Mesa Community College Best Practices for Hybrid Instruction

Introduction

This document was developed by members of the Hybrid Learning Task Force over the 2008-2009 academic year. It contains recommended best practices in hybrid course design and instruction. This document is designed as an informational resource. For more detailed information on the online portion of the course, review the Distance Education Handbook at www.mc.maricopa.edu/distance/faculty.html and Distance Learning Resources at http://ctl.mc.maricopa.edu/wiki/index.php/Treasure_Trove_of_Ideas_for_Teaching_Online. For information on hybrid learning, faculty should take the Hybrid Learning Workshop http://mcli.maricopa.edu/blended-learning. At MCC, hybrid courses combine face-to-face instruction and web- or computer-based learning that is non-specific as to time and place but meet approximately half the time in class and half the time online.

Key Questions

Before you begin to develop a hybrid course, consider these 10 crucial questions about hybrid learning. http://www4.uwm.edu/ltc/hybrid/faculty_resources/questions.cfm

1. What do you want students to know when they have finished taking your hybrid course?
2. As you think about learning objectives, which would be better achieved online and which would be best achieved face-to-face?
3. Hybrid teaching is not just a matter of transferring a portion of your traditional course to the Web. Instead it involves developing challenging and engaging online learning activities that complement your face-to-face activities. What types of learning activities do you think you will be using for the online portion of your course?
4. Online asynchronous discussion is often an important part of hybrid courses. What new learning opportunities will arise as a result of using asynchronous discussion? What challenges do you anticipate in using online discussions? How would you address these?
5. How will the face-to-face and time out of class components be integrated into a single course? In other words, how will the work done in each component feed back into and support the other?
6. When working online, students frequently have problems scheduling their work and managing their time, and understanding the implications of the hybrid course module as related to learning. What do you plan to do to help your students address these issues?
7. How will you divide the percent of time between the face-to-face portion and the online portion of your course? How will you schedule the percent of time between the face-to-face and online portion of your course, i.e., one two hour face-to-face followed by one two hour online session each week?
8. How will you divide the course-grading scheme between face-to-face and online activities? What means will you use to assess student work in each of these two components?
9. Students sometimes have difficulty acclimating to the course Web site and to other instructional technologies you may be using for face-to-face and online activities. What specific technologies will you use for the online and face-to-face portions of your course? What proactive steps can you take to assist students to become familiar with your Web site and those instructional technologies? If students need help with technology later in the course, how will you provide support?
10. There is a tendency for faculty to require students to do more work in a hybrid course than they normally would complete in a purely traditional course. What are you going to do to ensure that you have not created a course and one-half? How will you evaluate the student workload as compared to a traditional class?

Underlying Principles

The following best practices are built on these following underlying principles:

• Hybrid redesign is faculty driven
• Hybrid is being designed to promote student learning
• Whole course redesign is preferable to partial course redesign
There are many benefits to hybrid teaching and learning such as flexibility, convenience, independence, and participatory learning. It is said that when moving from face to face or online to hybrid students and teachers “get the best of both worlds.” Satisfaction levels by students and faculty in hybrid learning exceed face-to-face and online satisfaction rates. However, transitioning to hybrid entails a course redesign with hybrid learning in mind. It is neither all about face-to-face nor online but how the two work together to create the best teaching and learning experience for both you and your students.

The following best practices elaborate both on specific tangible items to include in the syllabus and the online portion of hybrid course, they also address, conceptual attributes of hybrid course design.

**Course Overview**
This information should be provided from the beginning, within the course shell and syllabus, when possible, be readily available (on either the instructor or department website) prior to the start of the semester.

- **General Online Information** - Until such time as there is a specific web area for hybrid classes, guide students to MCC Online at [www.mc.maricopa.edu/distance/](http://www.mc.maricopa.edu/distance/) to complete the online readiness quiz and for other valuable information.
- **Syllabus** - District requirements are met. See Maricopa Syllabus Resource Center at [www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/syllabus/index.php](http://www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/syllabus/index.php). This includes college/instructor name, contact information, course information, grading standards, attendance requirements, required materials, statements of responsibility, services related to special accommodations and a subject to change statement. Syllabus must include definition of hybrid class. Make assignments and other course expectations as explicit as possible. Make sure the schedule of in-class and online work is clear, and that due dates are stated explicitly and repeatedly.
- **Learning Resources** - Textbook and other resource requirements are noted. Make ancillary resources available Online or at a mutually convenient location (library)
- **Technology** - Requirements and plug in/additional software download processes are presented. Use communication tools to elaborate on course content.
- **Instructor** - Contact information, office hours and instructor introduction are available.
- **Expectations** - Information is included on purpose of the course, its components, and defining the relationship between the online and face-to-face portions of the course. Also, the demands and requirements for success. Delivery methods are defined. For example, on-campus requirements, attendance at class meetings, student participation, field-trips, etc. Provide a recommended range of hours for online portion of the class. Make sure students understand the equivalence between the amount of work in a traditional class and in a hybrid class.
- **Learning Objectives** - Defined, measurable and consistent with course competencies. Should be stated in syllabus and in each module.
- **Course Access** - For continuity, the institution’s learning management system should be used as the course gateway (even if a different system is used for the actual course).
- **Getting Started** - Process is in place for students to get information on initial course steps and access to the course. For example, what is needed before class, when course goes live, initial contact, a “start here” feature, etc.
- **Finals** – It is expected that hybrid classes will continue through the week of finals.

**First Class:**
The first face-to-face class, as well as online resources, should address the required computer skills, course layout and navigation tips, expectations for timely assignment submissions, organization tips, appropriate communication strategies (“netiquette”), and most important, how much time will be required to complete the assignments. Clarify expectations of student participation both in-class and online.
General Course Design

All of the information in General Course Information should be provided in the course shell. In addition, the following information should be considered when designing the online portion of the class.

- **Navigation** - Instructions are available to help students familiarize themselves with the course. For example, a scavenger hunt, virtual orientation, etc.
- **Learning Module/Assignment Objectives** - Defined, measurable and consistent with course competencies. Present content in manageable segments (modules) in logical, sequential order.
- **Structure** - Course organization is clear and the course is easy to navigate. There should be a clear distinction between online and in-class expectations.

Blending in-class and online components

Integrate course content activities for in-class and online environments determining what is best suited and where.

- Determine how the face-to-face and time out of class will be integrated into a single course.
- Determine how to assess student work in each of the two components.
- Develop learning activities that capitalize on the strengths of online and face-to-face learning environments.
- Focus on the integration of the online and face-to-face components. Connect what occurs in class with what is studied online.

Assessment

Assessing student participation and progress regularly is essential to good course design; student feedback can also provide valuable information when considering course modifications and updating.

- **Objectives Alignment** - Align course competencies/learning objectives, learning activities and assessment/evaluation activities.
- **Assessment Process** - Identify and explain assessment policy and procedures. Clearly communicate assignments with length requirements, formatting, time frame, etc.
- **Evaluation** - Provide detailed description or criteria for evaluating student work. For example, rubrics or grading explanations/criteria. For rubric examples go to [http://ctl.mc.maricopa.edu/wiki/index.php/Grading_Forms](http://ctl.mc.maricopa.edu/wiki/index.php/Grading_Forms).
- **Instruments** - Describe activities that monitor student progress throughout the course and measure learning objectives/outcomes. For example, tests, projects, essays, etc. Provide students opportunities to apply concepts and skills they have learned. Clearly identify for students which occur in class and which occur online.
- **Assessment Safeguards** - State cheating, student-only work and plagiarism policy. See [http://ctl.mc.maricopa.edu/_resources/helpdocs/turnitin.html](http://ctl.mc.maricopa.edu/_resources/helpdocs/turnitin.html) for further information. Also, see the Course Integrity statement under Legal Matters.
- **Grading Policy** - Provide a detailed explanation of grading policy. For example, point/percentage requirements for assignments and for the overall letter grade.
- **Grade Book** - Provide students online access to their progress in the course.
- **Course Evaluation** - Provide a tool that captures student feedback. For example, suggestion box or anonymous survey. Examples of such tools can be found at [www.mc.maricopa.edu/](http://www.mc.maricopa.edu/)

Communication

It is important to engage students in your course and make them feel part of a community both face-to-face and online. Frequent communication helps to promote retention and increases student participation and interaction.

- **Contact Information** - Clearly stated contact information and procedures, including instructor availability.
- **Response Criteria** - Clearly stated timeframes for responding to student questions (usually 24 to 48 hours during the week), weekend/holiday responses, providing feedback on assignments, and posting grades.
- **Student Communication Plan** - Outlined process for communicating with students. For example, class announcements and emails.
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- **Class Interaction** - Methods to allow three types of communication: student/student, student/instructor, and student/content interaction. Clarify expectations of student participation both in-class and online. Use collaborative tools such as discussion boards, chat rooms, instant messenger, email, etc. in addition to in-class collaborative learning.

- **Create and Nurture a Learning Community** - Process for class introductions and ongoing activities that create a sense of community and comfort. For examples, visit [http://onlinelearninglab.wikispaces.com/icebreakers](http://onlinelearninglab.wikispaces.com/icebreakers). Process to create learning community both online and in-class via projects and activities.

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**Learning and Technology Support**

Delivery methods should promote learning. Connect students with support resources. Email students expectations prior to the beginning of class. Provide students with information pertaining to support resources. In first face-to-face meeting, ensure all students are accessing the online portion of the course.

- **Learning Resources** - Provide information on learning assistance resources. For example, stated office hours, publisher tutorials, MCC Learning Enhancement Services at [www.mc.maricopa.edu/library/LE/](http://www.mc.maricopa.edu/library/LE/), MCC Writing Center at [http://www.mc.maricopa.edu/dept/d13/eng/writing_center.html](http://www.mc.maricopa.edu/dept/d13/eng/writing_center.html) MCC Library services at [www.mc.maricopa.edu/library/](http://www.mc.maricopa.edu/library/) and other resources.

- **Technology Support** - State how students can obtain technological support. For example, TSS at [www.mc.maricopa.edu/its/tss](http://www.mc.maricopa.edu/its/tss) or outside support options if using a publisher-provided instructional management system.

- **Learning Support** - Technology tools should support learning objectives and promote active learning. For examples, see “Teaching and Learning on the WEB.” [www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/tl/index.html](http://www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/tl/index.html).

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**Legal Matters**

It is important to address security and legal issues.

- **Copyright** - Have proper permissions and citations for any copyrighted materials or creative commons, [http://creativecommons.org/](http://creativecommons.org/) used in your class. See [www.maricopa.edu/legal/ip/](http://www.maricopa.edu/legal/ip/) for copyright information.

- **Course Integrity** - State cheating, student-only work and plagiarism policy. See MCCCD policies at [www.mc.maricopa.edu/students/publications.html](http://www.mc.maricopa.edu/students/publications.html).

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**Accessibility**

It is important that the course be accessible to all students.

- **Disability** - Include an ADA statement and willingness to make accommodations based on disabilities. [www.mc.maricopa.edu/students/disability/links.html](http://www.mc.maricopa.edu/students/disability/links.html). Some thought should be given to alternative modalities based on student needs.

- **Readability** - Consideration should be given to the readability of course information. For example, type of font and colors used. [http://www.cast.org/products/Bobby/index.html](http://www.cast.org/products/Bobby/index.html).

*For more information on best practices, please visit [http://www.qualitymatters.org/](http://www.qualitymatters.org/) and link on FIPSE Grant Project.

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Adapted from Best Practices for Online Instruction developed by the Distance Education Committee, April 2008.