



Blended Learning Session 5: Wrap Up

Academic Council – April 9, 2021

Agenda

No.	Topic	Lead	Allocated Time
1	Introduction – Goals for today & questions for discussion	Cheryl Foy	5
2	President's Observations	Steven Murphy	10
3	Overview of: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Concept of Blended Learning• Challenges• Opportunities	Cheryl Foy	10
4	Emerging Principles	Cheryl Foy	20
5	Next Steps		5

Goals for Today's Session:

- Recap of the work that we've done together.
- Identify principles/guidelines – what's important to keep in mind as we manage the challenge of tech in teaching and learning.
- Consider how to differentiate Ontario Tech from other institutions in a post-COVID world.
- Clarify next steps.

Questions for Discussion:

- What's important for the university to keep in mind as we navigate the future of tech in teaching and learning (what arises from the work we've done)?
- Where do you see connections in the work of Academic Council on blended learning and the challenges and opportunities of tech in university's mission, vision, and values?
- How can we differentiate Ontario Tech from other institutions?

Overview of What Blended Learning is:

- **A dynamic concept:** a direction, a strategy, a mandate, a tool, lacking a definition, a blender, ill-defined term which could mean a myriad learning/teaching methods, uniquely defined by each individual instructor depending on their discipline and their students' needs, non-prescriptive
- **Student/learner focused:** Student centred, focused on doing what is best for the student, designing learning experiences for my students, student friendly, a mix of engagement modes, using technology to address remote learning and enhancing in-person learning, getting in sync with today's students, an approach that can make learning more accessible, an opportunity to enhance engagement with student, supports learning outcomes, gives more control to students for their pace, a new way of communicating with today's generation as they are technically savvy, a student-centred approach that requires the instructor map learning outcomes to course objectives and define how and where they will be delivered, a way to teach that acknowledges external demands on students and increases flexibility, kind of like a flipped classroom – students have to be self-directed

Overview of What Blended Learning is:

- **Technology Enhanced** – Using technology to enhance FtF and vice versa, Augment technologies like videos, voices, images, URLs, with materials to cover course detail and that could be synchronous or asynchronous mode, on demand, more than a tool – it is a platform to build para social interactions, An instructor combining face to face instruction with online learning; combining labs, lectures, placements etc.; mixing the material in a class to draw on the visual, auditory, and kinesthetic senses. It's about mixing or blending learning sessions, Lectures, labs, platforms (face to face or online, VR, AR, simulations), experiential learning and co-op placements. It about mixing all aspects ..., augment course materials with inputs from course instructor and students.
- **Descriptors:** Immersive, Interactive and personal, Multimodal, Amazing, Learning, an opportunity, Collaborative, fun, not a new thing, same as hybrid learning

Overview of What Blended Learning is not:

- **Static, restrictive or an end in itself:** not discipline specific, not one size fits all, miraculous cure, or a panacea, not suitable for all courses (some courses are not suitable for the blending learning environment), not appropriate for all students (not all students can prepare for – every class is using a different method with different tools), not a reason to use technology when it isn't supported pedagogically, not different than what instructors are already doing in their courses/not sure why this is a new thing
- **A means or a path to reducing quality of teaching/learning:** not just recording your lectures, not a static display or information where students can complete at their own pace, not death by powerpoint, not a way to disengage, not a replacement for face to face, not a replacement for in-person, human interaction, not an excuse to decrease face to face engagement, not a correspondence course, not an opportunity for profs to take the easy way out



Summary of Key Challenges Discussion

Summary of Key Challenges:

Technological Requirements:

- “Varying levels of technological requirements exist dependent on one’s role in the ‘classroom’ be it student, instructor, or teaching assistant. These include conditions necessary to create and consume, participate/engage in the classroom experience as well as requirements related to technology use and health, for both educators and students.”
- Content creation vs content consumption: they may be trying to accomplish the same thing, but the challenges can be very different
- Personal computing requirements
- Reliable technology for instructors and students
- Multiple platforms and technology overload
- Student engagement
- Support
- Technical considerations and requirements in classrooms
- Teaching from campus, but not from a classroom
- Technology requirements and expenses



Summary of Key Challenges:

Faculty Resources & Support Needs:

- More TA resources needed, especially for large classes
- Need more time to develop blended learning courses – may need less time going forward
- Think about the best use of students' time on campus
- Opportunity to re-invent teaching
- Consider using AI for marking
- Connecting remotely & improving experience in person
- Leverage the diversity of tools available in an online environment – using different resources requires different rules
- Opportunity to share among faculty: if faculty are siloed, they don't know how things are being done in other classes - could inform how faculty teach courses
- Best practice forums would be helpful to faculty, as well as informing faculty about what is going on across the university – a sharing forum where faculty can learn about best practices, as well as learning from failures
- Consider alternative forms of assessment: self-assessment and peer assessment

Summary of Key Challenges:

Student Resources & Support Needs:

- Asynchronous discussions: providing students with choice of how and where to discuss is key to ensuring engagement; instructor participation in asynchronous discussion is also key to maintaining engagement and meaningful reflection.
- Challenges of assigning a grade to reflection, the authenticity of reflections, and the issues of mandating reflection; while these may work for some students, there can still be a sense of isolation; one solution suggested was to create smaller “family pods” of students or “home groups” who can create stronger relationships when classes are large.
- Videos: some students do not attend synchronous classes, but watch the videos of lectures on their own time; creates a challenge of developing class community, but also has the advantage of anywhere anytime learning for students; could be a good way to flip the learning and ask questions of profs
- CANVAS LMS: student perspective indicated some challenges when each professor uses different features of Canvas; can be overwhelming for students taking 5 courses set up in entirely different ways; some professors also use outside elements such as blogs, wikis, nings, which add to student workload; challenge is ensuring academic pedagogical freedom in course design, while trying to streamline for students where, and how, they are required to participate.
- Social interaction: There appears to be a need to find ways to intentionally create virtual social communities, to redesign, or replace, the on campus experience (eg virtual coffee house, virtual concert, virtual social settings)



Summary of Key Challenges:

Change Management:

- Articulating the approach– acknowledging the breadth & scope of activities & approaches to blended learning within the university, how do we describe it in a meaningful way that serves to differentiate the university? Is there a description we can all get behind?
- Once we know what we're communicating/getting behind: identifying the impact of the change on various stakeholders & creating the conditions for their acceptance of the change.
- Leavitt's diamond – Structure, Technology, Task, People – change 1 and the other three will compensate to bring things back to equilibrium
- As the technology is changing, need to think about how are we changing the tasks, the structures and the people.
- Engage our community, what is in it for each of the stakeholders?
- Not doing it for doing its sake but to do things better/smarter/easier/less work/less confusion. Improve processes. Improve experience.
- Considerations of equity and equal distribution – people have to feel equally treated, equally supported from where they are (some more tech savvy than others)
- Can't perceive the change as top down or forced – all have to feel part of it.

Summary of Key Challenges:

Change Management:

- Not technological determinism rather tech with a conscience (in what we adopt and how we do it)
- Consider a design principles and project management approach – start with the problem, what are the user needs? What are the engineering/design requirements? What are the options for solutions? Design and Test.
- Embrace consultation all the way through.
- Don't lose sight of the problem(s) we are solving.
- Ontario Tech has to chart its own path technologically –constraints of the shared services model.
- Need to consider the term “blended learning” – it's used a lot and externally – what's the external meaning?
- Who are the flagship institutions for blended learning? What can we learn?

Summary of Key Challenges:

Academic Integrity:

- Keep faculty members updated on plagiarism “workarounds” (example of Turnitin workshop)
- Suggestion of using an academic integrity pledge that students sign at the start of a course
- Adoption of multiple versions of assessments, used with no backtracking and randomized order of questions
- Use of problem-based or scenario-based assessments to make it more difficult to search for answers online
- Must focus on major offenses & how to address mass cheating, as it is easier to do online; perhaps use instance of widespread cheating as an object lesson to reduce subsequent instances of cheating.
- Consider reviewing the policy, as some cultures value group work and collective knowledge rather than individual submission such that academic integrity offences can be inadvertent or not deliberate.
- Consider use of multiple lower stakes assessments, perhaps with using alternate assessments in an iterative format to achieve final result.



Summary of Key Opportunities Discussion

Summary of Key Opportunities:

Technological Opportunities:

- Mimic real-world room setup for remote participants prepares the students for a workforce where remote and non-remote collaboration happens synchronously.
- A-la-carte: On demand approach to consuming course information can reduce the amount of time required to complete courses, providing opportunities to complete additional electives not otherwise offered due to traditional time constraints; the on-demand model allows for options such as asynchronous courses enabling students to watch the videos all at once and then take the exam, finishing the class at their own pace completely transforming the idea of the “traditional semester.”
- Provides opportunities to rethink student interactions within the class in a blended environment.
- Apply technology that further enhances social communication between students not currently available in Google and Zoom.
- Creative ways to identify learning outcomes.
- Opportunities around testing or evaluation and demonstration of knowledge.
- Online simulation can be a mechanism by which students can demonstrate their knowledge of a particular concept using simulation.
- “Showing what you know” using technology can help improve learning outcomes as opposed to rote memorization.



Summary of Key Opportunities:

Pedagogical Innovation:

- How has teaching changed for the better since transitioning to online?
 - Student perspective: increased levels of on-demand binge watching recorded lectures.
 - Suggestion to use the Perusal app - allows for self-directed learning over and above class; helps to mark because of its AI components; it integrates into Canvas, and students do not need to create a separate account to use it; offers the opportunity for group work, but students can also individually comment on written content, images, and videos; instructors can use break-out rooms to address detailed parts of the content with Perusal.
- How are you incorporating innovative assessment?
 - Student perspective: like the shift to open book and collaborative exams.
 - replaced exams with weekly application exercises based on the weekly materials; students seem to like these exercises, but it also takes about three weeks to understand the workshops are not the same as a test of memorized information; students can have the lowest two grades dropped; responses to application workshops used as starting points in the next class.
 - uses Perusal APP to reveal the areas where students are struggling to understand. This is called the confusion log - information used to start the next class.
 - would be helpful to have sharing sessions across all faculties so instructors can discuss innovations.



Summary of Key Opportunities:

Accessibility:

- Pandemic has exacerbated already existing gaps in access - how do we fulfil our responsibility to narrow that gap?
- Accessibility is not just physical or technical, it is attitudinal, so we need to ensure that we are “keeping our humanity central, making judicious decisions about how tech can be used to improve the human condition for all”.
- Mental Health – How can we decrease stigma, use tech to offer broader support to students, work with student groups to create digital ways for support hubs for students who, post pandemic, may have even greater issues with anxiety, depression or other mental health concerns.
- The university experience writ large, and the important social aspects of a university experience, have changed. How do we use the tech to increase social presence, a sense of belonging to Ontario Tech community, and increase “collision spaces”.
- Accessibility for lower SES – connecting with our south Oshawa neighbours to ensure that we facilitate a path for those individuals to a university education.
- Accessibility for Indigenous, remote or marginalized communities. We need to find ways to reach out and use tech to connect, even in those areas that may not have infrastructure (eg northern Ontario) and work collaboratively with the community, elders, leaders, as to what tech might help them resolve local problems and issues.
- Accessibility for Seniors –using tech to access supports both cognitively and socially.



Summary of Key Opportunities:

Student Support:

Communications: establish expectations from the start; instructors respond to student emails within a much shorter time frame compared to pre-COVID; instructors like virtual hours - don't want to go back to "in person" student hours post-COVID, especially female instructors whose students insist on closing the door for a one-on-one meeting; student meetings can use a variety of platforms or be conducted over the phone.

Canvas : design is important to simplify access for students; analytics provide a snapshot of how frequently individual students engage with various aspects of the course.

Assessments: increased flexibility in terms of deadlines, duration of availability, extensions are easier to get.

Content materials: recorded lectures allow students to access at their own convenience; time management continues to be a factor for students.

- Overall general tone of compassion and empathy: currently do not require medical statements, thinking about continuing this practice past COVID; taking students at their word when they say that they're going through a rough patch, with or without details.



Summary of Key Opportunities:

Individualization:

- Students love having lectures recorded so they can watch material repeatedly, they can do it on their own timeframe; can use the material to prepare for “in-person” time; if an in-person class is missed – there is no way to make it up
- Able to accommodate different learning styles
- Will the changes allow us to re-think the 4 months semester? Can other formats be made available?
- Trying to build skills so the skills are applicable across contexts
- We are moving into a new world; the online portion will be critical to preparing our students for the future skills they will need
- Students like individualized office hours with a professor – not having to commute for a meeting with the prof is good

Summary of Key Opportunities:

Individualization:

- Individualized learning is not limited to the online environment, it can also happen in person
- So, the guiding principle may be that about 10% of the total pedagogical experience should be in-person and on-campus; so, if there is 30 hours of total time dedicated to learning, 3 hours should be in-person, on-campus.
- How are we accommodating students with learning disabilities? some students are tactile learners, visual learners, etc.
- Need to differentiate ourselves from other universities in student experience so students feel a part of a community
- Most learning situations call upon multiple modes of learning (tactile, group work, individual reflection, listening, writing, taking notes)...
- Suggestion to embed more flexibility in many firm and rigid aspects of our scheduling.
- Individualized learning is a tool worth exploring, we need to try to make the overall experience better





Discussion

Questions for Discussion:

- What's important for the university to keep in mind as we navigate the future of tech in teaching and learning (what arises from the work we've done)?
- Where do you see connections in the work of Academic Council on blended learning and the challenges and opportunities of tech in university's mission, vision, and values?
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Next Steps:

- Proposing two more sessions:
 - Next session: Would like to invite academic colleagues who presented recently at COU to give AC a sense of what other institutions are thinking and doing.
 - Final session: the path forward.
- Notes: Would like to summarize the AC discussion for Board as we think the information will be helpful.