

## Hybrid Courses: The Best of Both Worlds

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Hybrid courses are courses in which a significant portion of the learning activities have been moved online, and time traditionally spent in the classroom is reduced but not eliminated. The goal of Hybrid courses is to join the best features of in-class teaching with the best features of online learning to promote active independent learning and reduce class seat time. (Garnham and Kaleta, 2002)

For most people, the term “classroom” evokes images of students at their desks, discussing ideas or listening to a teacher’s presentation. There are many advantages to learning in a face-to-face setting, but the traditional classroom does have non-negotiable limitations. Learning is constrained to fit within a certain time (usually 45-90 minutes several times per week) and space (a generic room or lecture hall). Given these limitations, incentives for experimenting with hybrid teaching are manifold.

Consider the following real-life scenarios:

Scene 1: A group of students are gathered together for a class. On the table in front of each student sits a tumbler filled to the brim with water and one ice cube. They sit, quietly, for the entire class period – watching the ice melt and taking notes in their journals. By the end of the class, students will have written ample observations in their journals, but nobody will have had time to compare notes. The question that nobody dares to ask: is this the most effective use of in-class time?

Scene 2: With rising enrollments, class sizes are increasing each semester. With 120 students, the professor finds it difficult to get to know her students. In addition, some of her assignments work best with smaller groups. She wonders if there is a way to make space for smaller gatherings within the context of large enrollment courses.

Scene 3: A one credit course for seniors meets only once a month. Both students and faculty are frustrated by the loss of momentum that occurs between sessions. What can be done to improve the situation?

Until very recently, educators have had few alternatives for addressing the challenges described above. But with the advent of online courseware, some class time can take place outside the confines of a face-to-face classroom. As opposed to the fully-online context of distance learning, hybrid courses blend face-to-face and online learning, swapping out some face-to-face “seat” time with sessions that take place online.

Faculty members who teach hybrid courses for the first time are usually surprised by how much they learn about their students in a hybrid course setting – even more than in a face-to-face context. Online musings provide insight into students’ lives outside the classroom as well as unvoiced misconceptions about the subject matter. In addition, students often take on additional responsibilities, such as helping out their peers – and their increased initiative can spill over into the face-to-face sessions. In fact, some research studies indicate that hybrid courses can be more successful than either face-to-face or fully-online courses (Center for Distributed Learning, 2001).

Experienced hybrid course developers offer the following suggestions for successful planning and implementation:

1. According to faculty participants in The Hybrid Course Project, "Start early and plan carefully; hybridization is a lot of work." Parsons and Ross state that

Courses taking a hybrid learning approach will require different thinking about what happens in a classroom, and consequently about how a classroom is organized and designed, also about the physical context in which the classroom is situated (Parsons and Ross, 2002).

Hybrid courses come in all shapes and sizes – there's no one "right" way. But with this freedom comes the responsibility to think through, in advance, how the course will unfold online and face-to-face. Don't just post every other session online – take time to redesign the entire course.

2. What do you want your students to learn – and what types of learning experiences will set the stage for this learning? Which of these experiences are ideally suited for independent learning? Which experiences need to take place face-to-face? Which experiences will benefit from the flexible time frame of an online learning environment?

Remember that you're not limited to a choice between face-to-face or online – some of the best assignments interweave face-to-face learning, independent exploration, and online discussion. Peter Sands, a faculty participant in the Hybrid Course Project, offers this advice: "Imagine interactivity rather than delivery."

While information-transfer may be more effective online, simply putting materials up on the web will not guarantee that students engage with and learn from them. For that, you need activities that require students to perform basic academic tasks, such as summary and analysis, and that place them in conversation with each other, such as through responses to each others' summaries and analyses (Sands, 2002).

3. How are the face-to-face, independent, and online learning experiences connected? Students surveyed for The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Hybrid Course Project were "quite critical if they felt the face-to-face and time-out-of-class components of the course were not well integrated." Likewise, when asked what they'd do differently, the project's faculty members responded that they'd "devote more attention to integrating what was going on in the classroom with the online work."

Not sure where to begin? We recommend starting with The "Top 10 Questions" planning document developed by the Hybrid Course project:

Questions for Reflection on Creating Hybrid Courses  
<http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/LTC/HybridReflective10Questions.pdf>

At Simmons College, Academic Technology also has a staff of instructional designers and instructional technologists who can help you design and implement hybrid

courses. If you want help – or if you want to kick around ideas and get feedback, give us a call at x2677.

This paper is one in a series of articles developed by Academic Technology. Each thought piece provides suggestions and resources about a topic related to teaching and learning. Other articles are available at

<http://my.simmons.edu/services/technology/ptrc/resources/articles.shtml>

## Readings and Resources

Aycock, Alan, Carla Garnham, and Robert Kaleta

"Lessons Learned from the Hybrid Course Project," *Teaching with Technology Today*, Volume 8, Number 6: March 20, 2002. Downloaded 2/21/05.  
<http://www.uwsa.edu/ttt/articles/garnham2.htm>

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<http://www.wfu.edu/~brown/Syllabus%20Articles/SylHybrid%20Courses.htm>

Garnham, Carla and Robert Kaleta

"Introduction to Hybrid Courses," *Teaching with Technology Today*, Volume 8, Number 6: March 20, 2002. Downloaded 2/21/05.  
<http://www.uwsa.edu/ttt/articles/garnham.htm>

Parsons, Philip and Deepika Ross

"Planning a Campus to Support Hybrid Learning," Downloaded 2/21/05. File last saved 2/2002. [http://www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/ocotillo/tv/hybrid\\_planning.html](http://www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/ocotillo/tv/hybrid_planning.html)

Sands, Peter

"Inside Outside, Upside Downside: Strategies for Connecting Online and Face-to-Face Instruction in Hybrid Courses," *Teaching with Technology Today*, Volume 8, Number 6: March 20, 2002. Downloaded 2/21/05.  
<http://www.uwsa.edu/ttt/articles/sands2.htm>

Soules, Marsha

"Hybrid Online Courses & Strategies for Collaboration" Downloaded 2/21/05.  
<http://www.mala.bc.ca/~soules/hybrid.htm>