

# Best Practices for Teaching Hybrid Classes

## Plan Your Curriculum

- When designing your curriculum, first establish learning objectives for your students.
- Use backward design principles and Bloom's digital taxonomy to select assignments and assessments that support your learning objectives.
- Search for free resources to support learning. Make use of all the free videos, online materials, and Web 2.0 tools available to you online.
- Create activities that support your learning objectives, promote active learning, engage the students in collaborative activities, and encourage the following interaction - student:course material, student:student, and student:instructor.
- Create assessments to measure whether learning has taken place and your learning objectives have been met.
- If students are responsible for readings, videos, resources, etc., create an activity to verify your students have done the readings and watched the videos, whether it is a low-stakes quiz, a discussion group, etc. Or create an activity for students to apply what they learned. Otherwise, even the best students will eventually ignore the readings, videos, resources, etc.
- Design online class material to flow into in-person classes and vice-versa. In other words, the information in online weeks shouldn't exist in a vacuum; there should be a natural flow of the curriculum between online and in-person days, and this flow should be obvious to students.
- Fill out your curriculum map with details of your curriculum to stay organized and to help communicate plans with your instructors and colleagues.

## Create a Welcoming Look and Feel in Moodle

- Use headings to make the class easy to visually scan for information.
- Mark up headings (heading 1, heading 2, heading 3) for text readers for visually-impaired people.
- Use high-contrast colors and sans serif fonts.
- Don't underline anything but links.
- Create a consistent look and feel. Each topic should have the same format, colors, and headings.
- Refer to the the Usability and Accessibility checklist for more information.

## Be Prepared

- It is impossible to wing it when delivering a hybrid class.
- Start designing your hybrid class early - at least six months in advance.
- Have a colleague peer review your class before you deliver the class.

### **Establish Your Online Presence**

- Create a Moodle block with your (and your co-instructor's) contact information, a picture, and some information about yourself to help students get to know you.
- Create an introductory video where you take the students on a tour of your class to orient them and welcome them to the class.
- Send out a welcome email about a week and a half before the class starts.
- Hold weekly online (virtual) office hours using a Moodle chat room, and give your students an incentive to attend office hours at first to get them comfortable with the process. Also send reminders before office hours to encourage students to attend.
- Make sure you are an active participant in the class (e.g., you are present in question forums, discussion groups, chats, etc.).
- Model the kind of online behavior you'd like to see in your students.
- Log into the class at least once a day - even on weekends.

### **Connect with Your Students and Maintain Frequent Contact Throughout the Week**

- Send polls and reminder texts.
- Get involved with the discussions in the advanced forums. Address questions that come up in the online conversations, summarize information, point out main ideas, track who participates, etc.
- Facilitate online chats, etc.
- Make sure you are a presence in the course; do not let the course run itself because that discourages student engagement.
- Update your Moodle site regularly.

### **Provide Timely and Personal Feedback**

- Let students know when they can expect feedback on assignments.
- Try to make the turnaround time as fast as is feasible for you.
- Make sure your feedback is personalized. For example, if you're responding to students' forum posts, don't just reply "great job" to each person. Comment on the *content* of her post to demonstrate that you are engaged in the online discussion.

### **Respond to Questions in a Timely Manner**

- If your students email you, try to respond within 24 hours.
- Create a Ask Questions Here forum in the intro section at the top of the class where students can post questions to you and other students. Encourage students to use the forum instead of emailing you directly. The advanced forum should be a single simple discussion that forces everyone to be subscribed (so they receive an email for each post). This also helps to build a sense of community among your learners because students in these forums often help each other before the instructor has an opportunity to respond.

### **Pass Along Your Tech Skills**

- Do not assume students know how to use the tools you're using in class. Just because your students know how to post on Facebook doesn't mean they know how to use your tech tools.
- If you expect your students to use a tech tool in class (for example, Google Docs), then you should demo the tool in person before the class uses it online, and you should have the students try out the tool when the class is together in person to increase their knowledge, skills, and comfort with the tool.
- Be knowledgeable about tools you're using in class. You don't have to be an expert, but you should be able to use the tool reasonably well in order to train students on how to use the tool and to help your students troubleshoot.

### **Create Activities That Encourage Interaction**

To maximize student engagement and active learning, you want to create activities that encourage three types of interaction each week:

- Student:student interaction
- Student:course material interaction
- Student:instructor interaction

Blogs, wikis, chat rooms, advanced forums, TitanPad, Google Docs, and Google Presentations are tools that encourage interaction.

### **Create a Sense of Online Community**

- Have students update their Moodle profiles with pictures, a bio, and a list of interests separated by commas.
- Have students introduce themselves to the class in an advanced forum discussion, and have each student respond to one other student's post. You might also require that students look at each other's Moodle profiles as part of the forum assignment (for example, create a profile scavenger hunt – "find someone who is not from Wisconsin," etc). Introduce yourself in the forum to kick it off. Reply to each student, or reply at the end of the posts with comments about some of the students' posts. This helps you establish your online presence while building a sense of community among learners; it demonstrates that you are an active participant in the course.
- Create activities that encourage student interaction and collaboration: discussion forums on class material/topics, online chats where students interact with each other, group projects that support collaboration and active learning (for example, have small groups edit a wiki together), invite students to share experience and expertise with each other, and create assignments using advanced forums where students upload their work and give each other peer reviews and feedback.
- Encourage students to answer each other's questions when a student posts a question in your Ask Questions Here forum.

### **Establish Expectations Immediately**

- Fill out your expectations document, and email it to your students in your welcome email before the first day of class. The expectations document lists knowledge and skills your students need for the

class, required hardware and software, time commitment for the class, your feedback turnaround time, etc.

- Consider creating a quiz on your syllabus and expectations document to make sure all students have read them. The quiz should be before or during the first week of class.

### **Ask for feedback, and Make Adjustments**

- You can't see your students' confusion or frustration in an online class, so we created anonymous surveys you can add to your course that capture your students' impressions of how class is going.
- If your survey results show things aren't going well in class, use the feedback to improve future weeks in your course. Don't wait until the end of the semester to make adjustments.

### **Make Information Easy to Access Online**

- Provide links to resources (e.g., websites, links to textbooks on Amazon, videos, tutorials, reading material, interactive games, etc.).
- Add Library database search blocks to Moodle - If your students will be doing library research, contact the Alverno librarians to have them add the Library database search blocks to your class.

### **Eliminate Assignment Confusion**

- For assignments, provide rubrics or criteria that show how you'll assess student work.
- Provide examples of successful attempts on the assignment.
- If the assignment is extremely complex, consider making a screencast video that walks students through the steps they need to take to complete the assignment.
- If you have a number of homework assignments for students to complete in a week, consider creating a progress checklist to eliminate confusion about what students need to complete and the order in which they need to complete the tasks.

### **Don't Overload Students**

- Avoid the temptation to pack too many resources and assignments into your course. It will overwhelm students.
- UWM instructional technologists call this "class and a half."