Suggestions for Faculty Designing and Teaching Hybrid and Online Courses

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Introduction

Increasing numbers of Hunter faculty are deciding to take advantage of online or hybrid platforms in the development of their courses. These new educational technologies allow instructors to craft challenging and interactive curricula without sacrificing what is best about the traditional classroom experience. But they present unfamiliar challenges as well. The world of online education is evolving rapidly, and selecting the most appropriate format for one's course might seem an exacting task for some faculty. On top of this, colleges are increasingly being asked to evaluate online credits earned at other schools, even as accreditation agencies such as Middle States are developing their own guidelines. For these reasons, a Hunter working group comprised of faculty and educational technologists has developed the following recommended guidelines for instructors who wish to develop online and hybrid courses. These guidelines are neither completely exhaustive nor narrowly prescriptive. Rather, they should be

considered a set of best practices for instructors wanting to take their coursework online without sacrificing Hunter's commitment to providing a world-class education to its students. In addition to exploring this site, instructors are encouraged to meet with the educational technologists at ICIT for further recommendations and assistance.

Definitions

The following codes are used CUNY-wide by registrars. This information is necessary for students to make informed decisions prior to registering for courses.

N = In-Person. No course content or assignments delivered online.
W = Web-Enhanced. No scheduled class meetings are replaced, but some of the course content and assignments, as well as required or optional activities, are online.
S = Partially online. Less than 32% of classwork is on-line.
H = Hybrid (Blended). Between 33% and 80% of scheduled class meetings are replaced with online activities or virtual meetings.
O = Online. More than 80% of scheduled class meetings are replaced with online activities or virtual meetings.
Y = Fully online. All of the class is online.

Once you have determined what kind of a course you are teaching, please take the following steps to inform the Registrar and your students:
- Inform the person in your department charged with filing information with the Registrar about your courses using the codes above.
- Review the descriptions of your courses in the online schedule to make sure that students have accurate information about how your classes will be conducted. Specify any online components that take place in real time, so that students do not schedule conflicting online classes.

Course Structure

Clear guidelines for the structure of an online or hybrid course are perhaps even more important than for traditional face-to-face courses. Students need to know what is expected of them, which technologies are required, and any other information that will allow them to meet the special expectations of a distance learning course.

1. The structure of the course (by theme, unit or week) should be immediately evident when students open the course in Blackboard or the course management system used.

The course should be well organized and easy to navigate. All modules or folders should be consistent.
2. The in-class and online meetings should be clearly stated.
3. Expectations regarding course management, issues and policies should be set early and explicitly stated. Students should be instructed to test their technological readiness.
4. Important information such as instructions and due dates for assignments should appear in different locations.
5. To whatever extent possible, materials and assignment instructions for the entire semester should be posted before the course begins.
6. The course site should contain an orientation module to guide students in the hybrid or online mode of instruction. The orientation module should include course goals, learning objectives, instructions for accessing information, and directions for determining students' technological readiness. It should also include recommended hardware, software, and Internet connection as well as sample exercises using the tools that students are expected to use in class.
7. The instructor should provide an overview of the course structure in the form of a short screencast or during the first face-to-face class to make sure students know where to locate information.

Course Goals and Learning Outcomes

Course goals and learning objectives are centrally important features of any course. But the clear statement of goals and objectives is markedly more vital in an online or hybrid course than in a face-to-face course in which an instructor can expect to see his or her students 2 or 3 times a week.

Course goals are broad statements about the purpose of a course or what a student can expect to know upon successful completion of the course. They are large targets to hit over the course of a semester.
Example: "In this course students will learn how the social sciences rely on the application of the scientific method in asking and answering research questions."

Student learning outcomes (SLOs) are more concrete statements about what a student will be able to do upon successful completion of a course. SLOs are derived from course goals, but specify a mastery a student is expected to demonstrate, and are subject to assessment or measurement when a course is completed.
Example: "Students will demonstrate their ability to develop a research hypothesis, gather data, analyze variables, and operationalize a research question."

The distinction between goals and outcomes has become more important with the advent of CUNY Pathways, and you should be certain to examine existing departmental guidelines for the course you are teaching. In general, bear in mind the following:

1. Objectives should use action verbs that define what students will know and be able to do.
2. Learning objectives should be clearly stated in each course module.
3. All activities and learning experiences should be relevant to the course and contribute to helping students meet the learning objectives.
4. Learning objectives and assessment activities should be closely aligned.
5. You may want to consult the document on Bloom's Taxonomy and learning outcomes at http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/acert/repository/files/LO%20example.pdf .

Assessment

The rapid expansion of online learning has been followed by questions about its assessment (and, increasingly, accreditation). Naturally, we expect students enrolled in online courses to learn exactly what those taking in-person courses would. But because the delivery of course material in online and hybrid formats differs substantially from an in-person format, so too must its assessment. Blackboard and other course management systems offer a variety of ways to assess asynchronous or flipped coursework. Instructors can consider:

- Using a series of low-stakes assessments instead of one or two high-stakes assessment.
- Using non-traditional methods of assessment such as reflections, journals and peer reviews.
- Allowing opportunities for students to peer assess each other's work and give feedback.
- Requesting that students submit multiple drafts of a project.
- Varying methods of assessment throughout the semester.

The Template for Course-Level Assessment available at http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/academicassessment/repository/files/Temple%20Course-Level%20Assessment%20Sep%2009.pdf may be another useful tool.

Syllabus, Materials & Assignments

The syllabus for an online or hybrid course should contain the same information found in a traditional face-to-face course: faculty contact information; course meeting times (no meeting, online synchronously, or face-to-face in class); course objectives; reading schedule; attendance and lateness policies; grading policies; accessibility policies; and plagiarism policies. Also, instructors should consider the following:

1. Syllabi should be prepared and reviewed using the Hunter College Syllabus Checklist: Recommendations Based on Best Practices available at http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/academicassessment/repository/files/Hunter%20College%20Syllabus%20Checklist.pdf

2. Assignments should include opportunities to explore new ideas, wrestle with them and produce evidence that they have learned.
3. The activities and assignments for each online portion should be clearly sequenced to lead to learning.
4. The time required and amount of learning in the online portion should be equivalent to the face-to-face portion.
5. The online and face-to-face components of the class should be integrated and complement each other.
6. Instructions and due dates for all assignments should be specific, consistent, and appear in multiple locations where student might need them.
7. Examples of quality work and rubrics for assessment should be shared with the students.
8. Assignments and tests should be designed in ways that discourage plagiarism and cheating. A statement defining academic integrity and stating what are inappropriate behaviors should be included in the syllabus. If technology tools are used to detect plagiarism or prevent cheating, students should be informed about them.
9. Instruction and instructional materials should be created in a way that they are accessible to all learners (ADA compliant) and designed following principles of universal design (provide multiple means of representation, action and expression, and engagement).
10. Materials should be displayed in formats that can be viewed on most computers and mobile devices (.doc, .pdf, .mp3, .mp4). If additional software is needed, suggestions on where to find and download the software should appear in the course.
11. Before using copyrighted materials, consider the 4 factors to determine if your use of the materials is fair use.
12. All course materials should be current and properly cited.
13. Required and optional materials should be clearly distinguished.

Interaction & Engagement

Student engagement is as important in online education as it is in brick-and-mortar classrooms, but achieving it obviously represents more of a challenge. The best online instruction combines a robust instructor presence with an active and collaborative learning environment. Please consider the following:

1. The course should provide many ways for students to interact with the instructor and other students in real time (e.g. in face-to-face class, web seminars, online office hours, online breakout rooms) and asynchronously (e.g. email, discussion boards, blogs).
2. The requirements for student interaction in terms of quality and quantity should be clearly articulated.
3. The instructor should have a clearly stated plan for response time on communication

and feedback.
4. The instructor should offer frequent, prompt and focused feedback.
5. There should be many opportunities for self and peer assessment throughout the course.
6. Instructors should clearly state whether or not face-to-face office hours will be available for students.

Student Support & Technology

Support services for students enrolled in online courses should be easily accessible on the course website. Successful online learning requires that students should have easy access to technical help, library services, and other advising functions. Consider the following:

1. Suggestions about how to be an effective online learner and links to campus resources for writing help, study skills, test-taking skills, and technical help for students should be easily found in the course.
2. Course-specific resources, contact information for instructor, department and program should be included in the course.
3. A community of learners who can support each other technically, academically and emotionally should be encouraged and built.
4. A list of technical requirements including hardware and software needed should be made available to students.
5. Technical tools should be introduced with short and simple assignments that allow students to practice using the tool without getting penalized.
6. The instructor should remain flexible and have alternative plans in case of technical difficulties.

Additional Resources

Technology Teaching & Learning Group, ICIT http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/ttlg
Blackboard Help for Faculty http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/icit/blackboard/blackboard-9.1-faculty-resources
Student Learning Outcomes: Guideline & Do-It-Yourself Workbook
http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/academicassessment/repository/files/Hunter%20College%20LO%20Document.pdf
Universal Design for Learning http://www.udlcenter.org/resource_library/videos/udlcenter/udl

CUNY Hybrid Initiative http://hybrid.commons.gc.cuny.edu/

University of Wisconsin Milwaukee Hybrid Courses http://www4.uwm.edu/ltc/hybrid/
University of Central Florida Blended Learning Toolkit http://blended.online.ucf.edu/