Teaching Tips

A Forum for discussion and tips for
advancing teaching and learning at Mona

What is Blended Learning

Blended learning is defined as learning that combines a mix of different delivery modalities; usually face-to-face and online learning. It is used to describe a solution that combines several different delivery methods. Blended learning is often referred to as hybrid learning.

Kurtus (2004) states:

> Blended learning is a mixture of the various learning strategies and delivery methods that will optimize the learning experience of the user. Classroom training sessions, Computer-Based Training (CBT) via a CD-ROM, Web-Based Training (WBT) can be combined as a way to train the learners. WBT can be on demand or at a specific time with an instructor and other students involved.

The primary aim of blended learning is to combine the affordances of different delivery modalities and learning strategies to provide students with the most effective and efficient instructional experience and optimize the learning experience for the student.

Blended learning is therefore a flexible approach to course delivery as it *blends* some of the conveniences of online courses without losing the instructional benefits of face-to-face contact. Blended learning has the potential to provide students with a more fulfilling learning experience than that offered in a traditional face-to-face environment or a completely online environment.

Special points of interest:

- The **Teaching Tips Newsletter** is a publication of the Instructional Development Unit (IDU) at the UWI, Mona.

- The Newsletter is published once per month and provides tips for improving teaching and learning in higher education. It is available online (http://myspot.mona.uwi.edu/idu/) as well as in the office of the IDU.

- If you have an area that you would like to explore using this medium, do not hesitate to contact us at the IDU.

Why Blended Learning?

There are a number of reasons for using blended learning options rather than offering courses completely online or face-to-face:

1. One of the complaints from students who participate in fully online courses is that they miss the face-to-face contact; blended learning preserves the face-to-face element and combines the best of both the online and face-to-face worlds

2. Blended learning offers the potential to reduce the high dropout rates that are often associated with fully online courses. The face-to-face session help maintain the teacher to student relationship and interaction.

3. Blended courses have the potential to increase student learning. According to DeLacey and Leonard (2002), "Students not only learned more when online sessions were added to traditional courses, but student interaction and satisfaction improved as well." (Harvard Business School, 2002)

Designing courses using a blended approach

Like any other course offered face-to-face or completely online, the success of courses offered in blended modalities depend on the effectiveness of course design and selecting the appropriate media to deliver different segments of the course. In addition, a conscious decision must be made about which sections of the course should be facilitated online and which should be done face-to-face. Therefore, one of the primary questions that you need to ask when thinking about a blended learning solution is "What are the best ways to *blend* delivery types and methods?".

Design your blended learning courses to combine the opportunities for socialization that are facilitated in the classroom encounter and the active learning opportunities available online.

Your blended learning course should:

- Employ learner-centered strategies that allow students to become active and interactive learners during both the face-to-face contact sessions and the online sessions.
- Facilitate interaction between the students and the facilitator, students and students, students with the content and students with additional resources
- Incorporate both formative and summative assessment strategies
- Utilize the affordances of various technologies to design learning environments that support the development of learning communities as students learn with and from each other

A number of models for *blending* have been proposed.

- In some blended options, there is an initial meeting held during the first week of the semester (an orientation of sorts) where students and facilitator meet each other face-to-face. This is usually followed by weekly online assessments and synchronous meeting (facilitated through chat rooms, social networking tools, online meeting tools, etc.), asynchronous discussions and email and then a final face-to-face meeting where students complete their examinations and course evaluations.

- In one format, the teacher may assign weekly self-paced modules that students complete online and bring them into face-to-face sessions periodically for presentations and group discussions.

- In other options, in a three hour class for instance, there would one hour of actual face-to-face meeting and two hours of online meeting where there are discussions and additional exploration of various topics proposed in the face-to-face sessions.

- In still another blended learning option, the teacher may use a combination of online reading materials, self-paced tutorials, videos and podcasts and allow learners to choose the mode that best suits their individual learning style and needs. Students are then required to demonstrate their understanding of the materials by completing an assessment task online.

The blended option chosen will depend on the nature of the course, the students and resources available to both the teacher and the students. Choose an option that meets the needs of your students as well as one that facilitates the learning outcomes of the course.

Tips for designing blended learning courses

- Identify the learning needs of the target audience
- Clearly define your learning outcomes
- Choose the content to meet the learning outcomes
- Choose the most appropriate mix of learning methods
- Decide how often you will meet the students online
- Decide which segments will be done online and which will be done face-to-face
- Decide which technologies will be used to facilitate online components of you course

Use a combination of synchronous and asynchronous communication tools available in OurVLE to facilitate the online component of your course:

Synchronous	Asynchronous collaboration
Online IM/Chat sessions	Discussions
Live online meetings	Emails
Web/ Video conferencing	Wikis
Conference calls	Blogs

Include some self-paced modules which may be comprised of:

- Online tutorials
- Webinars
- Podcasts
- Simulations and games
- Online self assessments

There is no one way to *blend* your courses, choose the option that best meets the needs of the students and the learning outcomes.