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Benefits Of Hybrid Classes In Community Colleges


Joel Barker, Borough of Manhattan Community College, USA

ABSTRACT

This article discusses hybrid courses and their impact on educational facilities, their students, and instructors. Instructors now have over ten years of data related to hybrid courses and by trial and error have devised different strategies to plan and execute lesson plans via partly online forums. Programs are in place that gives students the opportunity to excel; these types of courses promote a unique balance of guidance by the instructor and acceptance of responsibility by the students. Students have responded in a positive manner in pursuing these types of courses.

Keywords: Community Colleges; Hybrid Classes; Benefits From Hybrid Classes

INTRODUCTION

 Community Colleges are said to have the largest diverse college populations. Within that mix, two major subsets exist; transfer students, and “first time college goers.” The needs of these subsets though different, are very similar. They both desired an education while trying to balance work, school, and family life. These are just a few of the things some students juggles to attain an education. Other issues may include though not limited to the distractions that may be associated with societal dysfunctions, norms and mores that are all but causal factors that stymie or motivate individual outcomes.

The fact that they are enrolled in college, speaks to their determination in attaining an education. Given the struggle to remain focused and relevant, most community college students today are in need of support systems culled to their changing needs. Providing avenues for them to achieve an education, therefore, is vital to their success. Hybrid classes provide a unique avenue or gateway for students to juggle the demands of society on their scarce time and other resources, while still been able to complete their education. The benefits hybrid classes provide for students are many faceted, assisting them to save on costs such as: transportation, text books, commuting time, loss of wages, childcare, and many others. Hybrid classes can be seen as the cost-benefit solution that addresses the needs of community college students.

According to Professor Thomas Gould of Durham Technical Community College, “Hybrids train students in a variety of computer skills including file management, email use, and website navigation that will prove valuable in the workplace.” This article provides an insight to the advantages derived from hybrid classes in community colleges.

HYBRID CLASSES: A GROWING DEMAND BY STUDENTS

Hybrid classes combine traditional classroom meetings with online learning techniques; this combination generally results in students and instructors spending approximately less than fifty percent of the time that they usually would in the classroom and more time at an alternative location (Lei, 2010; Beattie, Hartshorne, Jordan, & O’Brien 2011). Technology has created the means to override most traditional learning concepts and expanded the scope of how instructors interact with students. The traditional non-commuter students of previous years are in the vast minority (Newbold, Mehta, & Forbus, 2011). Colleges have adapted in order to respond to students who commute to school and their educational goals are only possible if they can find the time to incorporate their studies into an already chaotic life (Lei, 2010).

Many individuals begin their educational journeys at community colleges and it is important to evaluate the benefits derived from taking hybrid classes within this environment. The last few decades have produced numerous deviations away from the ‘norm’ of the classroom environment and this trend is continuing to grow at a rapid pace (Senn, 2008; Tice n.d.). Public universities have increased the number of hybrid courses, “over 3.92 million students were taking at least one online course during the fall 2007 term, a 12% increase over the number reported the previous year; community colleges reported an increase of 11.3% in distance learning enrollment during this period” (Tice n.d.).

The late 1990s is identified as the turning point at which forums such as hybrid classes became as highly regarded as face-to face learning (Yudko, Hirokawa, & Chi, 2006). Over the last ten to twelve years both instructors and students have provided insightful feedback regarding the growing number of hybrid classes (Lei, 2010; Senn, 2008; Tice n.d.). Time management skills are cited as one of the key areas to success; improving one’s ability to solve problems and to maneuver the system via which the courses are being conducted is necessary to excel in this medium. Overall, the perceived benefits of taking hybrid courses are the reasons why most students register.

BENEFITS OF TAKING HYBRID CLASSES

First, it is important to analyze who benefits the most from hybrid classes. In some cases, forms of hybrid programs were created to service students who lived in rural areas where commuting to school was problematic; hybrid courses offered the opportunity for these students to complete their degrees rather than drop out (Yudko, Hirokawa, & Chi, 2006; Tice, n.d.). However, hybrid courses have evolved in demographics: Returning mature students, single parents, young adults, international students, and students with disabilities or those with a specific learning disability all take advantage of hybrid courses. It is imperative to highlight that most of these individuals stress that having the opportunity to participate in hybrid courses was a key factor in the completion of their studies (Yudko, Hirokawa, & Chi, 2006; Tice, n.d.).

The major advantage of hybrid classes is that this forum allows some flexibility to students with multiple responsibilities to maximize their time. Instead of commuting to school various times per week, individuals have the option logging on from a more convenient location to complete their coursework. Of course, the convenience of this flexibility has its price; unlike traditional classes where the instructor takes the major burden of the responsibility of consistently reminding students of deadlines; hybrid courses places the responsibility directly on the students (Lei, 2010). Thomas Gould states, “To succeed in hybrid classes, students will necessarily develop or enhance time management skills crucial to academic and professional success. Critical thinking skills and problem solving skills are also emphasized.

Discipline becomes a necessary quality. In order to complete assignments in a timely manner, students have to devote the time to prepare their work and post it within the appropriate time frame stipulated by the instructor. Hybrid courses definitely aids in reinforcing life skills. Students who had prior experience with hybrid courses said “Do not postpone your work repeatedly” (Lei, 2010). This online access forces students to improve their time management skills in order to achieve any degree of success.

It can be said that hybrid courses provides the perfect synergy of the traditional classroom and the online learning facility. In their paper on Community Colleges Online, Crawford and Persaud, 2013 recognize that for online college courses to be successful, components of the traditional classroom would be required. They recognized that in order to be effective in teaching in the online setting while retaining high level student retention there would be need for, inter alia, a high level of teaching presence, student support services, student orientation programs as well as assessment readiness for online work. It can be seen that hybrid classes would be the perfect vehicle for the delivery of these components of success.

How effective are hybrid courses? Beattie, Hartshorne, Jordan, & O’Brien, 2011 states that from the student’s perspective, the instruction and educational content derived from hybrid courses are comparable to courses taken at a traditional learning environment. In many cases students indicated they learned more in this forum from working with other students in groups and from the online social interaction available to them (Senn, 2008). Also, the turnover period for responses from the instructor is usually shorter than in a traditional setting; this development

was engineered mostly by student's expectations.' Engaging in hybrid courses also exposes students to the intricacies of different systems and software packages that are necessary to conduct these types of courses (Senn, 2008). Some example of systems commonly associated with hybrid courses and other online learning are Blackboard, WebCT, Moodle, or Sakai. According to Yudko, Hirokawa, and Chi, "Students do believe that they benefit from this technology, but the belief is strongest in those who are most computer/Internet literate."

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, hybrid courses have given new impetus and options to educational facilities, their students, and instructors. Instructors now have over ten years of data related to hybrid courses and by trial and error have devised different strategies to plan and execute lesson plans via partly online forums. Programs are in place that give students the opportunity to excel; these types of courses promote a unique balance of guidance by the instructor and acceptance of responsibility by the students.

In turn, students have responded in a positive manner in pursuing these types of courses. Hybrid courses provide an alternative to spending time on campus; it reduces commuting time and travel expenses. In some cases, this type of educational program has evolved from being a choice to a necessity for many students. Most importantly, hybrid courses have become the impetus today that many students craved a few short decades ago. Hybrid courses present the opportunity for individuals to become students again and to graduate in their chosen field while taking on numerous other responsibilities. According to Thomas Gould of Durham Technical Community College, he believes that the benefits of hybrid courses include the development of time management skills, critical thinking skills, and comprehension skills.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

Joel Barker, MS, CPA, is an Assistant Accounting Professor at Borough of Manhattan Community College, CUNY, New York, New York, USA. He received his tertiary education through CUNY colleges. He has taught within the CUNY system at Colleges such as, Queens College and York College. Prior to entering academia, his professional experiences were in Public Accounting with the specific focus on audits and taxes. E-mail: jbarker@bmcc.cuny.edu

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