

Panel Discussion Hybrid/Blended Learning: Advantages, Challenges, Design, and Future Directions

Panelists

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Introduction

A growing number of universities are adopting hybrid learning (Young, 2002). The terms “hybrid learning” and “blended learning” are often used interchangeably. Hybrid learning is a blend or mix of conventional face-to-face instruction and Web-based distance learning (Koohang & Durante, 2003). Elearnspace (2005) defines hybrid or blended learning as the integration of face-to-face classroom instruction learning with distance/e-learning. Valiathan (2002) referred to blended learning as a mix of various event-based activities, including conventional face-to-face classrooms instruction, e-learning, and self-paced learning. In a hybrid learning setting, a part of the learning activities and assignments are transferred from the face-to-face classroom to the distance learning environment.

Elearnspace (2005, paragraph 3) states that “Blended learning takes the best of both worlds and creates an improved learning experience for the student.” As hybrid/blended learning becomes more popular among higher education settings, it is imperative to draw attention to its advantages, its challenges, its design, and its future directions.

Purpose

The purpose of this panel is to create a dialog regarding four major themes related to hybrid/blended learning. Those themes include: 1) the advantages of hybrid/blended learning, 2) the challenges posed by hybrid/blended learning, 3) the design of hybrid/blended learning, and 4) the future of hybrid/blended learning.

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Themes

Hybrid/Blended Learning – Advantages

The advantages of hybrid/blended learning reported in the literature are convenience; increased interaction; flexibility; increased learning; higher retention; reduced seat time; and decreased costs

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(Garnham & Kaleta, 2002; Young, 2002). The panel will attempt to provide a comprehensive analysis and evaluation of these advantages.

A key question regarding the advantages of hybrid/blended learning is, “What learner characteristics enhance or detract the advantages posed by hybrid/blended learning?”

A corollary key question is, “What instructor characteristics enhance or detract the advantages posed by hybrid/blended learning?”

Hybrid/Blended Learning – Challenges

University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee, Learning Technology Center (<http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/LTC/challenges.html>) outlines three challenges facing the hybrid/blended learning. They are as follows:

- Creating a formal faculty development program for teaching hybrid courses
- Allocating the necessary time for instructors to redesign traditional courses into hybrids
- Preparing students to learn effectively in hybrid courses

The panel will attempt to discuss and delineate these challenges.

Hybrid/Blended Learning Design

The most critical variable in hybrid/blended learning should be *student learning*. The design of hybrid/blended learning value rests with sound and appropriate instructional design (Koochang & Durante, 2003). The panel will discuss various instructional design theories, principles, and models suitable for hybrid/blended learning.

The issue of instructional design however involves more than instructional inputs and processes. It involves instructional outcomes. The panel will discuss a key question - “What outcomes assessment models or designs are best suited to measure the outcomes occurring as a result of hybrid/blended learning?”

Hybrid/Blended Learning – The Future

Regular face-to-face classes increasingly rely on the Internet to support the activities of teaching, including the disseminating course information; providing students with an online discussion forum; providing space for students to upload assignments; and providing resources and instructional support materials. The difference between a Web-based online course and a face-to-face course with a Web anchor is narrowing significantly. The natural development of doing some courses online is not surprising.

The future looks increasingly digital, wireless, and networked. Along these lines, it is anticipated that we will eventually find a reversal of the logic that was applied to justify web-based courses. In the past, the feeling was that little, if any, effective instruction could occur online. Many educators, perhaps the great majority of them, held great reservations about online technologies replacing face-to-face instruction. In the future, it is anticipated that the change will be in the opposite direction. To borrow the metaphor from Marc Prensky (2001), a video game designer, the new generation will be *digital natives* and the present generation is composed of *digital immigrants*. Hybrid/blended learning is not a novel nicety, but increasingly becoming an essential mode of delivering instruction.

Ubiquitous computing will fundamentally change the ways in which students learn and teachers teach. New ways of seeking and finding information has rendered learners who are active, self-empowered seekers of solutions. The traditional model of dependency upon the instructor, the

textbook, and the ground-based library has been replaced with the powerful capabilities of online search tools and tutorials. The new generation of *digital natives* is far better able to use neural networking to frame problems, identify and seek solutions. *Digital natives* are also well-equipped to mix social networking and networking with resources on the web to progress towards answers and solutions.

The panel will attempt to discuss the future directions of hybrid/blended learning.

The Structure of the Panel

The panel will consist of four themes in the area of hybrid/blended learning: hybrid/blended learning advantages, hybrid/blended learning challenges, hybrid/blended learning design, and the future of hybrid/blended learning. Panelists will present one theme at a time. Audience will be invited to ask questions and contribute to the discussion.

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Panelists Biography



Alex Koohang is a faculty member and the director of undergraduate program in the School of Information Studies at University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee, USA. Dr. Koohang has designed, developed, and implemented various traditional, non-traditional, hybrid, and on-line courses/programs. He has been involved in the development of on-line education, having initiated and administered some of the earliest asynchronous learning networks. Dr. Koohang's current research interests are in the areas of learning objects, open education, open access, open source, e-learning, usability, and knowledge management.

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Johannes Britz is the Dean and professor at the School of Information Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. He specializes in the fields of information ethics, knowledge management and information for development. Dr. Britz's current research interests include knowledge management, ethics, and e-learning.



Tom Seymour is a professor and North Dakota Senator in the Business Information Technology Department at Minot State University, Minot, North Dakota, USA. Dr. Seymour has extensive experience with distance education programs. He has designed, developed, and implemented many hybrid and on-line courses. He is currently a Peer Reviewer for online programs with the NCA Higher Learning Commission based in Chicago, Illinois. Dr. Seymour's current research interests are in the areas of e-business, open education, open access, open source, e-learning, and knowledge management.