

## **Hybrids, Hassles, and Hiccups: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Challenges and Advantages of Hybrid Classes**

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*"Hybrid" or "blended" courses are a much debated topic and a growing trend in higher education today. Reflecting on our primary andragogical (adult learning) experience, we examine the implementation of the hybrid model in the areas of nursing, art history, and applied administration/business and economics. A critical interdisciplinary overview evaluates the advantages and challenges of the hybrid approach within the diverse student environment of a two-year regional college of a state university. Faculty design and delivery experience is integrated with student learning experiences from various in-class assignments capturing student's perceptions of hybrid courses. The faculty and student qualitative narratives provide insight for improving navigation methods of the shared hybrid challenges of change, time, and workload. Overcoming the challenges enables faculty to leverage the technological benefits of hybrid design to enhance student learning.*

The general purpose of a hybrid course is to integrate face-to-face and online learning to support and complement one another to increase student retention and success. The "hybrid format which combines face-to-face with online course design features combines the best of both worlds" (McVey, 2015). "Faculty teaching blended learning courses must adopt new tools and new mindsets to increase the likelihood of positive outcomes. Considering these potential challenges, transitioning to the blended learning model should be carefully managed to ensure that both students and faculty are ready and receptive to this approach" (Napier, Dekhane, & Smith, 2011). Aycok, Kaleta, and Garnham (2003) found that change and time were faculty members' biggest obstacles when deciding whether they wanted to teach a hybrid course. This is consistent with Muirhead's (2000) findings that teachers reported increased workload and stress with online education. The faculty adaptation intersects at change, workload, and technology.

We utilize hybrid course delivery to enable us to maintain a level playing field among a diverse student population (Muchado, 2011) and to

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incorporate multiple learning strategies and keep the students actively engaged in the learning process. We implement Internet activities to promote and assess active learning, to facilitate student peer review/collaboration and student-professor interaction, as well as to accommodate individual learning styles. In that sense, we support the general notion that hybrid learning increases the opportunities for active learning strategies and we agree with the premise that “the Internet is a powerful tool which can be used to support student-centered instruction because it facilitates methods that focus on constructivism, active learning, collaborative learning, and individualized learning” (Karoglu, Kiraz, & Ozden, 2014). The online environment combined with active learning strategies promotes constructivism whereby all student life experiences are valued and new knowledge can be linked with previous knowledge. Further, because of the asynchronistic online environment, the educator is best seen as a facilitator.

The course management system often referred to as learning management system “facilitates communication channel, enhances learning practice for learners and instructors, and is an enabler for blended learning” (Chou, 2011). We demonstrate that the general benefits of the hybrid platform, such as flexibility, easy access, and multi-level engagement, can improve student performance in various programs at small regional campuses in the same way in which they have promoted student success in Engineering courses taught at a larger state university (Ilgu & Jahren, 2014). Similarly, we address some of the “hassles and hiccups” that inevitably occur in a platform’s practical implementation—e.g., time management for both students and faculty, efficient technology access, quality design, and effective online communication. “Hassles” are the problems brought about by the constant pressures of limited time, busy academic schedules, dependence on technology, increased work load and organizational demands of educators developing and teaching hybrid courses. “Hiccups” refer to the various pedagogical and technological challenges we experience, identify, and try to resolve along the way in order to achieve teaching effectiveness in both the face-to-face and the online aspects of hybrid courses.

We have identified hassles as the additional irritations of teaching with an online component that must be accepted, but can be minimized. An example of a hassle is the additional time that is required for hybrid courses. A hiccup is often co-mingled with the hassles, but often is a barrier or hurdle

we must overcome in order to develop and offer a course in the hybrid format, such as student's lack of technology literacy. We present the ways in which we have mitigated, resolved, or continue to address these "hassles and hiccups" in our own course design, content organization, and practice.

### **Methodology**

This paper combines qualitative methods of auto-ethnographic narratives of the faculty members and constructivist views of student responses. We label our faculty stories auto-ethnographic based on Muncey's (2010) position that "the researcher is a full member in the research group... [is visible in text and] committed to improving understanding." The pooling of our interdisciplinary experiences allowed us to compare those experiences for similarities and review what we are doing in our roles as educators. We are sharing our stories as researchers and participants to increase the understanding of the value of hybrid learning. The narratives of our faculty experiences are divided by discipline.

By examining student perceptions, the students become participants who construct knowledge from their experience. We describe our experiences for others to learn more about the usefulness of hybrid courses. It is a "constructivist viewpoint that concepts and theories are constructed by researchers out of stories that are constructed by research participants who are trying to explain...their experiences to the researcher" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Creswell, Corbin, Strauss, Karuglo et al, and many others have outlined important points to identify whether a study, a method, a teaching practice, or a course delivery is constructive. The similarity to our work is that the students are making meaning through the experience. In Karuglo, Kiraz, and Ozden's study "students engaged in these authentic scenarios to analyze real-life situations and to consequently [reflect] their own ideas" (2014). We reviewed student reflections for common experiences and the impact on their learning in the hybrid course as opposed to a traditional face-to-face course.

The qualitative narrative that follows examines three faculty experiences combined with student perceptions in three hybrid courses. In the first narrative, the Nursing Experience, uses literature review and personal voice to demonstrate the need for time management, well-thought-out assignments, and consistent feedback and assessments in hybrid courses. Art History uses a case study design to illustrate how multi-methods enhance the student and faculty engagement in learning. Finally,

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Business and Economics uses primary reflection and thematic coding of student essays to review the challenges and advantages of hybrid courses in a bachelor program. The three disciplines are offered by our two-year campus. Each discipline voices through qualitative methods the andragogical experiences and perceptions of faculty and students engaged in hybrid design, delivery, and learning to suggest methods to navigate hybrid courses for adult learners successfully.

### **Faculty Narratives by Discipline**

#### *Nursing Experience*

**Disciplinary considerations.** Nursing education focuses on nursing knowledge as well as personal attitudes and values, self-awareness, and the lifelong learning needed to grow professionally and adapt to an ever-changing health care environment. Addressing personal attitudes and values as well as promoting self-awareness presents some specific challenges to online teaching and learning of nursing education. As I began teaching in a hybrid nursing program I reviewed the literature. The literature detailed some specific problems such as how the learning management system (LMS) was utilized, the attributes of students, student authenticity, and faculty workload as it relates to assessment of student learning and provision of timely feedback. These are the challenges I will address providing researcher solutions and my experience with those strategies.

**Hybrid conversion.** The first hiccup or barrier to learning in a hybrid classroom often can be utilizing the LMS for presenting content and managing course grades. The online classroom must be engaging and interactive. This was affirmed by Sowan and Jenkins (2013), who reported that the key to success is utilization of the tools available on the LMS to support collaboration, rather than using the LMS as a static data repository (p. 315). The ability to collaborate is a vital skill for today's professional. In the conversion of the face-to-face content, engagement must be considered.

Faculty are challenged to embrace new tools and change their mindsets. There can be a temptation to simply convert classroom PowerPoints by adding audio. These turn out to be very lengthy presentations, without any interactive strategies. Thomas, Reyes, and Blumling (2014) coined this as "one-way communication" (p. 36). In this format students are expected simply to listen and accept information.

Students reported this strategy was ineffective for learning and felt like “busy work” (Thomas et al., 2014). The challenge is to move away from this type of communication and engage the student in a learning experience.

Still, do not throw out that classroom PowerPoint. Instead, Thomas et al. (2014) suggest breaking the presentation into more manageable pieces such as 10-15 minute segments and/or consider inserting an activity. In the case of the latter, instruct students to pause the presentation to engage in an activity such as responding to questions on a study guide, completing case studies, or practicing questions. One of the benefits of an online presentation is that students can review it as often as they need. Based on my experience, when there is evidence of student engagement in the online activity, their test scores demonstrate learning has taken place.

**The student factor.** Nursing educators are challenged to prepare students for a demanding career that requires students to be lifelong learners. They also must prepare students to complete state licensure successfully. Research indicates there are no significant differences in student success between face-to-face and hybrid programs (Robinia, Maas, Johnson, & Nye, 2012, p376; Thomas & Baker, 2008, p. 19). Still, the online learner must possess specific attributes to be successful. These student attributes, according to the authors, include self-direction, self-discipline, time-management skills, and knowledge of personal learning styles. Additionally, students need to have reliable access to and the ability to use technology.

Many students are not sufficiently prepared to be successful in the online environment. Online learning requires students to be self-regulated learners with time management and technology access skills (Robinia, Maas, Johnson, & Nye, 2012, p. 376). Research indicates that there is a correlation between time spent online and student achievement (Smith, Passmore, & Faight, 2009, p. 101; Sowan & Jenkins, 2013, p. 320; Thomas & Baker, 2008, p. 19.) One way to identify students who may have difficulty in the class is to design assignments that assess students for readiness to participate in the online environment (Vai & Sosulski, 2011). I have utilized scavenger hunts, discussion forum introductions, and videos to assess students’ ability to navigate the LMS, utilize asynchronous tools, and test technological skills and/or access issues. All of the researchers mentioned strategies to support students including: maintain uniformity between program courses, divide larger assignments into smaller pieces with specific due dates, and prepare videos that provide instruction on how to use LMS tools and other

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technology. Sowan and Jenkins (2013) demonstrated peer evaluation and collaborative activities improve students' self-regulatory skills (p. 321).

**The challenges.** Class size, time, and increased workload are the primary faculty hassles I have experienced. I do not think these are new hassles to anyone, though the reason they are problematic may be different. I will explore these challenges from a nursing perspective.

Nurse educators face the challenge of bridging theory together with real nursing situations. Educators must find ways to assess the student's ability to be in relationship with patients, have a caring attitude, and be culturally sensitive. One way we do this in the online environment is through the use of case studies (Smith, Passmore, & Faught, 2008, p. 100). A nursing case study will describe a patient situation and then expect students to respond to questions of the required nursing care including psychosocial needs. Ultimately, case studies enable students to assess critically how they would engage in a real life situation.

Investing time in creating critically reflective questions to promote students exploration of their beliefs and values is also key. Having students post their answers and requiring a thoughtful response to what others have posted on the discussion forum can offer students the opportunity to consider other students' points of view, which can expand their own perspective. For example: students were asked to reflect and share their view on providing pain relief to patients utilizing a discussion forum. Several students had very strong and opposing opinions about the topic. A few shared experiences of loved ones with uncontrolled chronic pain. Two students reported the effect of close family members with addictions on their lives. For one student, it resulted in the death of a spouse. All of the students with the strong opinions demonstrated the development of empathy for those with the opposing views. The majority of the participants who had no life experience with uncontrolled pain or addiction also demonstrated empathy and acknowledged the complexity of the topic.

**Class size.** While the online environment allows fewer educators to reach more students, the nursing literature mentions the importance of decreasing class size for several reasons. The class size needs to enable the educator to grade and provide timely feedback (Sowan & Jenkins, 2013, p. 316; Smith, Passmore, & Faught, 2009, p. 101). The educator needs to participate on discussion forums, blogs, wikis, and other interactive environments to promote critical thinking and to promote interaction and cooperation among students (Sowan & Jenkins, p. 318). "Reducing

interaction with faculty by increasing student enrollment with minimal interaction from faculty can create an environment of frustration and poor outcomes” (Thomas, Reyes, & Blumling, 2015, p. 37). Therefore, faculty should advocate on behalf of students for smaller class sizes.

**Time and workload.** One of the most crucial elements of teaching is the provision of feedback. This aspect of teaching requires a great deal of time. I have found that strategically using group problem solving activities such as case studies can help with the provision of timely feedback and promote interaction among students. First, there are fewer discussion forums, blogs, or wikis to track and review. Second, throughout the activity students receive feedback from peers. During the next face to face class, the faculty member can review the case study with the entire class providing additional feedback. This limits the amount of feedback the instructor needs to communicate through the LMS.

When you enter into teaching in the hybrid format you may feel that your workload significantly increases. Many of us do not expect technology to be central to teaching. Educators teaching online need to have access to technology and it takes time to learn and perfect the use of technology tools (Smith, Passmore, & Faught, 2009, p. 102). Robinia, Maas, Johnson, and Nye (2012) found “pre-purchased online case studies helped faculty manage the initial feeling of being overwhelmed” (p. 377).

Of course larger classes require more time for interaction and provision of feedback. In addition, the asynchronous communication of the online environment requires more time than the face-to-face version of the course. Online practice quizzes that provide the rationale for correct answers and assignments that allow students to provide feedback to each other increase the feedback students receive without increasing the time demand of the educator (Smith, Passmore, & Faught, 2009).

Still, feedback and interaction are significant components of teaching in the online environment. I have found that strategically using group problem-solving activities such as case studies can help with the provision of timely feedback and promote interaction among students. Throughout the activity students receive feedback from peers. During the next face-to-face class the faculty member can review the case study with the class. Reviewing the work of 6-8 small groups rather than 40 individuals reduces the amount of review time required from the educator.

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Nursing is a relational discipline. We have illustrated ways to utilize the benefits of the hybrid structure to enhance the relational aspects of the course, one of which is the peer evaluation in group activities.

Students studying other disciplines may have different needs for content and communication depending on discipline. Although it shares similar issues, Art History has different methods of instruction and needs of delivery. In the next section, the Art History experience is analyzed through the case study method.

### **Art History Experience**

**Disciplinary Considerations.** When designing a hybrid course and deciding on the course's optimal delivery mode, the instructor needs to consider the requirements of both the course and the discipline (Brinthaup, Clayton, Draude, & Calahan, 2014). The history of art survey combines the difficulties of teaching a survey course with the challenges of art history as a discipline. In terms of material and scope, the history of art and design survey, as any other introductory survey, is characterized by comprehensiveness (it includes a vast chronological, historical, geographic, and cultural span) as well as genre and thematic variety (it covers a range of art forms, such as painting, drawing, and sculpture, and an array of artistic movements and individual styles). As a result, the art history sequence, by the nature of its design, moves at a fast pace, jumping rapidly from one culture to another and from one period and movement to the next one. That is an important factor to consider when converting a face-to-face course or designing a hybrid because the most common challenge in hybrid courses is that students find them difficult and overwhelming. Art history poses additional complexities as an academic discipline. Leaving aside the question of how limited any classification of academic disciplines is bound to be, one of the most widely used classification models, Biglan's theory (Biglan, 1973a, 1973b), can be used to describe art history as a combination of two of the soft disciplines defined by Biglan—one of those disciplines is *pure* (history) and one of them is *applied* (art). As such, art history courses combine creativity with analysis and assessment. Accordingly, students are expected to meet various requirements and objectives.

1. They are required to learn to identify visual objects or to memorize facts such as select terminology, artists' names, key dates, and so on.



2. They have to learn to understand, analyze, and apply abstract concepts (e.g., cultural movements, historical trends, and artistic styles).
3. They have to demonstrate and master different skills (e.g., to be able to conduct visual and cultural analysis and to be able to place and discuss a work of art in its historical and cultural context).
4. Lastly, the students are expected to learn to use different tools of analysis and vehicles of information such as image, text, diagrams, architectural plans, two-dimensional and three-dimensional models, maps, videos, and so on.

The characteristics of the discipline are important to consider when designing/converting a course and choosing a course delivery method because some skills and vehicles of information (e.g., memorization of facts, peer review, or application of theory to personal experience) are easier to master than others so they are more appropriate for independent study or synchronous/asynchronous group work outside of the classroom (Hybrid Course Design). In comparison, other activities, such as analyzing complex primary texts or architectural models, are more suitable for class sessions in which the professor can guide the discussion, answer questions, and explain the complexity of the material.

**Methodological considerations.** For the past few decades, the history of art has been one of the leading disciplines in the incorporation of new instructional technologies and computer-based tools in the classroom. However, despite such technological advantages, there is very little data and scholarly literature on the use of those technologies in art history courses and the practical application of computer-based tools in achieving discipline-specific goals and objectives.

The only book on the subject is a small collection of essays and case studies titled “Teaching Art History with New Technologies: Reflections and Case Studies” (Donahue-Wallace, La Follette, & Pappas, 2008). The authors recognize both the rapid transformation of the field caused by the adoption of the new technologies as well as the need to further examine the changing trajectory of the discipline. The first part of the book offers general methodological reflections upon the changes in art history pedagogy brought about by developing technologies while the second section traces the pioneering use of digital resources in face-to-face art history courses. A few of the case studies address select strategies for teaching art history

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courses online; however, the subject of the more recent modality of hybrid teaching needs further study and consideration.

The technologies of e-learning have evolved significantly since 2008; however, some of the issues and challenges connected with their use remain the same. For instance, the preface of the book acknowledges “the dearth not only of readily accessible information about teaching art history with new technologies, but of pedagogical literature for art history in general” (Donahue-Wallace, La Follette, & Pappas, 2008). Today, apart from the publication of this small collection of essays, the scarcity of data and peer-review articles on the subject continues to be the case and there is a fair amount of “trial-and-error experimentation.” The primary vehicles of learning remain the pedagogical models adopted from other disciplines and the experience of others, particularly, the reflections and case-studies by the early adopters of e-learning technologies.

Incorporating the reflections and experience of other disciplines, this case study describes the adoption of e-learning methods and technologies in teaching survey courses in art history at a two-year state college. In terms of general methodological considerations, as per instructions in other fields, the art historian has to make a series of pedagogical decisions before and during the process of converting a face-to-face course into a hybrid (Questions for Reflection). A careful meta-pedagogical reflection would ensure a better success and teaching effectiveness. In addition to the usual challenges connected with e-learning, such as workload, class size, communication, and time management, the reflection should also consider the requirements and objectives of the course as well as the specifics of the discipline, the institution, and the students taking the course. Without making any claims to be comprehensive, this case study describes my preliminary methodological reflection and the process of converting, designing, and teaching new hybrid survey courses in the history of art and design. The preliminary pedagogical thought process included a consideration of the nature of the discipline and the course, the students taking the course, and the general benefits and challenges of the hybrid model. Describing those considerations, the description of the case study outlines the process of implementing particular e-learning techniques and methods as I concentrate on the structure, advantages, and challenges of the hybrid art history survey.

**The student factor.** The second stage of the pedagogical reflection in preparation of teaching a hybrid course involves the students taking the

course. According to the literature, the designers of hybrid courses need to consider the level of the course, the constitution of the student body taking the course, and the issues they encounter in their face-to-face courses. The most common problems that emerge in traditional face-to-face courses, and particularly in large introductory surveys, are also the most widely discussed reasons for adopting the hybrid model. The problems include: low attendance in traditional lecture courses; different level of student comprehension during face-to-face lectures (some students grasp the material quickly; other students require a slower pace); low student retention in those courses (due to missed classes) busy schedule, life interruptions, and missed homework); and multitasking in class. (Feldmann & Carney, 1998; Moore, 2003). Combining online and face-to-face components, hybrid courses have the potential to mitigate or resolve those general problems because, when well designed, they maintain a high-quality student-faculty interaction (Navarro & Shoemaker, 2000; Riffell & Sibley, 2003) and enhance the learning outcomes (Tuckman, 2002). In addition to the above-mentioned general problems with face-to-face courses, regional two-year state colleges experience institutionally-specific issues connected with limited funding for faculty development and technology training and a diverse student body that regularly includes first-year students who are underprepared and adapting to college. Such students often encounter reading, listening, and comprehension issues (for instance, the most common comments made by students having such difficulties include “I cannot learn from the book,” “I cannot concentrate during the lecture,” and “Listening to lectures (reading textbooks) is boring to me”). With its promise of multi-level engagement and high-quality student-faculty interaction, hybrid courses are particularly well-suited to address such issues and have become an increasingly popular platform (Young, 2002).

**The hybrid conversion.** Taking all of those issues and the literature into consideration, I decided to convert three survey courses in art history and one survey course in the history of design into hybrid courses, beginning with the first part of the art history survey taught at a two-year regional campus. The projected goals were multifaceted and included: increased student comprehension and retention; enhanced learning outcomes; achieving active learning; and addressing the varied needs of a widely diverse student body. The hybrid delivery mode was chosen because its potential, as it was outlined in the literature, responded to my projected goals with its promise of increased learning and independent learning,

interaction, flexibility, and, most importantly, increased instructor satisfaction (Lindeman, 2004). This case study summarizes the results and pedagogical reflections after one year of teaching hybrid courses during which three of the projected four face-to-face courses were converted and taught as hybrids. The summary of student grade data, student comments, and instructor observations, as a whole, confirmed that the hybrid model worked well for the majority of students in the art history survey.

*Table 1.* ARTH 1001 (Art History Survey, Part 1) Average Scores on Objective (Multiple-Choice) Exams and Final Paper: Semester Comparison (Fall 2013--Summer 2015)

| Grade Data                                       | F 2013       | F 2014 | SP 2015 | SU 2015 |
|--|--------------|--------|---------|---------|
| Course Modality                                  | Face-to-Face | Hybrid | Hybrid  | Hybrid  |
| Exam 1 Scantron                                  | 75           | 78     | 79      | 85      |
| Exam 2 Scantron                                  | 33           | 69     | 65      | 84      |
| Exam 3 Scantron                                  | 66           | 74     | 75      | 79      |
| Exam Grade Ave.<br>on Scantron<br>Analysis Sheet | 58           | 73.6   | 73      | 82.66   |
| Final Grade<br>Average                           | 67.46        | 75     | 75.46   | 87.91   |
| Paper Grade<br>Average                           | 59.81        | 81     | 85.80   | 87.77   |

The hybrid model enhanced the learning outcomes and student understanding of the material, improved student retention and grades, facilitated active learning and better interaction between student and professor, and raised the level of student and faculty satisfaction with the course. The most indicative evidence that the implementation of the hybrid model in art history survey courses improved student performance is provided by the comparative analysis of the semester grade data. The most objective component of that data and evidence is the average raw score of the multiple-choice section of each exam as calculated on the Scantron analysis sheet of each course in each semester (see Table 1). The semester comparison demonstrates a dramatic increase in the average raw score in hybrid sections (fall 2014, spring 2015, and summer 2015) in comparison with the average raw score in the face-to-face modality of the same course (fall 2013). In addition, the data shows a steady progression and

improvement in the average raw scores and overall grades in hybrid courses over the course of three semesters (spring 2014-summer 2015).

Student evaluations and reflections (student answers to specially designed questions) on the hybrid structure of each course were collected from all students enrolled in all art history hybrid surveys between spring 2014 and summer 2015. All of the evaluations were administered online at the end of the semester. The results were analyzed and pseudo names were used to protect the identity of the participants. The results will continue to be analyzed as part of an ongoing study; however, the preliminary summary suggests a positive trend of student satisfaction with hybrid courses.

The vast majority of students demonstrated preference for hybrid courses as opposed to face-to-face courses; a smaller number of students attributed their academic difficulties to the hybrid model; and a minor fraction of the students admitted that they preferred the more direct communication with the professor facilitated by face-to-face courses as the method of instruction that would enable them to succeed.

Students appreciated the flexibility and organization of hybrid courses (“I really appreciate Hybrid Courses. I actually learned the materials better in this course because I could watch the lessons whenever I wanted so it wasn’t butted up against another class and therefore gave me time to debrief in between classes. I could learn at my own pace”). They liked the combination of online and face-to-face learning (“I liked the use of online and classroom teaching mixed”) and understood that the face-to-face component, which is missing in online courses, is one of the primary benefits of the hybrid model (“Having a teacher to explain things in person when you didn’t understand the homework”). The most commonly described challenge of hybrid courses was time management and meeting all deadlines (“The primary challenge of Hybrid Courses is to manage time and make sure I can stay on top of projects as they come”). However, many students also realize that such challenges teach them how to manage their time properly (“Using time wisely to get homework and papers done...”) and how to study effectively (“...after taking this course I know that it is necessary to do work throughout the week and not to put it off if you have the choice”).

Four peer reviews and one informal Quality Matters review of the hybrid courses were conducted between fall 2014 and summer 2015. The peer reviewers express appreciation for the organization of the course (“I found this to be a very effective approach, as it makes them [the students]

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comfortable with the material to engage with each other and with the instructor during class. The variety and interactivity of the materials no doubt keep them more interested in the topic than passively reading the textbook.”). They praise the appropriateness of electronic resources and content delivery tools (“The thoroughness of her power points is unequaled and unsurpassed...”) as well as the effective use of the LMS (“The Blackboard site was very detailed, with a lot of direction, and many support materials were accessible” and “Her Blackboard course, including her modules, power points, critical thinking questions, etc., were of very good quality and extremely well organized...”) In the spring of 2015, the first part of the hybrid art history sequence underwent successfully a rigorous Quality Matters (QM) review. Comments from the review applauded the course’s varied and clearly explained assessments, clear instructions and clear introduction on “what to expect” in this course and the variety of assessment techniques. The review letter noted that students are provided a variety of resources to support the instructional material and the reviewer concluded by writing, “I believe that your students are receiving a quality course and that this course meets the QM standards at least at 85%.”

**Case study summary.** After one year of converting face-to-face courses and teaching new hybrid courses, I can summarize my experience in four categories: benefits, caveats, positive outcomes, and challenges. In terms of benefits, in hybrid courses students are more active and accountable for their own learning. They spend less time in passive listening and observing and devote more time to active comprehension by working individually and collaboratively in and outside of the classroom. The faculty is able to document and examine student work more thoroughly and the instructor has more time to interact with the students because the time spent on lecturing in class is reduced, and, as a result, there are more opportunities to guide, assess, and track student progress. Finally, faculty can provide to the students opportunities to learn and participate in multiple ways—synchronously and asynchronously—and therefore the hybrid courses are better suited to accommodate different individual and learning styles. In terms of caveats, as noted in the literature and confirmed by my experience, hybrid courses require more time and resources to develop, specific technology skills, and better self-management and higher self-motivation of students. As demonstrated by some studies on the subject, the instructor of hybrid courses can indeed experience a “loss of power” as more responsibility is placed in the hands of the students and the

face-to-face time is reduced so, as a result, faculty have less control over how and what students are learning (Lindeman, 2004). There are certain strategies that can help mitigate that effect—setting up clear guidelines, deadlines, and expectations; keeping up active communication; providing timely feedback; and sending frequent reminders. The positive outcomes of adopting and using the hybrid model that I have observed and recorded include: higher overall grades and grade point average for each class; improved retention, class discussion, and understanding of the material; as well as better management of student time and enhanced preparation. My experience also confirms that the common challenges discussed in connection with hybrid courses and e-learning are prevalent. For faculty members designing and teaching new hybrid courses the biggest challenges are achieving effective time and workload management, maintaining active communication, and controlling student progress, especially in the case of students who struggle with the course or the material. When asked what aspects of the hybrid course they find most challenging, students point out the use of technology, the amount of work they have to do each week, the importance of meeting deadlines, the inability to ask spontaneous questions and receive immediate responses as they do in face-to-face meetings, and the need to manage your time effectively.

### **Applied Administration Experience**

**Disciplinary considerations.** At our regional campus, we offer an interdisciplinary bachelor's completer degree program. The program resides in Business and Economics, but is supported by the departments of Mathematics, English and Communication, Electronic Media, and Business and Economics. The program is known as a degree in Applied Administration, Bachelor of Technical and Applied Studies (BTAS). The BTAS allows students with two-year applied or technical associate degrees to complete a bachelor degree in the equivalent of four semesters (two years) of course work. The actual time it takes a student to finish depends on the number of courses that student can take each term. The students tend to be full-time employees and time is at a premium. The program could be described as blended because courses are scheduled face-to-face, online, and in hybrid formats. Even in face-to-face courses, the Blackboard learning management system (LMS) is used to support courses. A few courses in the Applied Administration program are fully online, others are hybrid such as teambuilding and the senior capstone course.

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**The student factor.** The Applied Administration Senior Capstone class is offered as a hybrid class to students of the bachelor degree program. As part of the readiness assessment online, each student submits an information sheet with basic information about their major and course experience and they answer the following questions:

1. Describe your thoughts/perceptions of a hybrid course in general.
2. Describe what you consider the primary difficulties in a hybrid course.

This information is used to determine strategies in curriculum design and delivery to enable successful completion of the class. Information sheets from a class of 16 Capstone students over the age of 18, were manually coded for common themes in their responses to the prompts describing their thoughts/perceptions in general of hybrid courses and what they considered to be the primary difficulties in a hybrid class.

The common themes students stated as their primary difficulties or hassles included: self-organization, communication and wait time for responses from the professor, time and personal management.

1. Change/self-organization: Many students feel they are learning from the internet, not the professor. Students in general prefer face-to-face classes because they feel any online component makes the class more difficult than face-to-face.
2. Communication: Online students did not have synchronous discussion like in a classroom, when questions were asked they did not like waiting for responses. Team work and communication is difficult online.
3. Time and Workload: Some students feel lack of organization ruins the course. Students perceive class time is a waste and, if the class is going to have an online part, then it should be fully online. Hybrids require lots of time outside of class. The pace is quick and there are no holidays. Workload issues include: work/life balance, social loafers on teams, procrastination and a feeling that some work is busy work.

Applied Administration students are trying to complete their degree quickly. This is a challenge because they are trying to “cram” as many classes into the evening hours of each semester and work a 40 hour per week job. Students want a flexible schedule and to be able to “stack” classes. Class stacking, also referred to as scaffolding, allows students to



attend multiple hybrid courses in an evening. For example, a semester three credit hour course can be offered in a hybrid format in which each class meets 60 or 90 minutes per week face-to-face allowing students to schedule two or three classes in that three-hour class time frame. This type of scheduling enables students to take four or five classes per term, but not be in the classroom every evening during the week. Both instructor and student must learn to pace and schedule work completion, which means clear schedules of work assignments and communicating early and often what is required to be completed online. An example of a hybrid course in the Applied Administration program is the Senior Capstone. Students have face-to-face class one hour each week, have assignments to complete online, and must complete 15 hours of project work with a for-profit or non-profit organization. The face-to-face and outside-of-class work is supported by the online content, and the course includes space for teams to collaborate online.

**Hybrid conversion.** The challenges experienced in developing hybrid courses are consistent with those of my colleagues. The hassles include 1) Change: moving appropriate face-to-face content to online environment; 2) Communication: students delayed responses and the interpretation of meaning of what is posted in an online environment; 3) Time: it feels like it takes twice the amount of time to offer a class as hybrid as opposed to a face-to-face class; and 4) Workload: it often feels as if each student is an independent study student requiring individual attention. No release time or additional compensation is offered to develop classes in hybrid or online format so the incentives are purely student- and self-motivated. Student motivators and challenges are similar and include change, time, communication, and workload. Hybrid learning is often challenging because students and faculty feel they have to learn technology and content. This is a reality in the “real world” too.

Course redesign requires learning new tools and developing a different mindset as a teacher. There is a desire to put as much content as possible online, often causing an overload of material which is called course-and-a-half syndrome (Aycock, Kaleta, & Garnham, 2003). It is a process. Everything does not have to be completed the first time. Faculty want the first time to be perfect so they try to be a Super Teacher. Faculty need to be patient with themselves and students.

**Change.** The first challenge was how to change the way I teach. Face-to-face classes enable some creative flying by the seat of our pants.

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One must be much more organized in a hybrid format. Face-to-face and online material need to coordinate to leverage both. Setting a pace for varied computer skill levels and content experience is a challenge for instructors. Readiness assessments introduce students to each other and start the formation of a community and teamwork. Students complete tasks to be successful in communicating on discussion boards and in submitting assignments. Rubrics help eliminate grade discrimination and level the playing field. As faculty design hybrid course content the next challenge is effective communication.

**Communication.** Language becomes critical to conveying meaning. What we typically have is a failure to communicate, we must manage student expectations. State clearly to students when you will be unavailable and you can be unavailable! Feedback must be prompt, students often do not feel it is quick enough; give them parameters of when they can expect to hear back from you whether it is two days or two weeks. Explain late assignment policies. I have found that accepting late work makes double work for me. You may have a different experience, but whatever your policy let students know this in several places. Repeat, repeat, repeat. I post information within the modules, in announcements, and in the Course Overview. Technology is not an excuse—students need a plan for when things go wrong, and they will go wrong. The dog will eat the computer cable, the electricity will go off, and the system will go down. Students may need to leave their houses to find internet access.

**Time and Workload.** Time keeps on ticking. It is often difficult to manage time effectively with other duties. A dearth of instructional design support at many institutions forces faculty to be content and technology experts. The workload in and of itself requires substantial time commitment. Additional training is required. For those who are procrastinators: this behavior must change immediately. We get into a habit of a ritual of Tuesday/Thursday or Monday/Wednesday/Friday classes and, when part of a class is online, it is easy to forget you have this class. Instructors, you need to pace yourself. Schedule your work time on the class so you do not end up working 24/7. Make policies and stick to them.

## General Conclusion and Recommendations

### Andragogical Reflections

The Applied Administration program needs revolve mostly around design and delivery to impact time and workload; whereas the Art History issues are both design/delivery and content based. Nursing found that the literature supported hybrid conversion of face-to-face classes. In this section we combine our conclusions and findings from each discipline to recommend future research and efforts in hybrid learning

In terms of instructional design and practice, our experience with hybrid teaching supports the general recommendations and successful strategies suggested in the literature (McGee and Reis, 2012). The recommendations are connected with all the components of the course:

- 1) Course Redesign
- 2) Course Structure & Navigation
- 3) Course Assessment & Measurement
- 4) Learner Interaction and Engagement

A complete course redesign when converting an introductory face-to-face survey course into a hybrid is not only recommended but also necessary in order to avoid the “double course syndrome”—the tendency to make the course too demanding and overwhelming for both the instructor and the students. (Being “overwhelmed” is the most common complaint among students taking newly designed hybrid courses.) A targeted redesign can make the scope and the material more manageable and ensure a better alignment between the elements of the course.

Hybrid courses also require new course elements such as distance learning policies, new technologies, preliminary course information, and new techniques for assessing student preparedness such as a Readiness Assessment. Similarly, the alignment of all course components is of special importance in hybrid courses. Key course components such as learning objectives, assessment, instruction, activities, interaction, and course technology need to work well together to achieve the desired learning outcomes. If this alignment is overlooked, some instructional activities may appear random and unnecessary, while important course content may lack proper assessment and evaluation. Increased clarity, user-friendliness, and transparency in all aspects of hybrid courses are also paramount. That

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necessitates a simple course structure, easy accessibility and navigation, as well as clear assessment, instructional materials, and measurement (grading policies, rubrics, and criteria have to be well defined and easily available). Finally, learner interaction and engagement are key components of hybrid courses and the success of many students largely depends on them. Therefore, the instructor needs to be easily accessible, to be able to provide various opportunities for interaction and engagement, and to facilitate or moderate discussions in class and outside of the classroom.

Online/hybrid courses are not easier or less time: this must be communicated early and, often, it is a common misconception. We recommend that you plan milestones in your hybrid class just as you would in your face-to-face courses, to discourage students from waiting until the end of the term to complete assignments. Students must become active learners--make them responsible for their learning. As a result of our interdisciplinary experience, we have found that, if the abovementioned recommendations are implemented, the hybrid model is advantageous to the majority of our students, and we recommend using the following strategies to deal with the challenges of teaching hybrid courses:

- Start early in your design
- Set student expectations on the first day of class either online or face-to-face
- Incorporate a student readiness assessment
- Communicate clearly and often
- Keep discipline specific needs in mind
- Avoid the course-and-a-half syndrome--don't overdevelop
- Use a variety of interactive learning strategies
- Utilize activities which limit need for feedback
- Use face-to-face class time to reinforce online learning
- Keep what you do well face-to-face and align with online materials.

### **Future research**

This interdisciplinary narrative adds to the academic literature supporting quality design of hybrid courses grounded in primary experience of faculty and student perceptions. This research has an approval to continue collection of student perceptions through focused reflective student assignments. We will be coding a larger group of students'

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perceptions and continuing with a thematic analysis of common student themes to further develop curriculum and course delivery strategies.

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