

Week 2 Webinar and Chat Questions
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Webinar Questions:

1. How do you design your course for interaction? What kind of activities do you save for the classroom and what kind of activities do you put online?

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2. How do you decide which mode to use at the design stage? Is the design influenced by connectivity and accessibility or students profile - i.e background of students or the availability of the technology?

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3. Does the discipline that you are teaching determine into the kind of "blend" that you give to a particular class?

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4. How do you communicate your expectations for blended interactions to your students? How often do you communicate with students?

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5. What is the role of the instructor/designer to design for interactions in the course as opposed to interaction that will happen regardless? Is interaction frosting or a graded activity?

Dylan: Interaction is a key component of a blended course, not an optional element, even in the online work of the course. The flipped model seems to be more situated towards moving some assessments and extra content delivery online so that the interactions happen in class, and in a blended course, interactions should likewise be happening in class. However, depending on the extent of the "blend," it is important for the online piece to seem valuable to students and their learning, not just additional or busy work. I think that online interactions increase the value of the online component in students' minds, and instructors can develop different outcomes from it as well.

6. Reconsidering the issue of quantity and quality, how much quantity is necessary quality interaction?

Dylan: Quality is most important, particularly when starting out in the blended mode. I think it is far better to have fewer online discussions, for instance, that better meet the learning objectives than more frequent ones that only ask students to scratch the surface. The other consideration, though, is engagement; you will want to ensure that students stay engaged in both the online and the face-to-face elements and that they know how these different modes, activities, and interactions will benefit them. So, quantity is important in that students need to be actively working in the course, but not all of that needs to be interaction among students or with the instructor. Interaction with content is critical, too.

7. How can I best increase the rigor of online activities?

Dylan: If by “increase the rigor” you mean “increase the effectiveness,” then I think it is key to focus on backward design and using assessments to evaluate how effectively students are meeting the learning objectives. If by “rigor” you refer to making sure that the course is difficult enough to meet the standards of face-to-face instruction, then I think there is less to worry about there. Research tells us that blended courses on the whole are at least as good as face-to-face courses. Naturally, there are poor blended courses, just as there are poor online and face-to-face courses. However, the move to the blended format tends to impress upon instructors the importance of student-centered, active learning (often through faculty development programs), which in my mind increasing learning (and rigor).

8. What does the instructor role look like? What kinds of shifts have you observed in your own teaching role in your blended courses? Do you find yourself being more student-centered? And what does that look like to you?

Dylan: The instructor role in a blended course becomes much more about facilitation than about content delivery, the “guide on the side” model as opposed to the “sage on the stage.” This is not too different for me teaching writing in the blended format, however, as the focus in my discipline has been traditionally focused on student-centered learning. The difference is learning the skill of engaging with students in asynchronous discussions and finding ways to integrate the online and face-to-face components so that the course seems like an effective whole. I would add that it tends to take even more self-reflection as a learning facilitator, so I keep a journal so that I remember what revisions I might need to make to a course in later iterations.

9. Do you think it is important to participate in online and blended course to design a blended course? Does it help to capture the do’s and don’ts?

Dylan: I think that an online or blended faculty development experience is enough to gain a sense of how online and blended courses work, even though this kind of training is different from taking a credit course. I believe it is far more important to have a network of fellow online and blended instructors to help work through problems, share resources and activities, etc.

10. How can you prepare/train course administrators/faculty for "moderating" online/blended interactions?

Dylan: I think modeling online and face-to-face interactions in a blended faculty development program is key. We in the UWM LTC recently redesigned our faculty development program for an active learning classroom, which has helped us to move even more away from content delivery in the face-to-face to cohort-based learning and higher order discussions.

Chat Questions:

1. Do you ever query your students for feedback on the delivery / activities?

Dylan: I frequently use CATs (Classroom Assessment Techniques) in the face-to-face classes to uncover what issues students may be having or concepts they may be having difficulty with. I also use progressive and summative survey instruments to help inform the course, and most importantly, I use that information to make changes to the class as I see fit. I often discuss the responses with students online or in the face-to-face classes to see if there is additional information or context I can gain.

2. Do you have a course policy (expectations document) for your course, especially in terms of online communication?

Dylan: I used to have a netiquette document, but I removed that recently because it seemed like an outdated concept. I outline expectations in the assignment prompt, but I also monitor online discussions very closely and spend extra time early in the semester addressing any issues that arise. Typically, students are not inappropriate in these forums; it is more often the opposite, that students don't want to challenge one another in academically-appropriate ways.

3. Are your online shells redeveloped each session or are they static and the blended part is more flexible or something else?

Dylan: I am consistently redeveloping the online and face-to-face components, which is probably not an effective use of my time. Self-reflection (mentioned above) and a focus on learning objectives can help you focus on the high priority modules and activities that need to be redeveloped. I should take my own advice!

4. Are you familiar with any studies highlighting the importance and success of student to student interaction? Here are two suggested in the chat today.
 - Swan 2003 - LEARNING EFFECTIVENESS ONLINE:WHAT THE RESEARCH TELLS US
 - 2011 Social Presence within the Community of Inquiry Framework

Dylan: I would recommend *Blended Learning: Research Perspectives, Volumes 1 and 2* (Picciano, Dzuiban, and Graham) for some solid research on blended learning in general.