

Blended Learning A User's Guide

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EDUC 6125

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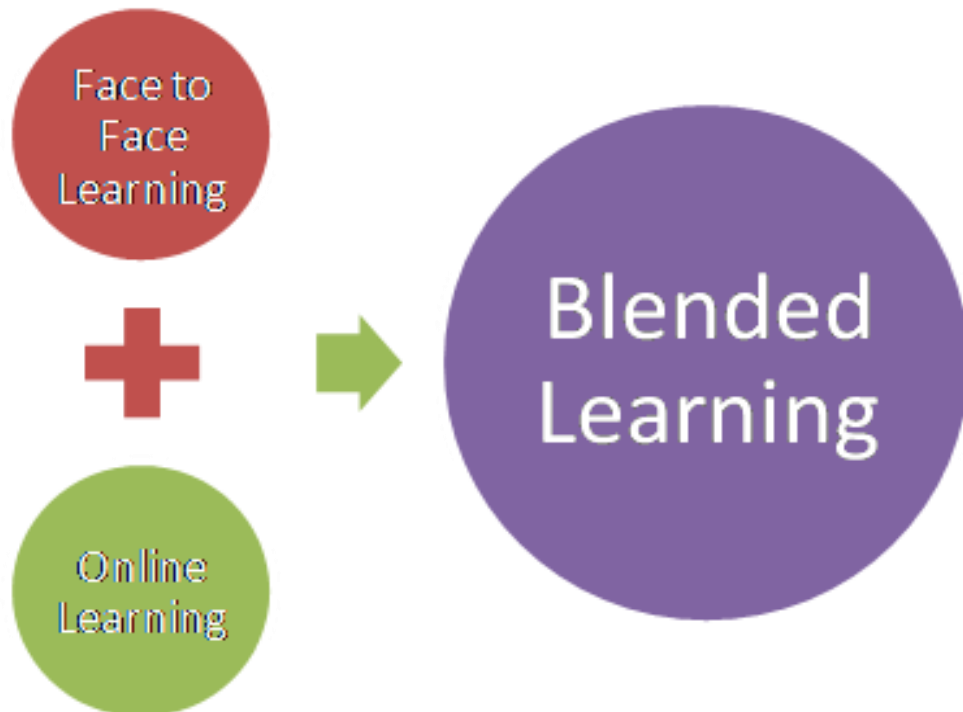
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Blended Learning: Defined

What is Blended Learning?

Blended courses (also known as hybrid or mixed-mode courses) are classes where a portion of the traditional face-to-face instruction is replaced by web-based online learning (UCF, AASCU, & NGLC, 2016).

Blended learning is not the same as technology-rich instruction. It goes beyond one-to-one computers and high-tech gadgets. Blended learning involves leveraging the Internet to afford each student a more personalized learning experience, including increased student control over the time, place, path, and/or pace of learning (Christensen Institute, n.d.)



Why Blend?











In many cases, the act of “blending” achieves better student experiences and outcomes, and more efficient teaching and course management practices. It can involve a mix of delivery modes, teaching approaches and learning styles.

Advances in technology provide new opportunities for teachers to design and deliver their courses in ways that support and enhance the teachers’ role, the students’ individual cognitive experiences, as well as the social environment; three key elements in successful learning and teaching. Blended learning technologies can:

- Broaden the spaces and opportunities available for learning;
- Support course management activities (e.g., communication, assessment submission, marking and feedback);
- Support the provision of information and resources to students;
- Engage and motivate students through interactivity and collaboration.

Blended learning isn’t just about using technology but about finding a better way of supporting students in achieving the learning objectives and providing them with experiences that guide them is the best possible learning and teaching (Christensen Institute, n.d.).

10 DRIVERS OF BLENDED LEARNING

 1	Improve ability to personalize learning	 2	Potential for individual progress	 3	Improve student engagement and motivation	 4	Shift to online state tests starting in 2015	 5	Need to extend time and stretch resources
 6	Potential to extend the reach of effective teachers	 7	Ability to improve working conditions	 8	Decrease device costs	 9	Student and parent adoption of learning apps	 10	Interest in narrowing the digital divide

The Process of Blended Learning:

Planning

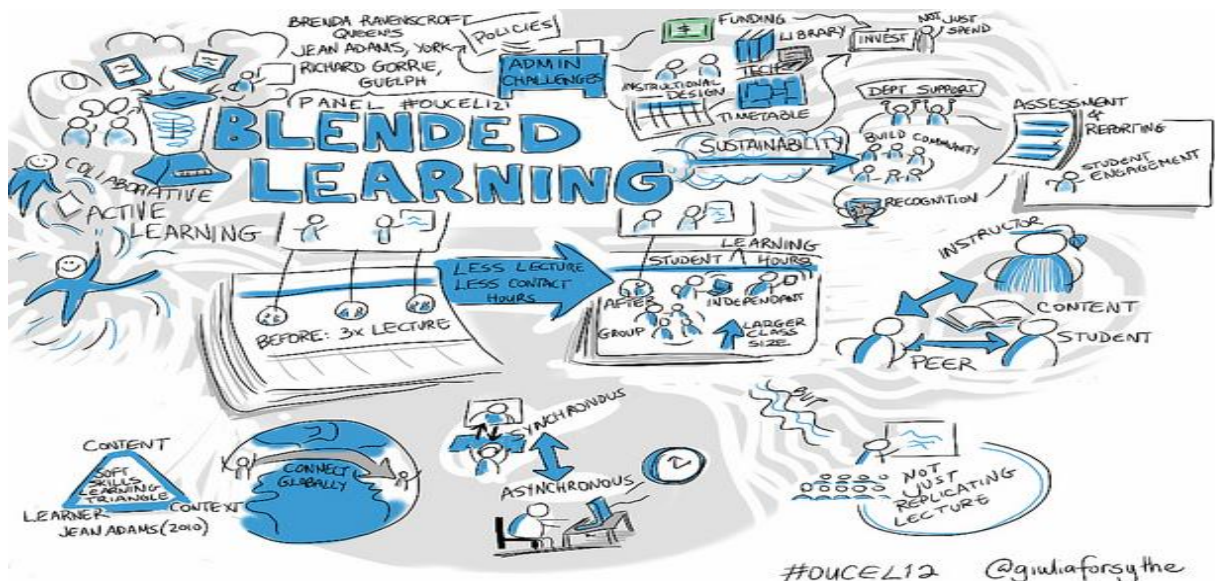
Planning is the first stage of the design process and it is a crucial component to the ultimate success of your course. As with any curriculum, the learning and teaching activities need to be meaningful and relevant for the students' learning. They also need to be clearly valued and supported by the teacher, and well integrated into the whole course experience (Christensen Institute, n.d.).

Good preparation and decision making is essential not only for efficient use of your time in the construction and maintenance of your resources, but also for the creation of quality learning experiences for your learners (Christensen Institute, n.d.).

What is your situation?

As an instructor of a blended learning course, there are many things to consider before jumping into designing the blended learning components of your course, for instance:

- Are you developing a new course?
- Are you taking on an existing course or redesigning a course you have previously taught?

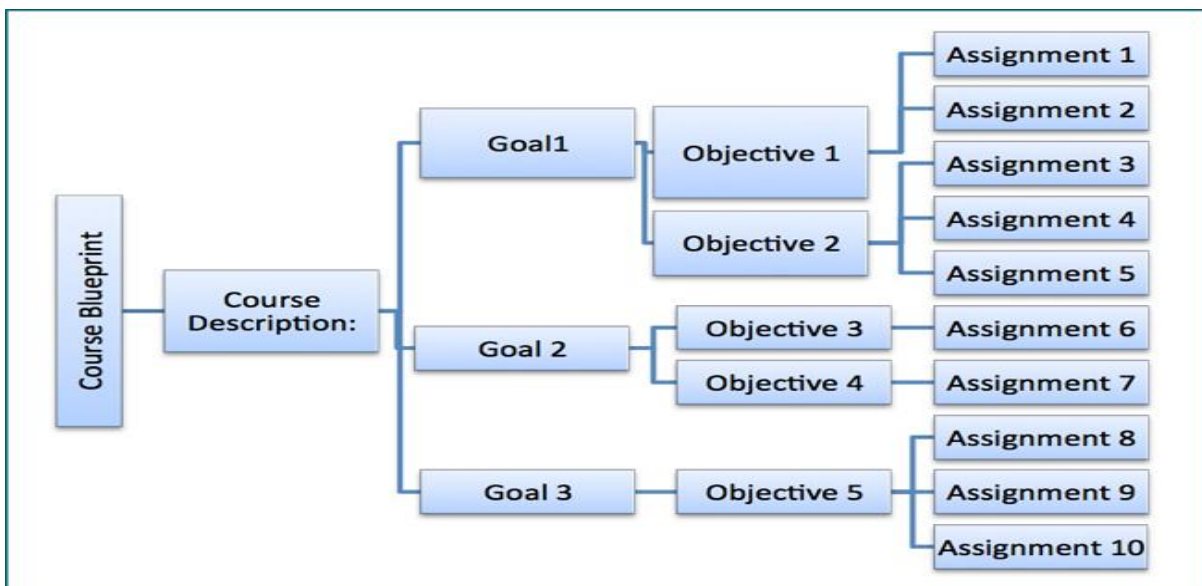


Course Blueprint

The combination of face-to-face and online environments in blended learning offers a unique set of opportunities and challenges in the course design process. Although many factors intervene in successfully building your blended course, defining your teaching, and learning philosophy at first lays a solid foundation for the development of a quality course. Knowing where you stand on what constitutes teaching and learning will help you envision the protocols and strategies throughout the life of a course from its creation to its delivery (UCF, AASCU, & NGLC, 2016).

Before delving into the type of content or technology to incorporate in your blended course, charting the direction to pursue is fundamental. A course blueprint provides such direction which will prove useful while designing, building and delivering the blended course. Generally, a course blueprint encompasses four elements as follows (UCF, AASCU, & NGLC, 2016). :

1. Course description: portrays what the course is going to cover. Institutional course catalogs are a great starting point to convey and describe the course you are building for your learners.
2. General course goals: outlines the overarching targets and focus of the course.
3. Learning objectives: defines the desired measurable learning objectives students will achieve upon course completion.
4. Learning outcomes: defines the means through which students will demonstrate proficiency in learning and realizing the objectives established for the course.



Critical Success Factors

Critical success factors when building your blended course entail the proper combination of teaching and learning strategies for you as the facilitator of learning, your students, and the learning environment. The key areas to bear in mind as you build your course are (UCF, AASCU, & NGLC, 2016):

Instructional Method:

The question to ask is how the specific learning objective at hand can be delivered most effectively. That is, determine whether the content or interaction of the course should be addressed in the face-to-face class session, online, or both. The one caveat to keep in mind is to avoid unintended replication that could be perceived as pointless by your students.

Organization of the Course Content and Supporting Materials:

Consider what constitutes the most suitable sequencing and transition between the online and face-to-face portions of your blended course. Other elements to consider are if you should adopt existing content of your own or a publisher's packaged course. The key is to organize the content of your course in a complementary way while filling in the existing gaps.

Defining a Course Interaction and Assessment Strategy:

Determining the types of activities, assignments, interactive exercises and assessment is crucial as students need to understand the applicability of what they are learning. Providing sufficient examples and opportunities to practice the knowledge and skills they are acquiring is key for their self-assessment and your assessment on whether they are closer to achieving the proficiency expected of them. For instance, watching a video segment prior to class could lay the foundation for a class discussion. Online discussions can be used to carry on a conversation that students found very interesting during a class session. Games could be used as a starter to a conversation or to self-assess. The possibilities are endless.

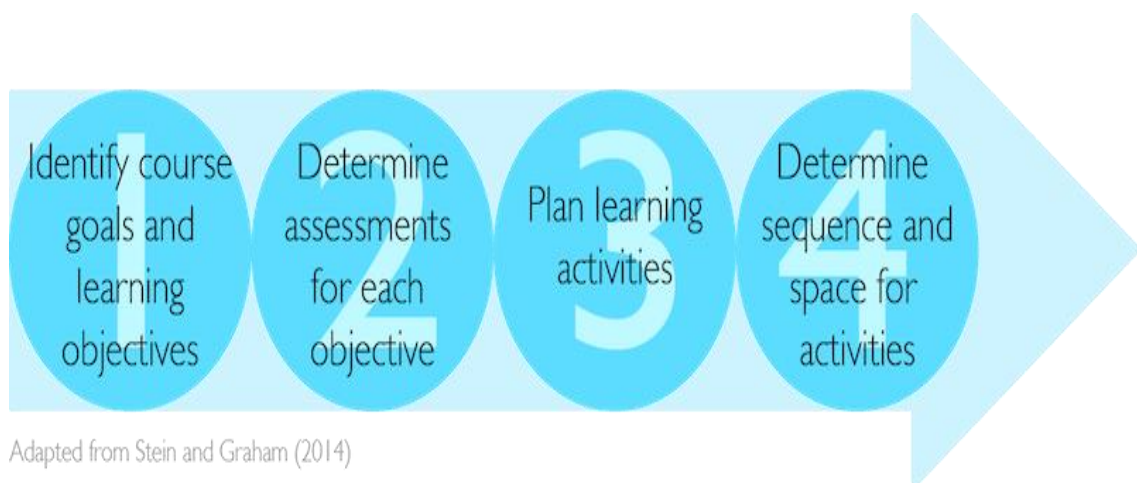


Communication:

Communication and feedback are crucial in building a quality and satisfactory blended learning experience. Some of the most successful communication approaches encourage plenty of appropriate student-to-faculty contact; collaboration and interaction among students; prompt feedback; and communication of expectations and protocols from the very beginning of the course. The key is to be cognizant of the diverse needs and talents of students through a consistent and clear communication strategy, whether online or face-to-face.

Logistical Considerations:

Lastly, for a comprehensive approach to building a blended course, awareness of the technologies, services, and support available to you and your students can be very valuable. For instance, knowing the protocols of your institution's technical support can shape your communication strategy in terms of how promptly your students can get additional help when a technology problem arises. If your institution's library or writing center provides modules and other materials, you could incorporate such content in your blended course. Referrals to services across the campus are most useful to your students as an extension of your role as a facilitator of learning.



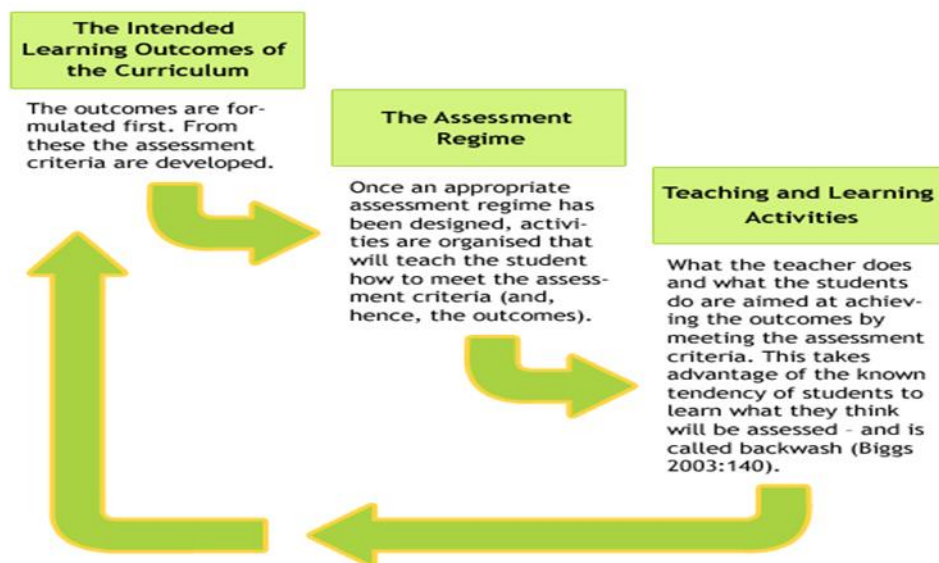
Adapted from Stein and Graham (2014)

Design, Developing and Delivery

A well-designed blended course is not as simple as dividing your course into face-to-face and online components.

General Design Principles

1. Course learning objectives, teaching and learning activities and assessment tasks need to correspond with each other. They should guide the design of your course rather than technology.
2. Activities should be purposeful, and where appropriate and possible, authentic. Create activities that require students to engage in the course content and with each other.



3. Keep It Simple Starting (KISS)
Professor Stephen Lytle of UCF came up with this variation on the KISS acronym.
 - His advice is to start with a few technology tools that integrate well into your course.
 - Make sure you understand the active-learning strategies associated with the tool so you use it appropriately and don't create extra work for yourself or your students.
 - You can add additional activities and technology tools to your course in subsequent semesters.

4. Teaching and learning activities need to be clearly linked in time and content.
5. The workload for a blended learning course should not exceed that of a course in traditional mode.
6. Keep in proportion the time, effort and resources involved in developing blended learning in relation to the impact or importance in the course. Make sure you allocate sufficient time to redesign your course.
7. Find experienced blended faculty willing to share their experiences. The exchange of ideas is beneficial to both parties (UCF, AASCU, & NGLC, 2016).
8. Organize the sequence of activities logically and be consistent (UCF, AASCU, & NGLC, 2016).

Your blended learning elements should be integrated into the whole course experience. As part of the design and development phase, your course blueprint should express the elements of the course in relationship to one another and how they will be sequenced across the duration of the course (UCF, AASCU, & NGLC, 2016).

Student Expectations

(UCF, AACSB, & NGLC, 2016)

Blended Concept

Students don't always understand the concept of a blended course and the relationship between the classroom and online components. Clearly state the rationale for your course design and the relationship of the components.

Active Learning

Some students don't have the maturity to understand their responsibility in active learning strategies. You need to specify their responsibilities and the consequences of failure.

Time Management

Some students need help with time management. They may need assistance to develop these skills.

Classroom vs. Home

Some students need help understanding the concept of "reduced seat time." They do not consider time in the classroom to be "work". However, time spent online outside the classroom is "work" and they have more "work" at home in a blended course.



Content and Resources

When utilizing technology it can allow the content to be accessible and flexible to everyone. The following sections outline when and how you might incorporate online contents in your course (Christensen Institute, n.d.).

Lecture Materials

Uploading lecture notes and presentation files to a course web site is a common practice and a very effective way to provide students with ongoing access to these resources.

Lecture Recordings

The recording of lectures is fast becoming common practice in many universities. Generally, this means the recordings of audio and whatever is projected on the screen (e.g. PowerPoint slides).

Virtual Classroom

A real time, online classroom environment that allows individuals to use audio and video to present such as a PowerPoint presentation to a live audience. Other features include interactive questioning, small group “breakout rooms”, sharing applications and documents, and an e-whiteboard.

Webcasts

Media (audio and video) broadcast over the internet.

Digitized readings/documents

Documents are digitized and made accessible online subject to copyright provisions (journal articles, book chapters, tutorial guides, work booklets, etc).

Wiki

A webpage or multiple web pages where users can collaborate to create and edit content including text, images and multimedia elements.

Blog

A web site to which individuals can contribute text, graphics and video.

Discussion forums

An asynchronous communication tool in which discussion forums are created for participants to post and reply to messages over time.

Webcasting

Media (audio and/or video) broadcast over the internet.

E-portfolio

An e-portfolio, or a digital portfolio, is essentially a web-supported repository allowing an individual to create a collection of digital objects that demonstrate their experiences, achievements and evidence of learning.

Assessment

Blended learning offers a range of ways in which learning activities can be incorporated into the course assessment program.

Why blend assessment?

- To monitor student progress frequently and more easily
- To motivate students to engage in learning in an ongoing manner by using online activities scheduled as part of the course curriculum.
- To make managing and administering assessment more time efficient and accurate.



Implementation

Kenny and Newcombe described the tasks that faculty must accomplish and the multiple roles that faculty need to play in the course transformation process. The tasks include: re-examining course goals; developing online and face-to-face activities that are integrated and aligned with the goals; finding ways to assess students' understanding and mastery of the course material; and creating ways for students to interact.

Faculty must take on pedagogical, social, managerial, and technological roles as they implement the method. Pedagogically, instructors become guides and facilitators of learning rather than “information suppliers”. Socially they must develop a “collaborative community of learners”. As course managers, they are responsible for scheduling activities, determining due dates, and grading assignments, and technologically they set up, maintain, and orient students to the course management system and assist students with technology issues (Kenney & Newcombe, 2011).

Evaluation

As with any course, obtaining feedback about various aspect of the course experience is a crucial part of the course design process, as well as being important to your own ongoing professional development in curriculum design and teaching. Gaining timely and well-tailored feedback will help you review different aspects of the course, and consider where improvements can be made to enhance the course for future iterations (Griffith University, 2010).

Why should I evaluate?

It is not necessary to wait until the very end of a course to conduct an evaluation and obtain feedback from students. Preferably, you should collect feedback for continuous improvement throughout the course so consider building in evaluations at different points throughout (Griffith University, 2010).

What should I evaluate?

Evaluating in the blended learning environment entails the same basic elements of a course, however, because of “blend” and the use of technology, these will present an additional range of issues to gather data about. The model of evaluation for online learning and teaching which is based around the three main principles (Griffith University, 2010):

- Pedagogies – the learning activities which underpin the unit;
- Resources – the content and information which are provided for the learners; and
- Delivery strategies – issues associated with the ways in which the course is delivered to the learners.

Ideally, you would collect information about the blended nature of the course, including such things as accessibility, usability, consistency, and integration, as well as information relating to good pedagogical practices (Griffith University, 2010).

Conclusion

To conclude, the successful creation of a blended course is highly dependent on the ultimate goals and the learning objectives students are to achieve at the end of the course. No one course will be completely perfect. The aim is to build a blended course that balances the best of both worlds, online and face-to-face, to help students achieve the course goals and learning objectives (UCF, AASCU, & NGLC, 2016).

Blended Learning Implementation is quite simple if you have a specific goal oriented plan before you begin. Knowing your resources, knowing your limitations and understanding your student's needs are vital in order to implement a successful plan. Many schools and districts are opting to phase in a Blended Learning approach over time. Making small changes to your instructional practices will lead you towards success, understanding how to reach your students and engage them to become Life Long Learners is only one blended step away (Escobar, n.d.).

Resources

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