## How Faculty Roles Transform in Hybrid Courses

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## Introduction

Hybrid courses are becoming increasingly popular with faculty, students, and institutions. Hybrid courses, also known as blended, reduce in-person classroom meetings and replace a significant amount of that instructional time with online learning activities (Garnham & Kaleta, 2002; Swenson & Evans, 2003). The benefits of offering hybrid courses include improving student learning, providing time flexibility for students and instructors, and offering scheduling and classroom space flexibility for institutions. Willingness and ability to change, however, are critical for faculty who choose to teach hybrid courses. The following article provides excerpts and selected findings from a larger study published in a book chapter on blended learning:

> Kaleta, R., Skibba, K., & Joosten, T. (2007). Discovering, designing and delivering hybrid courses. In A. G. Picciano & C. D. Dziuban (Eds.), *Blended learning: Research perspectives* (pp. 111-143). Needam, MA: The Sloan Consortium.

## The Hybrid Course Model

Hybrid courses are substantially different from wholly face-to-face or online courses. They require faculty to develop new teaching skills and to learn how to design hybrid courses. To transform a course from a face-to-face format to a hybrid format, an instructor must re-examine course goals, develop new online and face-to-face learning activities, utilize new types of assessment, integrate face-to-face and online learning activities, and interact with students in new ways. As Bonk, Kim, and Zeng (2006) noted, "Blended learning highlights the need for instructional skills in multiple teaching and learning environments" (p. 564). Designing an effective hybrid course and learning to teach in new ways involves significant pedagogical changes that require instructors to gain new skills and assume multiple roles.

## Instructor Role Framework

In order to organize, analyze, and understand faculty experiences designing and teaching hybrid courses, this study utilized a framework developed by Berge (1995) for enhancing online courses. This framework describes the pedagogical, social, managerial, and technological roles that online instructors assume when they teach online. These roles translate well in the hybrid environment, which incorporates both online and face-to-face instruction. Following is a brief description of the four roles modified for the hybrid environment (Berge, 1995). The *pedagogical role* includes both the design and the delivery of instructional learning activities for the in-person and online environments. The *social role* involves communication between the instructor and students and among students within the course to create a friendly and nurturing environment to support a community of learners. The *managerial role* includes all aspects of coordinating a course, including scheduling online and in-person interaction, setting due dates, and managing assignments, discussions, assessments, and student roles. Finally, the *technological role* includes instructors utilizing a course management system to organize course content and assisting students with user or system technology issues. In the hybrid course model these roles change significantly from a traditional course.

## Methodology

To understand the instructors' processes as they implemented the design and delivery of their courses, Berge's (1995) instructor role framework was used to investigate the pedagogical, social, managerial, and technical roles that instructors must assume as they teach hybrid courses. As part of a larger study, the following research question was investigated: *How do instructors' roles change as they implement the hybrid course model?* A qualitative study was employed to gain an in-depth understanding of faculty hybrid teaching experiences. The basic interpretive method was used to allow 10 faculty from three universities to explain in their own words their experiences with the hybrid instructional model. The primary method of data collection was in-depth, semi-structured telephone interviews. Prior to the interviews, a Web-based 34-item survey was administered to gather demographic data, information on the participants' hybrid teaching experience, and information on their preparation for hybrid teaching.

## Findings: Hybrid Instructors Assume Multiple Roles

During the implementation of their hybrid courses, instructors not only assumed new roles, but multiple roles as well. For example, they may lecture or lead group discussions in the classroom one day, and the next day they may facilitate online discussions, activities, and assessments or even solve technology issues (Swenson & Evans, 2003). Thus, the hybrid instructors' roles changed week to week as they navigate the in-person and online environments. When the 10 hybrid instructors in this study were asked how their role as a teacher in a hybrid course compared to or differed from their role in the traditional classroom, their answers reflected the diverse pedagogical, social, managerial, and technical roles described in Berge's (1995) framework. In general, the research study indicated that the hybrid model requires that faculty modify familiar roles and learn new ones, such as facilitator, instructional designer, community builder, time-manager, and even technology "troubleshooter."

### Pedagogical Role

There are two related but distinct aspects to the pedagogical role: teaching style and instructional design. Both are very important for instructors as they transition to the hybrid-teaching model.

**Teaching Style Transformed**. Many instructors cautioned that the learner-centered nature of the hybrid environment is not an easy transition because both faculty and students need to make significant adjustments. The research participants explained that they had to be willing to give more control to students. Those faculty who embraced the traditional role of a teacher as lecturer had the most difficulties in the transition. Thus, instructors who adopt the hybrid format need to be prepared to leave their previous constructs of what a teacher is behind and to anticipate how the new model redefines them, their course, and their students. Instructors are no longer just "teaching"; they are facilitators of the learning process. Research participants found that even though they had many years of teaching experience, they had to learn new ways of teaching when using the hybrid course model.

In order to successfully transition to the role of facilitator in hybrid courses, instructors must know how to effectively facilitate and manage both online and face-to-face discussion and interaction. One participant noted that the facilitative role "really drives the dialogue between students – and that is what I want." One research participant explained that instructors need to "evolve to understand that facilitating is also teaching." Faculty who are preparing to teach hybrid courses must be made aware of the importance of making the transition from acting as a presenter of content to becoming a facilitator of student learning. Because hybrid courses are more student-centered and incorporate more student assignments and learning activities, instructors must be prepared to devote more effort toward guiding, supporting, and encouraging students in their work.

**Instructional Re-design Is Critical.** In order to convert a traditional course to the hybrid format, instructors had to become instructional designers. Faculty must rethink and redesign their course, create new learning activities and integrate online and face-to-face course components. In addition, instructors need to significantly redesign courses for hybrid learning, taking advantage of the strengths of the online and face-to-face teaching environments to facilitate student learning and to achieve course goals and objectives. When asked which activities consumed the most time when making the transition from a traditional face-to-face course to a hybrid course, the most frequent responses focused on instructional design issues including creating online learning activities, assessments, and discussion forum assignments. Many said it was impossible to guess how long it took to redesign their course because "they were still refining." Findings indicate that instructors struggled most with re-examining course goals and objectives, selecting the best activities for the online and face-to-face environments, and succumbing to the tendency to have too much content and activities designed into the course. The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Learning Technology Center coined the term "the course and a half syndrome" to describe the latter difficulty (Aycock, Garnham, & Kaleta, 2002). Study participants tended to overload their courses with activities and needed to rethink the amount of work they assigned students and themselves. When a hybrid course was planned well to take advantage of both the online and in-class environments, instructors realized the potential of both environments to create an integrated and rich learning experience that facilitated student learning and offered greater interactivity.

**Social Role**

The biggest concern instructors feared when converting their traditional courses to the hybrid format was the potential of losing personal connections with students. One instructor who taught a freshman seminar said he had "withdrawals" from not being able to meet personally with each of his students as often as he did when he taught the same course face-to-face. Although some of the instructors were concerned about losing the personal touch with students, others related how they were able to get to know their students even better. The majority of the instructors said students were more conversational "and more open" online than they were in the classroom. Many of the instructors talked about the importance of creating a "community of learners," which is a well-known challenge in online education (Brufee, 1999). To create this community, the instructors shared their experiences of establishing "social presence," also known as a feeling of connection and community among individuals (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976).

One instructor summed up what many discovered:
> A lot of people are afraid that replacing seat time with online is going to diminish the quality of the relationship – whether it is teacher-student or student-student. And actually I have to say from my experience it is contrary to that… I get more quality interactions and feedback from the students ... which then helps increase my connection to them.

Findings indicate that when a positive climate is created, hybrid courses have the potential to increase and extend connectivity and to build relationships more so than in traditional or online courses. So while many felt it was important to "have some physical contact with an instructor," they also were able to build connections through online discussions in between in-person meetings. When these connections were created, most felt that the communication increased in a hybrid course compared to a traditional course.

**Managerial Role**

Findings indicate that managing hybrid courses forced instructors and students to become "more organized" and "prepared" than they had to be in a traditional course. The hybrid environment also added additional scheduling challenges as courses meet both online and face-to-face. Although both faculty and students enjoyed the "flexibility" and the increased "personal contact," navigating these dual-learning spaces did cause some challenges and confusion. As one instructor said, it can be hard "to keep straight" when the class is meeting in person or online. To create one seamless course, the hybrid instructor's role

needs to expand to include unique scheduling and organizational tasks (Sands, 2002). The major faculty and student benefits and challenges of the managerial role, as shared by the research participants, involve course scheduling, course organization, and student time management.

A major decision for faculty was the frequency of scheduling face-to-face and virtual activities. Some faculty met with students weekly, while others only met face-to-face a few times in a semester. When asked how they decided when to meet as a class, reasons varied, including "it depended on the content," the need to schedule around other obligations and courses, and a desire to give students an opportunity to work on a project online between classes. In addition to helping students better manage their time, instructors noted how working online also made the in-class time "more serious and more valuable." Several instructors noted that the hybrid model offers "flexibility for over-burdened students" and for those with family and job responsibilities. However, like faculty, students had more difficulty committing time to online work than they did for "those 50 minutes in class." Although the course management system helped to organize and automate activities, instructors said that managing a hybrid course was still "more time consuming" than a traditional course. Scheduling flexibility and time management were the benefits as well as the challenges for both students and faculty.

**Technological Role**

While some instructors had high expectations for incorporating technology to improve teaching and learning, many did not anticipate just how significant the impact of technology would be on their ability to teach. Study participants who had not previously taught using technology became "stressed" with learning how to use the technology themselves and then dealing with student technology issues. In some cases the instructors' and students' lack of familiarity with technology, together with the unreliability of technology affected the instructors' ability to teach. One instructor was concerned about how students would perceive and react to his lack of expertise in using technology. He said it was important to continue to become more familiar with technology beyond the initial training because "students smell fear."

In addition to learning new technology themselves, many study participants noted that instructors "cannot assume" that students are proficient with using computers. Students' discomfort and frustration with technology can negatively affect their learning experience and place additional challenges and responsibilities on instructors. Many instructors described technical failures as "upsetting" for both instructors and students, such as when the course management system would go down periodically. Instructors also noted high occurrences of students playing the "blame game" of giving numerous technical excuses for not getting online work completed and "trying to pass off their own lack of timeliness and blaming it on the system." In order for the hybrid course format to be effective, instructors emphasized the importance of gaining familiarity with technology, in addition to providing opportunities for students to gain the same technology familiarity. Instructors in this study also emphasized the need to understand that "technology can and will fail" so it is important to "always have plan B." Therefore, faculty roles expanded in a hybrid course to include being a technical expert and "troubleshooter."

**Conclusion**

Once faculty make the commitment to try hybrid teaching and begin the course redevelopment process, they begin to encounter significant challenges as they start to redesign and teach their courses. Instructors are no longer just "teaching"; they are facilitators of the learning process, functioning in multiple roles. Therefore, faculty preparation for hybrid teaching should address the challenges and opportunities presented in their new pedagogical, social, managerial, and technological roles. As faculty developers build a program to guide faculty through the course design and teaching process, the findings of this study recommend that the following topics should be covered: re-examining how course goals and objectives can best be achieved in the hybrid environment; developing learning activities that capitalize on the

strengths of the online and face-to-face learning environments; integrating face-to-face and online learning activities to avoid teaching two parallel and unconnected courses; making the transition from a lecture-centered teaching approach to a more learner-centered teaching focus; avoiding the tendency to cover too much material and including too many activities that result in a "course and a half"; managing and facilitating online discussion and interaction; creating an online community of learners by providing an inclusive, positive, and friendly learning environment where students feel safe sharing ideas; developing a plan for conducting course activities when technology fails; managing student expectations regarding the hybrid format and course workload; identifying and developing plans, materials, and activities to help students with the technology and time management challenges; and using the tools in the course management system to get organized and stay organized when teaching hybrid courses. Instructors who adopt the hybrid format need to be prepared to leave their previous conceptions of what a teacher is behind and to anticipate how the new model redefines them, their course, and their students. Faculty developers can help instructors successfully make this transition.

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## Biographical Sketch

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