

Report and Recommendations on Hybrid Courses April 2009

Charge S-0806: Hybrid Courses and Model of Teaching: *Examine the pedagogical, financial and space implications of the increased use of the hybrid model of teaching at Rutgers. Investigate existing models of hybrid courses at Rutgers and other institutions. Identify best practices, and suggest models for Rutgers' hybrid courses. Examine the feasibility of indicating whether a course is taught face-to-face, hybrid, or fully online in the course schedule.*

Hybrid Courses

Increasingly institutions are adding hybrid courses to their mix of traditional face-to-face and online courses. A hybrid course is one that combines face-to-face instruction (the class convenes as a group in a university facility) with online instruction.¹ Combining face-to-face and online instruction allows students to benefit from the strength of both modalities. When properly developed and implemented, hybrid courses in many cases will allow for greater interaction between instructor and student, and greater interaction and collaboration between students than is possible in a traditional face-to-face course. Hybrid courses also offer the advantage of giving time-constrained students extra flexibility of schedule while potentially relieving the institution of some of the demands on it for parking and classroom space.

Committee Process

The Instruction, Curricula and Advising Committee was asked to look at some of the ways that hybrid instruction was evolving at Rutgers and consider some specific issues in relation to that evolution. In addition to reviewing recent literature on the topic, the Committee, or individual members of the Committee, also met with Rutgers faculty members and administrators who were utilizing the hybrid format in their classes or programs. Among those interviewed were Ted Goertzel (Sociology—Camden), who is currently teaching two hybrid courses, Neil Sheflin (Economics—New Brunswick) who teaches a large Intro to Economics section as a hybrid course, Tisha Bender and Darcy Gioia from the New Brunswick Expository Writing Program, which offers hybrid as well as traditional face-to-face sections, and Gary Gigliotti, the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs and the Director of the Center for Teaching Advancement and Assessment Research.

See Appendix A for details on some of these discussions.

Pedagogical Implications of the Hybrid Model

A hybrid course may incorporate online features such as threaded discussions, online peer-to-peer review, online quizzes and exercises, simulations, podcasts and other self-paced presentations. Whereas traditional face-to-face courses may utilize online features, either within a course management system or as part of a web site, as a course enhancement, a well-designed hybrid course will integrate the online and face to face components into a cohesive whole.

However there is no clear evidence that the hybrid format is pedagogically superior to other formats.² As with other modes of instruction, ultimately the effectiveness of the hybrid mode of instruction depends on the knowledge, skill, and willingness of the instructor to utilize those features which best exemplify that modality within the setting of that particular class.

While it may not be pedagogically superior, the hybrid format is a pedagogically valid mode of instruction that may appeal to many students.

¹ The use of a course management system, or web-based components, does not automatically define a course as a hybrid course.

² In a research project conducted at the Rutgers Graduate School of Education, a 300-level course in Educational Psychology met for 8 weeks face-to-face. Then half the students went to a hybrid model while half continued face-to-face. Students who had been working at an above average level got even better in the hybrid environment. Students who had been working at a below average level did worse in a hybrid environment. Most likely these are students with deficient study/organizational skills that are magnified in the hybrid environment. [Dean Richard DeLisi, oral communication, September 19, 2008].

Contact Hours

There was some concern expressed by Committee members that hybrid courses may allow for decreased contact hours. While the New Jersey Administrative Code sets minimum contact hours for face-to-face instruction, it specifies that “A semester credit hour is not required to be counted on an hour for hour basis for distance learning or blended (or hybrid) learning.”³

However it was agreed that content is more critical than contact—contact doesn’t guarantee content and value.

Face to Face vs. Online

Currently the number of face-to-face meetings vs. online instruction is up to the Rutgers instructor/program. For example:

Goertzel (Sociology-Camden): 25% face-to-face; 75% online.
Sheflin (Economics-New Brunswick): 50% face-to-face; 50% online.
New Brunswick Writing Program; 50% face-to-face; 50% online.

Some institutions include percentages in their definition of hybrid courses; others do not. For example:⁴

City University of New York: Minimally 1/3 face to face; typically 50/50.
Colorado Technical University: Typically 50/50.
University of Illinois-Springfield: Must have “between four and fifteen on site classes.”
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee: 20% or more online.
Florida State: No University-wide definition.

There was Committee consensus that in a Rutgers hybrid course at least one third of the class meetings should be face-to-face and that exams should be conducted on site rather than online.

Hybrid Course Development and Approval

The Committee also felt that faculty wishing to convert a course previously approved as a traditional face-to-face course, or to offer a section of a multi-section course in hybrid mode, should submit a written proposal spelling out what work would be required in place of face-to-face meetings to the relevant department. Departmental approval would be required for the course to be offered as a hybrid course.

No specific approval is needed for what is merely a “web-enhanced” course.

Course syllabi should also include clear statements of what activities will be conducted during the online portion of hybrid courses. These online activities should at least be equal in time and value to what would have been done in the omitted face to face classes.

Training needs to be available for faculty to utilize the available technology most effectively. Faculty also need to be aware that the initial preparation for a hybrid course is far more labor-intensive than the preparation for a face-to-face course.

Format Options

Not all students learn in the same way; the best environment for one student may not be best for another. Students should not be forced into a hybrid environment. In introductory courses/courses with multiple sections, students should have the option of choosing between hybrid and face-to-face courses.

³ *New Jersey Administrative Code*, “Distance Learning and Other Modes of Educational Delivery, § 9A:1-2.1 General program standards”

⁴ Information taken from *Best Practices in Hybrid Program/Course Development*. Eduventures: Online Higher Education Learning Collaborative. Custom Research Report, August 2008 Figure 2.

Students should also know what the format of the class is going to be when they register. Therefore course schedules should indicate if a course/section is hybrid or online. Currently Rutgers defines a fully online course as one using the eCollege platform. Courses not using eCollege would not be identified as an online course in the Schedule of Classes even if the class **never** met face-to-face. So students may not be aware that they are registering for an online course. In many cases this also means that a classroom is allocated to the course but never used.

Academic Integrity

The increased opportunity for cheating is a definite area of concern in the hybrid model. The Eduventures study⁵ lists this as a major concern among the institutions surveyed; Rutgers faculty with whom the Committee met also mentioned this as an area of concern. Neil Sheflin reports that about 15 percent of his students fail the final (in-class) exam despite having no apparent problem in passing all the online quizzes. The solution most faculty seem have adopted is to require that mid-terms and finals be taken on-site.

Space Implications

Combining face to face and online instruction allows students to benefit from the strengths of both modalities. However the principal reason for developing a hybrid course should be for its teaching and learning potential. It should not be economically driven. Nor should it be dictated by the lack of classroom space.

However, where an assigned classroom is being used only for part of the time, there needs to be a mechanism by which that room could be made available to other classes during those times when the room is not in use. Currently no such official mechanism exists at Rutgers.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The hybrid format is a pedagogically valid mode of instruction that may appeal to many students. While its usage at Rutgers is likely to expand, the hybrid model should not be seen as something destined to replace all traditional face-to-face instruction.

Recommendations

1. In a Rutgers hybrid course at least 1/3 of the class meetings should be face-to-face.
2. In most instances mid-terms and exams should be conducted on-site rather than online.
3. Faculty need to have access to training that will enable them to use the available technologies most effectively. Training specifically for the creation of hybrid courses should be available for anyone wishing to utilize any of the three major course management platforms in use at Rutgers—Sakai, Blackboard, and eCompanion.
4. In courses with multiple sections, students should have the option of choosing between hybrid and face-to-face courses.
5. Students should know what the format of the class is going to be when they register. Therefore, course schedules should indicate if a course/section is hybrid or online. For purposes of scheduling, the Rutgers definition of an online course must be expanded to include all fully online courses, not just those using the eCollege platform.
6. Faculty wishing to convert a course previously approved as a traditional face-to-face course, or to offer a section of a multi-section course in hybrid mode, should submit a written proposal spelling out what work would be required in place of face-to-face meetings to the relevant department. Department approval would be required for the course to be offered as a hybrid course.

⁵ *Best Practices in Hybrid Program/Course Development*. Eduventures: Online Higher Education Learning Collaborative. Custom Research Report, August 2008, p. 16.

7. Course syllabi should include clear statements of what activities will be conducted during the online portion of hybrid courses. These online activities should at least be equal in time and value to what would have been done in the omitted face-to-face classes.
8. Where an assigned classroom is being used for only part of the scheduled class time, a mechanism by which the classroom could be made available to other classes during those times when it is not in use needs to be developed.

Instruction, Curricula and Advising Committee 2008-09

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Appendix A
Some Hybrid Course Models at Rutgers
Summary of Committee Interviews

Discussion with Ted Goertzel (Sociology—Camden) and Colleen Adriano (Camden student) Goertzel is currently teaching two hybrid courses:

- Methods and Techniques of Social Research (60 students)

Required majors course

Class meets face-to-face once a month (Saturday; 3 hours)

Using Sakai for online portion

Course website: <http://mysite.verizon.net/tedgoertzel/MethodsFA2008.html>

- Cyberspace and Society (46 students)

Elective

Meet face-to-face once a month

Using Google Documents for communication; Sakai for quizzes and assignments.

Course website: <http://mysite.verizon.net/%7Etedgoertzel/CybSocSched.html>

This is the first year that Goertzel is offering these classes in this specific format. The format is the result of a “needs assessment survey” that he had his Research Methods class conduct last year. Students who dropped out from Rutgers-Camden were contacted about their reasons for dropping out and what kind of structure would have met their needs.

Preparation of Course Materials

- The initial preparation of materials for a hybrid course is more labor-intensive than preparing for a traditional face to face course. However once materials have been prepared they can be reused the next time the course is offered.
- Goertzel prepared narrated PowerPoint presentations and podcasts that students were able to go through at their own pace. Adriano found the narrated screencasts particularly useful.

Face-to-Face Meetings:

- Once a month
- Exams [2 mid-terms & a final] (doesn't really trust to be done in the totally online environment)
- Presentations on statistical methods (many students find this difficult to do online)

Quizzes:

- Weekly quizzes are done in Sakai. Students can take each quiz three times, so they're forced to figure out what it is they don't know.

Discussion Formats:

- Chat
No longer requires—wasn't possible for all students to be on at one time.
It is useful at the beginning of the semester to create a sense of community.
- Discussion Board
- Adriano feels is most important.

Assessment:

- Performance on quizzes and workbook assignments are measures of student engagement.
- So far test performance is equivalent to that of traditional face-to-face classes.

Tutoring:

- Undergraduate students who have previously successfully completed the course are available two days a week for tutoring assistance.

New Brunswick Expository Writing Program

Discussion with Tisha Bender and Darcy Gioia from the Writing Program.

- Hybrid sections have one regular 80-minute in-class meeting each week during the semester; online assignments, discussion group, chat, and peer review of papers.
- The Writing Program piloted four sections in the Fall of 2007; 15 sections in Spring 2008; 10 sections in Fall 2008, and 15 scheduled for Spring 2009.
- Completing data analysis for survey/interview that was done in Spring 2008.
- Particularly benefits nontraditional students, students with disabilities, and those who are reticent to speak in classroom discussions.
- Continued classroom sessions provide support and in-person interactions.
- Online peer-to-peer review has been especially beneficial.
- Ability to review archived discussions very useful.
- Traditional face-to-face sections continue to be offered; instructors and students able to self-select format that seems to work best for them.
- Instructors do require initial training on Sakai.
- Since a section is only using a classroom once a week, two classes are able to share a single assigned classroom.

Discussion with Neil Sheflin (Economics—New Brunswick). Sheflin is currently teaching a large (400 students) Introduction to Economics course in hybrid mode.

- Course structure: 50 percent online; 50 percent face to face.
- Even though the classroom is only used once a week there is no official way to release the room on the day that it's not being used.
- Weekly homework is graded and homework review is conducted online.
- Sheflin previously used podcasts but found they were not worth the time and effort.
- The hybrid format gives individual students more opportunities to ask questions and makes it easier to see where they need to focus.
- There is no practical way to require the use of the online discussion board with such a large class.
- Chat also doesn't work due to class size.
- The hybrid model definitely requires more work/preparation on the part of the instructor.
- Not sure he would use a hybrid model again for a large undergraduate class. If done properly it entails substantially more work on the part of the instructor than a traditional face to face class; it's not clear that the educational benefit to the students is proportional to the work required.