Applying a Faculty Learning Community Approach to Implement a University Blended Learning Initiative

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Genesis of Hybrid Program

The Hybrid Course Development Pilot Program was established in 2011 as a joint initiative of Ecampus in the Division of Outreach and Engagement and the Center for Teaching and Learning in the Office of Academic Affairs. Overarching goals of the initiative are 1) to expand uses of technology to promote deeper learning, especially in large courses, 2) to provide students greater flexibility in course scheduling, and 3) to reduce class scheduling pressures.

Process

Through a competitive proposal process, 6 to 9 faculty are chosen each term to participate in a 10-week Hybrid Faculty Learning Community, while each of them redesigns an existing on-campus course as a hybrid course. Academic Affairs provides $3,000 funding for each course redesign.

Structure

The Hybrid Faculty Learning Community uses a hybrid format, thus modeling a blended mode of teaching and learning. The learning community is facilitated by a Center for Teaching and Learning instructional designer. The group has five two-hour group meetings spaced between the 2nd and the 10th weeks of the quarter. The final meeting is a public showcase of the participants’ hybrid course designs. The face-to-face meetings are integrated with online activities using a group Blackboard site.

Group members participate in online and face-to-face discussions, post on the learning community blog, read online resources, view videos, review major blended learning sites for their peers, try new Web 2.0 tools and demonstrate them to colleagues. Group meetings also include guest speakers such as OSU Ecampus course development staff and veteran hybrid instructors, who present on topics ranging from Blackboard tools and techniques, to multimedia authoring, to best practices in hybrid design and delivery.

Beyond group meetings and online activities, participants work individually with the instructional designer to develop syllabi; align course content and assessment with outcomes; develop content; and build Blackboard course sites.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of participation in the Hybrid Faculty Learning Community, participants will be able to:

1. Describe recognized effective practices for design and delivery of a hybrid course, for example, methods to foster student engagement in a blended learning environment.
2. Design a hybrid course syllabus and develop course content that employs effective practices for blended learning, such as techniques to integrate online and face-to-face learning activities and materials.
3. Identify OSU resources—including the Center for Teaching and Learning, Technology Across the Curriculum, and Ecampus Course Development and Training team—and other online resources—such as Sloan-C and Merlot—to support hybrid course development and delivery.
4. Recognize and apply Ecampus policies and procedures applicable to hybrid course development and delivery, such as standards for Blackboard site functionality.
5. Employ fundamental features of the Blackboard learning management system for course delivery, for example, posting announcements and facilitating online discussions.

The Hybrid Faculty Learning Community provides a forum for interdisciplinary interaction, in this instance between Public Health, Liberal Arts and Engineering faculty.

Hybrid Definition and Course Scheduling

The development of officially-recognized hybrid courses through this initiative has necessitated development of an institutional definition for hybrid courses and a standard means of scheduling hybrid courses. A hybrid course blends online components and required face-to-face meetings, and has a substantial portion of the course learning activity is delivered online. Face-to-face meeting time is reduced by at least 40% compared to a traditional on-campus course. Most hybrid courses to date have used a model of one 80-minute weekly classroom meeting. The OSU Registrar’s Office has implemented a system of pairing hybrid courses for scheduling purposes to more efficiently use class space.

Assessment

Participants in the Hybrid Faculty Learning Community complete written self-assessment of their abilities regarding the five program learning outcomes as well as their level of experience using Blackboard features. At the end of the term, they do a written evaluation of the program and again self-assess their achievement of the learning outcomes.

Preliminary analysis of student success in hybrid courses indicates that percentages of students successfully completing hybrid courses with grades of C or higher is equivalent to, or greater than, fully online or traditional classroom sections of the same courses.

Three hybrid instructors have begun formal assessment of student success and engagement in the first offerings of their Hybrid courses compared to fully online and/or traditional classroom versions of their courses.

Structured follow-up interviews are planned with hybrid faculty one year after the first offering of their courses, to assess instructor attitudes regarding the efficacy of blended learning, and whether and how the hybrid learning community, course redesign, and hybrid teaching experience has affected their teaching practice overall.

See the OSU Hybrid Course Initiative webpage (http://oregonstate.edu/ctl/hybrid-course-initiative) and the Hybrid Faculty Learning Community blog (http://blogs.oregonstate.edu/hybridflc) for more information.

What Is a Faculty Learning Community?

“A group of trans-disciplinary faculty . . . of size 6-15 or more . . . engaging in an active, collaborative . . . program with a curriculum about enhancing teaching and learning and with frequent seminars and activities that provide learning development, transdisciplinarity, the scholarship of teaching and learning, and community building.”

---FIPSE Project on Faculty Learning Communities

http://www.units.muohio.edu/flc/whatis.php