

FAQs about My Early Experience with Hybrid Teaching

Prepared for the Penn State Abington Regional Colloquy - Hybrid Courses and Blended Learning

By Ross Brinkert, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Corporate Communication, Penn State Abington

Author Contact: rsb20@psu.edu

January 18, 2010

* * *

Q. 1. What motivated you to get started?

A. 1. I was aware that a revolution was taking place around me in terms of online learning and I saw hybrid course design as a terrific way to test the waters. Also, I knew that there was student demand for alternative course-delivery formats and that Penn State wanted to be a notable player, if not a leader.

* * *

Q. 2. Where did you begin in setting-up a hybrid course?

A. 2. Although I could have done it on my own, it helped to work with an instructional design specialist. He helped me clarify what was most important about the existing course design, the core content and more. The starting place for hybrid course design were the questions, "What do you value most about your traditional offering of this course and how can what you most value be maintained or even enhanced in a hybrid design?"

* * *

Q. 3. What were the main adjustments you made to transform a regular course into a hybrid course?

A. The first major step was to move all of my quizzes out of the classroom and into the online course management system. This saved me a great deal of time (copying, marking, managing, and providing feedback, etc.) and preserved class time for activities better suited to in person interaction. The second major step involved creating online activities that replaced parts of my classroom-based lessons. The third major step consisted of reworking my syllabus to clearly list course activities and associated due dates. Throughout these steps, the instructional design specialist and I stayed on top of the formula for decreasing classroom contact hours and increasing online activities.

* * *

Q. 4. How did you know students were learning?

A. 4. Now that I have some experience with hybrid teaching as well as traditional course delivery, I realize I previously may have been overconfident in judging student learning through simple classroom

observation. The online activities that now precede each of my in person classes give me much more impressive data about student learning and engagement. This can help me better customize my in class lessons as well as let me follow-up through electronic media.

* * *

Q. 5. Didn't it diminish your joy of teaching?

A. 5. I absolutely love the in person element of teaching. In person communication is multichannel and therefore extremely rich in terms of information-sharing potential. Nonetheless, just because a medium has exceptional potential does not mean that it is the optimal medium for all communication. Hybrid teaching has made me more aware of the pedagogical power of different media. The quiet student in the back of the classroom very often comes alive in an online forum (especially if participation is mandatory 😊). Seeing students learn in different media and in the overall media mix is an undeniable thrill.

* * *

Q. 6. How did you manage student expectations?

A. 6. My hybrid experience was particularly unique because I implemented the hybrid design along with an accelerated course schedule. I took 15-week courses and taught them in 8-weeks. Students were aware of these design issues at the point of registration. Prior to the start of each course, I emailed students about the unique format and encouraged those who were not prepared to handle the format to take a regular offering of the same course. As students gain more awareness of hybrid and accelerated courses, these notifications will become less important. I still regularly use them, though. It's important to add that some students are initially overwhelmed by the sheer number of required course activities that are listed in the syllabus. I offer some reassurance in saying that the carefully crafted course schedule breaks their responsibilities into manageable pieces that most students are able to comfortably handle.

* * *

Q. 7. Was there anything about the hybrid experience that surprised students?

While many students felt a little overwhelmed by the long listing of activities at the beginning of the semester, most students finished the course very happy with the hybrid experience and interested in taking more such classes. Students seemed to especially appreciate the time flexibility provided by a hybrid course.

* * *

Q. 8. Was there anything about the hybrid experience that surprised you?

A. 8. Two things stand out for me as surprises. First, the steady stream of online activities in a hybrid course mean that I get written content from every student on every lesson prior to the in person class

on that lesson. This is extremely empowering in helping me customize the in class content. Second, adopting a hybrid design makes me smarter in designing and managing the in class experience. There may be less in person class time but I feel better able to make it rich and rewarding for my students.

* * *

Q. 9. What's next for you in terms of hybrid teaching design?

A. 9. I have already gone on to design online courses which, by the way, greatly improved the content that I share in traditional versions of those courses. Every semester I update elements of each of my hybrid courses and also add more supplementary features like FYI article and web site links. In the coming year, I plan to bring in more online video and also create an additional hybrid course.

* * *

Q. 10. How did hybrid teaching affect your other teaching, if at all?

A. 10. In all of my teaching endeavors, I have become more deliberate about selecting the appropriate teaching medium given particular content, relational, and process goals. I still most enjoy teaching in the in person classroom environment but I have new found respect for how other learning formats can enhance the learning experience and outcomes for many students.

* * *