

Unit

Implementing Blended Learning



Implementing Blended Learning

This unit is designed to be used by those individuals involved in any portion of the implementation process: vice presidents, deans, department chairs, instructors, instructional design, student support, and information technology staff. Not surprisingly, implementing a successful blended learning program depends as much on instructors as it does on other members of an institution's community. Just as a traditional face-to-face instructional environment relies on the registrar, academic advising, orientation teams, and enrollment services, just to name a few, so does a blended environment. This unit will provide an overview of the different institutional components that should be considered and addressed during the implementation phase of a new instructional delivery mode and can also be used to reexamine and streamline existing practices.

Higher education institutions are likely to be motivated to pursue a blended learning instructional environment for a variety of reasons. The blended learning model:

- Is a safe way for instructors or units to explore learning online without launching a fully online program or initiative.
- Offers a way to meet Net Generation student expectations for a more technologically enhanced and pedagogically diverse learning environment that also provides some scheduling alternatives.
- Has the potential to produce cost and time savings (even though developing and teaching a blended course is at least initially more labor intensive), while also improving student engagement, achievement, and access.
- Offers the possibility of varying and flexing the amount of time that learners are expected to spend online and use technology to meet their own needs, as well as curricular and programmatic needs.
- Has the potential—depending on how it is deployed—to reduce the burden on physical space. For instance, twice as many class sections could be accommodated in a model where courses are scheduled to meet

alternatively during the week 50% online and 50% face-to-face.

As noted above, it is important to emphasize that a successful blended learning instructional implementation is correlated with several factors. Success is highly dependent upon an institution's ability to support the blended instructional model and the existence of a high-quality, well-designed (and supported) faculty development program.

Assessing Institutional Readiness for Blended Learning

The questions below fall into various categories relevant to deploying a successful blended learning initiative and can be helpful in beginning a conversation involving the entire campus community around implementation.

Institutional Planning

- Is blended learning a good fit with the character and mission of the institution? Has the mission of the institution evolved to include blended learning? Are the changes that necessitate blended learning evident to the institution's constituents?
- Is blended learning a good fit with the learners' characteristics? Has the institution collected and analyzed data on learner characteristics on which to base decisions?
- Does the institution have a clear and articulated mission and/or strategic plan for its blended learning initiative? Is the campus community aware of the plan?
- Is there or will there be dedicated leadership support for the blended learning initiative? An office or center, personnel, etc.?
- Is there an articulated and shared vision from top administration to support blended learning? Campus-wide coordination of the initiative?
- Have any plans been formulated to scale or grow a blended learning program? Will there be a course or program pilot to test the model before large-scale implementation?

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Technology Planning

- Does the campus have a robust technological infrastructure with which to support blended learning? For instance, is there ubiquitous, universal access to computing resources? Redundant, reliable network services? Well-equipped campus labs? Will multimedia production support be available?
- Will the program be centrally deployed? By department or unit?
- How will the use of digital materials be accommodated? What, if any, steps will be taken to educate instructors regarding adherence to copyright law and fair use practices?

Marketing

- How will blended learning be marketed internally (instructors, advising, counseling, registrar, student services) and externally (students, community)? Will definitions be consolidated to be clear and simple for anyone to understand? How will those definitions be communicated? Has blended learning as a model been sufficiently differentiated from other e-learning options such as online or technology-enhanced instruction? Have your definitions or terms been tested on users (i.e., students) so that you have some feedback regarding their clarity?
- Will there be complementary research and analysis support for the blended learning initiative? In other words, will data be collected to assess the effectiveness of the program over time?

Instructor Support

- Is there a demonstrated or evident level of instructor interest in pursuing blended learning as an instructional delivery mode? How is that interest contributing to the deployment of the initiative?
- Does or will the institution demonstrate a commitment to instructors support via incentives, rewards, or support for designing and preparing to teach in the blended mode? For instance, will there be release time, stipends, or a reduced teaching load at any point during the design and development phases?
- What will be the nature of the blended learning faculty development program?

Quality Assurance

- What mechanisms can be explored and implemented to ensure that high-quality standards are met in all blended learning courses? How will instructors be able to assess the quality of their courses? Will course peer review be available? How will quality be communicated to students and accrediting agencies?

Learner Support

- How will students taking blended courses be supported? Will there be 24 x 7 help desk support? Will tutoring and advising be scheduled at various hours and be available online? What, if any, web-based campus services will be offered?
- Will a student orientation to blended learning be available? How will that orientation be completed? Will it take place before students enroll in or begin a blended course?
- How will the institution ensure that students have appropriate equipment to succeed in a blended environment? For instance, will students need to own a computer, or will regular access to a computer lab be sufficient?

Blended Learning Faculty Development Implementation

As can be inferred from above, a critical component of a successful blended learning initiative involves an effective and efficient faculty development program. Institutionalizing a central program means that you implement an offering that is coordinated and integrated with the blended initiative. In other words, a process is in place that leads to or culminates

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in teaching in a blended environment—as opposed to an uncoordinated, disjointed effort where instructors might or might not participate in development and support opportunities. A coordinated program has a greater likelihood of producing efficiencies and positive outcomes such as discipline-based communities to support blended learning, an ongoing dialogue of experiences related to successful blended learning, peer evaluation processes, and coordinated support among others. Other benefits include:

- Creating an experiential learning opportunity for participants
- Enabling of cross-discipline sharing of blended teaching techniques
- Building blended learning communities of practice among the instructors
- Enabling systemic peer evaluation of successes and challenges
- Creating an institutional culture of ongoing learning and development in this area
- Reflection and discussion around blended learning and teaching best practices

Some questions to be considered for instructors:

- Will instructors be required to complete any kind of blended learning support opportunities prior to teaching a blended course? Will the requirement depend on whether or not an instructor has previously taught an online or blended course? If so, what is the necessary length of experience?
- Will instructors have to apply to teach a blended course? Will they be required to teach in this mode regardless of preference, or will it be optional?
- Will instructors be required to have any prior experience, teaching in either a blended or online format, to teach a blended course?
- Will instructors be offered release time from their current course load to prepare or convert a course into a blended format? Will they be given additional compensation to do so?
- Will courses be developed or converted into a blended format by individual instructors or

by a team of instructors? Will an institution compensate several instructors to develop the same course?

- How will blended courses be reviewed or maintained once they've been developed?
- Will a mentorship program be explored in which instructors can support each other during course development and as they deliver the course? Will mentorship happen in various disciplinary areas such as math, English, humanities, sciences, etc.?
- Will faculty development take place as a two-step process in which the instructors first design their course and then deliver it?

A successful blended learning faculty development program will have several components. As you begin to assemble such a program, consider the following list as a starting point to which you might add:

- Blended learning definitions
- Determining instructor readiness for the blended learning instructional environment
- Writing learning objectives
- Module development
- Course redesign strategies
- Assessment techniques
- Using rubrics
- Effective use of learning technologies (Web 2.0 and learning management system)
- Student readiness for the blended learning environment
- Student success
- Student crisis points
- Student teams and other collaborations
- Academic integrity online
- Copyright issues
- Building community
- Online discussions

Potential Implementation Costs

Not surprisingly, a successful blended learning program might have several associated costs. Below is a suggested list of what some of those costs might include, which will vary depending on the institution's experience with blended and online learning and on its implementation

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preferences.

Instructors

- Course redesign time
- Release time from some courses during pilot semester
- Orienting to model and development of courses

Course redesign resources

- Media specialists
- Instructional designers
- Instructional technologists
- Information technology

Infrastructure

- Labs
- Wireless
- Software
- Help desk
- Developing or purchasing online resources

Student success

- Determining and supporting readiness
- Advising
- Orientation
- Online services (i.e., tutoring, advising, library)

For institutions that have no existing blended learning courses, examining these issues and planning around them together with their campus community can be invaluable in launching a successful program from the start. However, it is more likely that over the years, an institution has had several early blended learning adopters and now has many “cells” of blended courses scattered throughout the curriculum, some of which institutional leaders might not even be aware. In fact, it is not unusual for an institution to have significant variation in the way blended learning is defined and deployed. While such variation is common and, to some extent, healthy in the early innovation phase, over time it may be advantageous to conduct a review of existing

courses. Some institutions are motivated to do so for a number of reasons: to prepare for an accreditation review; to attempt to streamline course offerings, definitions, and formats; to improve course quality; or to revise curriculum. Regardless of the situation, creating a successful experience for the learner requires support from the entire campus community.