Chapter 2
Blended Learning:
History, Implementation, Benefits, and Challenges in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Blended learning in common parlance is the combination of different modes of instructional delivery, teaching, and learning styles. In this chapter, the authors expand on the definition of blended learning and outline the history and trends of blended learning in higher education. They also discuss implementation of blended learning in higher education courses. In addition, the authors highlight the benefits and challenges of blended learning and offer higher education instructors interested in implementing blended learning course solutions on how they might address these challenges.

INTRODUCTION

The recent growth of technology and network systems in society has led to the development of innovative instructional delivery methods. These methods have refocused the way instructors teach and students learn in academic settings. One of the areas where the use of technology has had a positive influence is blended education. The literature indicates blended instruction offers educators a way to train 21st Century learners in such a way that they are ready for today's workplace.

Blended education involves the combination of multiple training approaches and technologies as needed for instruction (Ganzel, 2001). A blended instructional model allows instructors to teach by combining different modes of delivery, different types of teaching and styles of learning.

The most common approach to blended education involves embedding face-to-face instruction with web-based techniques and instructional tools. Instructors supplement face-to-face instruction with segments of self-paced web-based lessons (Rowe, 2000). Bonk, Olson, Wisher, & Orvis

(2002) described a blended instruction model where instructors combine web-based and synchronous online instruction with face-to-face instruction. Blended instruction, when implemented correctly allows transparent interaction among instructors and learners engaged in a course of study (Draffan & Rainger, 2006). Blended education, also known as hybrid instruction has many definitions as it is implemented in multiple ways using a variety of models. The general consensus is that blended education is an amorphous term (Tucker, 2012) and is not easy to describe. Multiple authors who have written on blended education have offered a variety of definitions. For instance, Singh and Reed (2001) referred to blended education as instruction and learning which involves a combination of online and offline learning, self-paced and collaborative learning, structured and unstructured learning, custom content and off-the shelf content, and lastly, as a combination of synchronous and asynchronous formats. Smith (2001) defined blended learning as an educational method that uses a combination of distance education, technology (high-tech, such as television and the Internet or low-tech, such as voice mail or conference calls) and traditional (or, stand-up) education. Lim, Morris, & Kupritz (2006) also described blended learning as a learning approach where different delivery modes are utilized to maximize student success and to reduce cost. They described blended learning as a mixture of instructor-led and student-centered activities assisted by technology. Garrison and Vaughan, (2008) classified blended learning as a careful combination of classroom face-to-face instruction with online learning technologies. The basic tenet of Garrison and Vaughan's definition is that the integration of the different modes of delivery leads to a dynamic learning experience. Lin (2008) defined blended instruction as a combination of traditional face-to-face teaching utilizing innovative technologies like multimedia, streaming videos, web-conferencing, virtual office hours and other web technologies. Similarly, Lim

& Morris (2009) define blended learning as an integrated method that uses strategically planned instructional or non-instructional approaches to promote learning. Finally Snart (2010) talks about the use of blended learning in academia as the type of learning interaction that is referred to as hybrid instruction which denotes a combination of the effective aspects of online and face-to-face instruction. In short, blended learning refers to the delivery of a combination of different types of learning including e-learning.

It is important to note that the variety of definitions and descriptions offered above do not include specifics on the extent to which the different modes of instruction need to be blended. The only definition that offers specificity is that of the Sloan Consortium. The Sloan Consortium offers definition for different types of instruction as follows: traditional education involves courses that are offered entirely on a face-to-face basis; web-facilitated education involves 1% to 29% of instructional delivery offered by internet, blended/hybrid education includes instruction where 30% to 79% of the course content is delivered online, and finally "online education" includes courses with 80% or more of the course content delivered online (Allen, Seaman & Garrett, 2007).

Orey (2002) also describes blended learning from the perspectives of the learner, the designer/instructor and the administrator. From the learner's views, blended learning entails the ability to select all facilities, technology, media and materials (books, computers, instructors, classrooms, virtual environments, tutorials etc.) according to their prior knowledge and preferred style of learning in order to achieve their educational goals. From the designer/instructor's view, blended learning involves the organization and distribution of every available facility, technology, media and materials in order to attain an instructional goal. Lastly, from the administrator's view, blended learning involves the organization and distribution of the most cost effective and economic facilities, tech-

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