-person in the classroom. Although hybrid courses appear to capture the best of both real and virtual worlds, the development of a high quality hybrid course and the decision processes involved in conducting one effectively requires consideration of factors that are not usually issues for in-person courses and that are not necessarily present in courses taught entirely online. The purpose of this demonstration is to present key considerations for developing hybrid courses and to demonstrate ways to build instructor competence with preparing and teaching using a hybrid format. A summary of the content for each of these sections is provided below, and these lists will be provided to session attendees as handouts.

INTRODUCTION

Differences between teaching online and teaching in-person, in a classroom, are a popular focus of study and discussion, and many of these differences are fairly obvious: Most online teaching formats lack the advantages of nonverbal, face-to-face, real-time, group-level communication, and communication dynamics such as pace and timing may be difficult to replicate online. Asynchronous threaded discussions, which provide the most practical means of interaction in an online course involving more than a few students, can quickly become complex and difficult to follow unless discussants (students) have some degree of proficiency in posting messages and developing meaningful threads. In contrast, in-person teaching makes use of more channels of communication (e.g., verbal, paralinguistic, nonverbal) and potentially enables richer interaction and involvement of more students at the same time. However, the record of what was said by whom may be less clear and enduring in person as compared to online. In addition, online discussions may draw out comments from students who may be more reticent in the classroom. It may be possible to take advantage of potential benefits while avoiding shortcomings associated with teaching online by developing hybrid online / in-class courses.

In a hybrid course, some class meetings are held online and some class meetings are conducted in-person in the classroom. In addition, a variety of course materials can be distributed to students using the online format, and supplementary information, activities, and resources can also be provided online, freeing up classroom time for instruction and interaction that capitalizes on the face-to-face environment. Hybrid courses appear to capture the best of both real and virtual worlds, and such courses may be perceived by students as convenient, modern, and flexible.

The development of a high quality hybrid course and the decision processes involved in conducting one effectively requires consideration of factors that are not usually issues for in-person courses and that are not necessarily present in courses taught entirely online. Instructors who might opt to teach a hybrid course would benefit from the experience of developing and teaching courses offered entirely online in order to better understand and capitalize on the strengths of web-based courses. However, gaining this experience, which would include exposure to the both pros and cons of online teaching, may be a rather cumbersome approach to building competence with hybrid courses. The purpose of this demonstration is to present key considerations for developing hybrid courses and to demonstrate ways to prepare course materials and to teach using a hybrid format.

In addition to more than 12 years experience in resident instruction, I have developed three online courses and I participated in the development of the curriculum for a large university's online MBA degree program. I began teaching courses online three years ago, in the year 2000. More recently, in order to capitalize on the strengths of each teaching medium, I have developed and taught hybrid courses in which students enrolled in traditional resident courses complete a portion of the course online. If Internet access at the conference is possible, I will demonstrate portions of the online component of an MBA-level hybrid course in Human Resource Management that I have taught.

In this conference session, I will discuss the advantages of in-class and online modes of instruction, facilitate a questions and answers (Q & A) period regarding issues and decisions that instructors of hybrid courses are likely to encounter, offer guidelines and considerations for *developing* hybrid courses, and offer guidelines for *teaching* hybrid courses. A summary of the content for each of these sections is provided below, and these lists will be provided to session attendees as handouts. Session discussion will emphasize a few of the points in each list, according to the interest and involvement of attendees. The main focus of the session will be on the Q&A and "Guidelines" sections.

ADVANTAGES OF TEACHING IN THE CLASSROOM

- provides immediate feedback in exchanges between and among students and the instructor

- provides nonverbal and paralinguistic information to augment communication and understanding
- allows the instructor greater control over the pace of information exchange and other interaction dynamics
- allows for quick changes in the focus of the discussion
- responses to one person's questions can be heard by all at the same time
- characteristics of individuals in the class (e.g., personality, communication style, values, mood) are more apparent to others in the class during interaction

ADVANTAGES OF TEACHING ONLINE

- offers convenience to students regarding class attendance
- provides convenience to students regarding class notes
- creates a record of online interaction and documents varying degrees of class participation
- may encourage more reticent students to participate in class discussion
- allows students and the instructor to introduce electronic documents and provide links to Internet resources for everyone to examine and discuss
- requires at least a minimum level of involvement from all students who log on
- presents a high-technology image regarding instructor competence and university resources
- permits students to edit and submit fairly coherent questions and comments
- information and comments posted by students and the instructor can be viewed ("heard") by everyone in the class
- can help to quickly establish a positive, professional teacher-student relationship

Q&A: ISSUES AND DECISIONS CONFRONTED WITH HYBRID COURSES

Note: Some answers to the following questions are proposed below, and several of the questions are also answered in the guidelines section of this paper. However, during the demonstration, the presenter will first solicit ideas from session attendees in response to the following important questions regarding hybrid courses.

- *How much information from a course should be uploaded to the online classroom?*
  When I teach a hybrid course, I upload my notes for every class meeting, whether online or in-person, to the course web site. Instructors who use slides or handout can also upload this information to a course web site for students to access and download prior to coming to class.
- *What proportion of classroom interaction should occur online in a hybrid course?*
  It is worth noting here that online information (as referred to above) is not the same as online interaction. It is attending class online and interacting with course materials, with the instructor, and with other students that distinguishes a hybrid course from an in-person course with supplementary information provided online. In my hybrid classes, one-

third to one-half of the course is conducted online. The ideal proportion of online interaction depends on the nature of the course, the format for in-class participation, and student and instructor preferences.

- *How can I evaluate levels of class participation in either mode?*
  At a minimum, attendance is required for class participation for an in-person class. Similarly, most courseware allows an instructor to track course log-ins and access/downloads by students. I actually define "A," "B," and "C" quality participation in my course syllabus, and these apply to either online or in-class participation. It is useful for instructors to consider the extent to which sufficient or good participation in a course entails direct interaction between each student and the instructor.
- *What skills do students need to develop in order to have meaningful, relevant discussions online?*
  Students need to understand how to post messages, post responses (i.e., reply to messages), and to follow (and/or change) discussion threads using subject headings. Students also need to appreciate the importance and value of responding to each others' comments and questions, rather than simply posting their own unique ideas on a message board. Finally, students need to develop a sense of asynchronous timing, which means that discussion threads may overlap in some places and may seem to take a while to develop in others.
- *What skills do instructors need to develop in order offer hybrid classes?*
  There is certainly skill involved in developing materials that are easily understood when students download them, and content that requires some involvement from students (e.g., self-tests, surveys, class polls) is a plus in making a course website more interesting to visit and use. Another important skill that instructors can develop for hybrid courses is their online facilitation skill, accompanied by a clear understanding of their own preferences and courseware use patterns.
- *What technological features of online courseware enhance the quality of online courses?*
  To name just a few: a editable course welcome page (the first thing students see when they log on to an online course) that includes announcements from the instructor; message boards that allow everyone to upload attachments within discussion threads; quiz, survey, and class poll tools; tracking tools that let an instructor know where students have gone in a course (and summary information can be very helpful with this tracking as well); and a "what's new" tool that gives users quick access to newly posted information.
- *What techniques can an instructor use to develop students' online interaction abilities and enhance the quality of online discussion?*
  First, in the classroom, the instructor needs to show students what a good discussion thread looks like and how they can create one. Second, the instructor needs to establish a protocol that students should use when accessing the online portion of the class. Finally, when in-person class meetings resume (or follow online class meetings), the instructor

should provide procedural as well as content-related feedback to students regarding their online interaction and use of online materials. This feedback need not be elaborate in terms of using up precious classroom time, but it should be focused on what students did well and it should provided specific suggestions, corrections, and information.

- *What are the potential pitfalls and disadvantages associated with hybrid courses?*
  Just as not all students enjoy coming to class, not all students like online class meetings. Some students may be intimidated by the online format. Some students may feel as though they have little to contribute to a threaded discussion, and yet the courseware may not be able to track their "observation" unless actual participation (i.e., posting a response) occurs. Poorly managed, online class meetings within a course may be perceived as missed classes, not actual class meetings that take place in an alternative format. In addition to negative perceptions, some course content may be inappropriate for online presentation, and less learning may occur as a result. These potential pitfalls and disadvantages warrant more careful study and outcomes assessment.

GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPING HYBRID COURSES: TECHNOLOGICAL GUIDELINES

Note: These guidelines will be supported by a demonstration from an actual hybrid course in MBA-level Human Resource Management.

- Personal web sites can be used as courseware, but many prepared courseware packages are available, too.
- Look for courseware that provides the opportunity (for students and the instructor) to upload attachments to message boards
- Look for courseware that organizes information and message boards such that uploaded notes and documents are presented in the same perceived virtual space (e.g., a named folder) as message boards (i.e., threaded discussions).
- Look for courseware that allows the instructor (and students) to download completed message boards into documents that can be edited and saved.
- Look for courseware that allows the instructor to move items posted by students to a message board (i.e., within a threaded discussion).
- Consider using courseware that provides a secure site.
- Consider using courseware that allows the instructor to password-protect certain or all files and access points.
- Consider using courseware that allows students, teams, and the instructor to edit the same document.
- Request the editing privileges within the courseware to alter the presentation of pages and folders within an online course. An editable course welcome page that can include announcements and instructions to students is helpful.

GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPING HYBRID COURSES: CHOOSING MATERIALS FOR CLASSROOM VERSUS ONLINE PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

Note: These guidelines will be supported by a demonstration from an actual hybrid course in MBA-level Human Resource Management.

- Preserve for classroom presentation discussions of highly controversial topics, topics that students usually have many questions about, and information that requires heavy use of the whiteboard to demonstrate "how to" do something. Present complex information in the classroom, and use courseware to distribute class notes and supplementary information. Students may appreciate having class notes available prior to a in-person class meeting.
- Topics that relate to current events or public/government data, and topics that already utilize links to Internet web pages (e.g., a case company's web site) are particularly suitable for online class meetings. In addition, students might also have electronic documents and resources related to certain topics, and the online message board may permit students to upload attachments within discussion threads. Topics that most individuals know at least a little about also tend to be good for online discussion. These topics, discussed online, may draw out students who are more reticent in the classroom; they may also require some more careful online facilitation by the instructor, however, in order to advance students' understanding and encourage learning related to the topic.
- Upload lesson summaries and class notes, glossaries of terms that help to provide a common language to discuss course topics, and electronic versions of handouts. Be mindful of restrictions regarding the use of copyrighted materials online.
- Use surveys, quizzes, and class polls to focus students' attention on key ideas.
- Keep it simple: Be mindful of the fact that many students will access the online course using modems of varying speeds. Heavy use of graphics, flash animation, and large files can take a long time to load and may not always appear as intended.
- Format uploaded materials in html, or use a software package that all students could be expected to have, such as MS PowerPoint or MS Word.
- In addition to instructor notes and handouts, prepare and post subject headings and starter questions on message boards in advance of each online class meeting.
- An appropriately updated welcome page, complete with announcements and instructions about "where to go" online for each online class meeting, helps to establish online classroom norms and the educational atmosphere desired by the instructor.

GUIDELINES FOR TEACHING HYBRID COURSES

Note: These guidelines will be supported by a demonstration from an actual hybrid course in MBA-level Human Resource Management.

- Prior to students' first online class meeting, demonstrate in-class not only how to use the courseware, but the optimal protocol for how to participate online. In particular, be sure that students understand that they will need to log on to the course website more than once, and that discussion must end by a certain date *prior to* the next in-class meeting. For example, for a class that is scheduled to meet on Tuesdays and Thursdays, I would arrange to have the class meet online from Thursday until Monday at 6:00 p.m. in place of meeting in the classroom on Thursday. Students would be required to log on by midnight, Friday to download notes, complete any online assignments, and post a message or response if appropriate. Students would be required to log on again to post any additional responses by Monday. Students would need to agree not to post any new responses to a threaded discussion after 6:00 p.m. on Monday. Provide a handout to students that describes any important courseware information and this protocol for online participation.

- Provide students with a clear description of how you will assess in-class attendance and participation and how you will assess online attendance and participation. Depending on instructor preferences as well as the tracking capabilities of the courseware used, it may be necessary to require that each student post at least one substantive message or reply in a discussion thread during the online class meeting period.

- Encourage students to reply to each others' postings, and show them how to do this in-class prior to meeting online. Be sure to keep expectations for online interaction on par with expectations regarding in-class interaction.

- Using the online courseware, encourage students to follow subject headings within a discussion thread when appropriate, and show them how to change subject headings when appropriate.

- Maintain a clear "presence" online and use good online facilitation techniques to achieve the desired degree of control over online class interaction. Maintain a similar degree of "presence" and involvement with students when teaching in the classroom.

- Follow-up in the classroom after an online class meeting. This follow-up should include both the instructor's commentary on the process as well as the content of the online meeting. If possible, make a transcript of the threaded discussion available to students.