Creating Learner Success with a Blended Learning Program

White Paper

March, 2012
Introduction

Blended learning is a new approach to learning that combines online, learner-led course content with an instructor led, practical component. It’s not a “layering on” of online on top of classroom, but rather a mindful integration of the two approaches.¹ This approach is gaining traction at all levels of education, including the university and college level as providing the best of the best in education today. In fact, recent studies report that students involved in blended learning classes achieved “higher course completion rates, improved retention, better student attitudes toward the subject matter and increased student satisfaction with the mode of instruction compared to traditional formats.”²

Among the benefits cited by students is the increased control of their learning time and pace. Instructional capacity is also a tremendous financial, organization and economic advantage, allowing a much larger group to start the program and progress independently through the online component, with instructional time and effort focused on providing more — and more thorough — skills and classroom components.

A typical blended learning course might look like this:

**Part 1: Introduction and Orientation.**

During this portion of the course the instructor meets face to face with students. He or she introduces the course and sets the expectation of learners for the entire program, explaining how the independent, online learning will integrate with the skills or classroom components. It may be useful for the instructor to schedule some sort of ice-breaker activity where students get to know each other, helping build a strong initial class cohort. The instructor should work hard during this segment to get acquainted with each student, building a relationship that can help coach the student during the independent, online learning segment.

**INSTRUCTOR ROLE:**

- Build a sense of a class cohort
- Help students get acquainted with each other
- Get to know students and build an initial relationship with each student
- Set expectations for the entire class
• Provide concrete instructions (including online course enrollment information), time frames and expectations to students.

Part 2: Independent online learning.

During this component, students will be learning independently in an online format. The greatest strength of this component is the ability for students to learn at their own pace, progressing through the course independently.

INSTRUCTOR ROLE:

• Monitor student progress on a weekly basis.
• Communicate with students weekly, providing encouragement and support.
• Offer to answer questions and provide assistance if needed.
• Remind students of completion expectations and start date of next component.

Part 3: Skills or classroom components.

Getting students successfully through the online component will prepare them for the skills or classroom component of the program. If this portion of the program requires students to learn, practice and demonstrate hands’ on skills, remember not to expect them to know how to do those skills prior to starting this portion of the course. No online course will prepare a student to actually perform skills. They must be taught – and practiced – hands’ on before a student can successfully pass this section of the program.

INSTRUCTOR ROLE:

• Keep expectations realistic. Expect students to understand why skills are done, but not yet to know how to do them.
• Communicate acceptance of students at a learning level. Encourage them to practice skills on each other, at home or in the skills lab until they are confident in demonstrating them to the instructor.
• Create a defined class structure and clearly explain it, helping students transition from the expectation of independent learning to instructor-led learning successfully.
• Remember that real learning is emotional as well as intellectual. Find ways to make learning fun, experiential and rewarding to your students. Adults always learn best when they can build on their own life experiences to understand the need for the new skill or knowledge.
Blended learning offers an opportunity to meet the needs of a growing group of students who are both technology savvy and time sensitive. A good blended learning program will utilize the very best in independent online learning and instructor-led learning, offering some of the most exciting opportunities for both students and for growing, innovative programs.

---
