This chapter describes important considerations for higher education administrators and other leaders as they design, develop, and implement a comprehensive hybrid learning initiative.

Supporting Institutional Hybrid Implementations

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Hybrid learning (referred to as blended learning throughout this chapter) has emerged within the past decade as an important development in the higher education landscape, with Ross and Gage going so far as to call it the "new traditional model" of instruction (2006). Perhaps its most interesting aspect is not the convenience it offers but the pedagogical advantages that positively impact student learning. Some studies have indicated that students not only perform better in blended courses than either fully online or face-to-face courses (Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, and Jones 2010) but that withdrawal rates are also improved (Dziuban, Hartman, Juge, Moskal and Sorg 2005). However, for a college or university to truly harness the power of blended learning, it needs to transition the initiative from a grass-roots movement of individual faculty members to a systemic, supported enterprise tied to institutional strategy. To do this, leadership must be collaboratively engaged at all levels of the institution (Garrison and Vaughn 2013). Transformational leaders should have an institutional vision for blended learning, the interpersonal skills required to work collaboratively with stakeholders, and the courage to remain undeterred in the pursuit of their vision, even when hard decisions are necessary (Vaughn 2007).

Moskal, Dziuban, and Hartman (2012) contend that implementation of a successful blended learning program requires alignment of institutional, faculty, and student goals. To this end, they define a collection of requirements that can help guide schools as they begin blended learning initiatives. These requirements ensure or establish: institutional goals and objectives; administrative/faculty alignment; organizational capacity; a common vocabulary and definitions; faculty development and course development support; support for online students and faculty; a robust and reliable infrastructure; institution-level longitudinal data; proactive policy development; and an effective funding model.

When examining institutional readiness for scaling blended learning, a particularly useful framework has been developed by Graham, Woodfield, and Harrison (2012). The framework establishes a matrix that describes an institution's capacity for supporting a comprehensive blended learning initiative. On one axis of the matrix are twelve blended learning success factors categorized into three groups: strategy, structure, and support. Along the other axis are three stages of institutional readiness or capacity from "Awareness/Exploration" to "Mature implementation/growth." By examining the definitional criteria associated with each success factor an institution can assess its own capacity to administer a comprehensive blended learning program across a variety of requirements.

Mazer (2014) offers another useful rubric for assessing an institution's administrative capacity for supporting a systemic blended learning operation. By applying the four frames espoused by Bolman and Deal (2003), Mazer describes how a variety of factors influence the adoption of blended learning:

- *Structural*: sufficient technology infrastructure, blended learning definition and institutional awareness, a strategic plan and implementation plan, blended learning

courses being recognized in the registration and scheduling system, and the presence of a formal course evaluation system.

- *Human Resources:* support systems—both technologic and pedagogic, incentive systems to support the transition of courses, and conflict related to intellectual property.

- *Symbolic:* the changing role of the instructor, faculty belief in a status quo structure (including didactic teaching methods, faculty belief that face-to-face teaching methods are superior, and misalignment between faculty and institutional goals related to tenure and promotion.

- *Political:* an individual's propensity to adopt innovation, the diffusion of innovation through an institution (including advocacy), and the presence of an effective change management process.

Any administrator who wishes to launch, nurture, and grow an effective blended learning initiative should consider all of the factors that could potentially enhance or derail success. Perhaps most importantly, the blended learning initiative should align the needs of the institution, the faculty, and students.   In addition to the models and frameworks already referenced, the following set of program considerations is offered as a collection of best practices in blended learning administration drawn from specific institutions. Each section concludes with a set of reflection questions to guide administrators in implementing blended learning.

Definition of Blended Learning

Jones (2006) observed that "when we use the term blended learning, there is a danger of believing everyone shares the same understanding or definition of this term" (186). This observation holds true within an institution just as it does across all of higher

education. Definitions for blended learning are often written at the course level. Without

institutional definitions, colleges/departments (or at worst individual course faculty) must define

and articulate the nature of blended learning for students, but these approaches may not be

consistent with the broader institutional context, confusing students. Conversely, the more

specific the definition, the less likely that it will apply to multiple institutions. For instance, the

University of the West Indies exists across a group of islands. As a result, this institution does

not require physical attendance for the face-to-face component of their blended courses. (They

rely on video conferencing to accomplish the face-to-face goal.) Some institutional definitions

frame blended learning as a web-enhancement to traditional, face-to-face courses (for example,

providing online content), while others depict it as online learning with strategic face-to-face

opportunities.

Definitions of blended learning might be concentrically arranged so that institutional

definitions are aligned with broader authoritative contexts. Articulating a clear definition for

blended learning within an institution is a foundational component of institutional readiness for

blended learning and sets the stage for other components such as course scheduling, faculty

readiness, student readiness, and so forth. Adopting or aligning with a definition used by a wider

number of institutions affords the opportunity to benchmark institutional metrics and contribute

to a broad knowledge base.

Questions for Administrator Reflection (Definition)

- Is your institution subject to outside definitions of blended learning?
- Do you have an institutional definition of blended learning?
- Is your blended learning definition sufficient?

- Is the definition of blended learning integrated with your course schedule in student-friendly language?

Scheduling

The scheduling of blended learning courses is dependent upon having an established institutional definition for blended learning. Scheduling, however, is a topic worthy of independent consideration. Early in the distributed learning initiative at the University of Central Florida (UCF), the potential of sharing classroom space for blended courses gained interest since approximately one-third of the institution's classroom space was rented. However, the traditional class scheduling software was built to look for conflicts, not to facilitate sharing of classroom space. As an administrator it is imperative that you ask yourself what it is that you are trying to accomplish institutionally with blended learning. If it is better space utilization, then your technology systems and workflow processes need to facilitate this.

At UCF, despite having a consistent definition for blended learning and systems that support sharing of classroom resources, there is wide variation in how and to what degree specific colleges/departments facilitate this kind of space utilization. In one college, a given department allows individual faculty members to choose which dates their classes meet face-to-face within their given time slot (e.g., once per week in weeks 1, 10, and 15). In a second college, a department specifies the dates a given blended class *must* meet. There are countless other variations.

Having an institutional definition for blended learning is a first step, but operationally, student-friendly language is needed so students understand when the class will meet. Specifically, if students want to take advantage of reduced-seat-time blended courses, can they search for such courses? Conversely, if students who are not aware of the nature of blended

courses inadvertently register for one, will the scheduling system alert them as to what this means?

Questions for Administrator Reflection (Scheduling)

- Does your scheduling system facilitate sharing of classroom space?

- How much freedom will you allow faculty in determining the meeting schedule of the face-to-face portions of the course?

Faculty Readiness

The technical and logistical aspects of teaching a blended course are not necessarily intuitive for faculty. For this reason, accrediting agencies often require institutions to provide faculty training when course offerings in a given delivery mode reach a certain threshold percentage (e.g., 50% online). Such preparation programs might address topics such as proficiency with the technology tools used in blended courses (e.g., learning management system), awareness of instructional design principles and teaching strategies for the online aspects of blended courses, and experience with the logistical aspects of implementing blended courses (e.g., scheduling the classroom(s) for the face-to-face meeting times and ensuring that students know what to expect). Some of these issues are rather nuanced and course specific. For instance, depending upon the latitude afforded them by the institution, faculty members might choose to provide specifics about their particular blended course implementations within the institution's class schedule. Similarly, faculty placing materials online as part of a blended course might be unaware of the issues surrounding their use of copyrighted digital materials or of the access challenges presented by their course materials to students with disabilities. Thorough faculty training can address such topics and contribute to successful implementations of blended courses.

Many institutions provide a preparation course, workshop, or set of tutorial experiences for faculty preparing to teach blended courses. Such offerings often group together blended and online faculty when the blended course modality is framed as a special case of online/distance education. Some examples from varied institutions include: St. John's University's *Online Pedagogy I* course (http://www.stjohns.edu/academics/schools-and-colleges/online-learning/faculty-resources/online-learning-pedagogy-i); Cleveland Community College's *Introduction to Distance Learning and Blackboard* (http://dlatccc.wordpress.com/2014/09/19/introduction-to-distance-learning-and-blackboard); and the University of Central Florida's *IDL6543* (http://online.ucf.edu/teach-online/professional-development/idl6543/). Some programs are required and may include financial stipends or other perks for successful completion, but many faculty development programs are voluntary. In addition to this baseline preparation, there are rare instances in which institutions require a refresher course after a certain number of years of teaching blended courses or, alternatively, require a certain number of professional development hours per year in order to maintain the credential to teach blended courses. For institutions without existing programs to prepare faculty to design and teach blended courses, the BlendKit open courseware (http://bit.ly/blendkit) may be used for free in whole or in part as the foundation of a new faculty development program under the terms of a Creative Commons license.

Beyond faculty training, institutions may cultivate a variety of additional resources to sustain the iterative design and teaching of blended courses. These may include access to instructional designers, media production resources, and technical support (addressed in detail later in this chapter); articulation of effective blended teaching practices; opportunities for collegial discussion with other faculty; recognition of excellence in blended teaching; and

support for scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) research. The importance of the instructional designer role, in particular, has been established in the literature (for example Pan and Thompson, 2009 and Salentiny, 2012) as a critical success factor for online courses. This role is no less important when designing blended courses.

At a minimum, faculty must be aware of the technical and logistical challenges involved in teaching their first blended course. The combination of robust faculty preparation and a varied ecosystem of faculty support resources can create a culture of faculty readiness that sustains a blended learning initiative.

Questions for Administrator Reflection (Faculty Readiness)

- What faculty training does your accrediting agency require when launching blended programs?
- Does your institution have sufficient faculty training to support blended programs?
- What resources are available to faculty to support the creation and delivery of their blended courses?

Student Readiness

The issue of student readiness is really about clarity of expectations. Students need to know the institutional parameters for blended courses in general and instructor expectations for specific blended courses. A student's first encounter with blended courses may be the class schedule while conducting a routine search for classes. Students need a quick reference that defines the institution's delivery modalities. Another possible initial communication venue to students is an institutional orientation to blended courses (see the University of Central Florida's Knights Online http://knights.online.ucf.edu).

At the course level, students need to know the "nature" of the blended course. Why is the course offered in a blended format? How are the face-to-face and online portions related? When

and where does the class meet? What technology is required? What are the teacher and student expectations? Many of these questions may be covered in the course syllabus (e.g., a statement describing the delivery modality). To ensure students are clear about blended expectations, course documents should also include details on how and where to seek technical assistance. In addition to a general institutional orientation to blended learning, specific course instructors might provide students with a course-level orientation to clarify how the blended format will work. Institutional guidelines for syllabi and course components can ensure that students receive the information they need at the course level.

Questions for Administrator Reflection (Student Readiness)

- How are students oriented to blended learning at your institution?

- Does each course have a description of how the "blend" will be implemented?

- Is there a uniform method at your institution for students to find out how to begin blended courses?

- What are students' technology needs in blended courses at your institution?

Technical Support

Technical support is critical for both faculty and students in a blended learning initiative and should be addressed at an institutional level to provide consistency for everyone. The following are some factors for administrators to consider when establishing technical support for blended courses.

Most technical support for blended courses revolves around the learning management system. However, supporting other resources used by blended courses at your institution is also important. Such resources might include lecture capture software, email, proctoring software, and more. Decide who will provide the technical support for blended courses: a dedicated team

or a general, institutional help desk? Dedicated technical support for blended courses provides

focused support but adds additional costs. However, sustaining multiple support groups requires

constant communication to keep everyone on the same page. Using one institutional help desk

stretches the resources of that group to cover more systems but might be more cost effective. A

third option is to hire an outside vendor.

Do you need technical support 24 hours a day, seven days a week? Are there sufficient

support requests to justify the cost of round-the-clock availability? A more practical approach is

to start with an estimate of the best coverage period and then track support requests over a period

of time. Also, have a plan for managing peak support periods like the beginning of the semester,

midterm and final exams.

Questions for Administrator Reflection (Technical Support)

- What resources has your institution made available to support the technology use of

  faculty teaching blended courses?

- What resources has your institution made available to support the technology use of

  students enrolled in blended courses?

Academic Support

Who is responsible for blended courses at your institution? While at the University of

Central Florida (UCF), the Center for Distributed Learning (CDL) (http://online.ucf.edu) holds

this responsibility, there are many other UCF units that provide academic support services to

faculty and students in partnership with CDL. It is important for administrators to build

partnerships between units and departments to support blended learning academically.

One of the most obvious partners is the library. How should students in blended courses

access library resources? Should the library provide a web page of services specifically for

blended students? Should there be a link in the learning management system to online library

resources? How do you educate faculty about these services? Librarians are very

knowledgeable about their services and specialize in one or more disciplines. Seek their

assistance in answering these questions.

What about the faculty teaching center, the online learning office, or similar

departments? What are the responsibilities of each vis-a-vis your blended initiative? Ensure

such offices have a joint understanding of philosophy and services to best support your blended

faculty in partnership.

Who handles student disability services on your campus? Accessibility has become a hot

legal issue in both face-to-face and online courses, and blended courses must deal with such

issues in *both* environments. Therefore, it is very important to partner with student disability

services to educate each other on the issues, to support faculty and students, and identify who

owns each part of the issue.

What about student academic services? Generally, there are several units engaged in

these efforts such as a writing center, tutoring services, and a variety of other student

services. Broker partnerships with these groups to educate them on blended courses and

brainstorm ways to support blended students.

Questions for Administrator Reflection (Academic Support)

- Who is ultimately responsible for the success of blended learning at your institution?

- With what units/departments do you need to partner to ensure the success of your
  institution's blended learning initiative?

Conclusion

The mixture of modalities inherent in blended learning has the potential to enhance

educational access for non-traditional students who work full-time and pursue a degree.

Combining the flexibility and convenience of online learning with the social engagement of face-to-face instruction can truly offer the "best of both worlds."

In addition, when effectively designed and implemented, blended learning can be a powerful catalyst for institutional transformation. It is crucial, however, that any blended initiative address the simultaneous needs and expectations of students, faculty, and the institution—and administrators play a key role in ensuring this strategic alignment. The considerations presented in this chapter provide institutional leaders with a grounded starting point for a successful hybrid learning program.

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