Hybrid Course Task Force Proposal

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Background

In response to an emerging need on campus for policy and procedures concerning the development of hybrid courses, the Chief Operating Officer Dr. T. Dwayne McCay appointed the task force to research the topic and make recommendations.

Mission Statement

After the first meeting, the task force drafted a mission statement:

The Hybrid Course Task Force is an interdisciplinary group of faculty, staff and administrators that will define hybrid courses, establish standards, and insure quality at Florida Institute of Technology. The purpose of the task force is to enhance educational outcomes, increase the number and variety of course offerings, and to establish standards for hybrid courses. The committee will work with both faculty and administrative staff in order to streamline hybrid implementation across campus.

Literature review

Defining hybrid courses has been problematic for many institutions and organization. Part of the problem has been agreeing upon the exact levels of interaction between the face-to-face elements and the virtual or online elements. For example, the Florida Distance Learning Consortium recommends that hybrid/blended courses be defined as “at least 50 percent and not more than 79 percent of the direct instruction [an explicit teaching of a skill set using lectures or demonstrations of the material, rather than exploratory models such as inquiry-based learning] of the course is delivered using some form of technology when the student and faculty member are separated by time, space or both” (Recommendations of the Florida Distance Learning Consortium, 2009). Other studies such as the collaborative project by the University of Wisconsin (UW) System Curricular Redesign Grant Program and several UW campuses tried different hybrid models, such as reducing class time by 25%-50% or eliminating one class meeting per week (Garnham & Kaleta, 2002). Some institutions aim for a 50 percent rule with equal face-to-face and virtual class time.

Furthermore, the U.S. Department of Education’s meta-analysis of online learning found no significant differences in learning between fully and partially online students, so adapting quality assurance criteria for fully-online courses to hybrid courses should not be a problem (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).
In pursuit of that mission and based upon current literature and practices, the committee agreed to the following definitions in order to have the most flexible and largest number of choices for students, faculty, and administrators:

*Traditional In-class:* These courses have instruction in a face-to-face classroom, with students and faculty members NOT separated by either time or space. These courses can be web-enhanced through learning materials (handouts, notes, quizzes, etc.) being posted in ANGEL or the current Learning Management System (LMS).

*Blended Learning:* These courses have approximately 1/3 of the instruction done outside of the traditional classroom.

*Hybrid:* These courses have approximately 2/3 of the instruction completed outside of a traditional classroom with online components.

*Online:* These courses are completely online with no face-to-face meetings (or at most one) between faculty and students. In these courses, faculty and students are separated by time, space, or both. Depending on the program or course requirements, some synchronous online sessions may be required.

All of the above definitions assume existing learning objectives will be achieved regardless of delivery method and that the focus should be on the learning objectives rather than the amount of time spent face-to-face.

**Administrative Issues**

**Process**

1. Department/faculty member would identify course’s category.
2. Courses are coded within the class schedule so that the students are aware of the format and nature of the course. Registrar’s office should establish a way for codes to be identified. One of the advantages of this would be to examine classroom usage and determine ways to leverage facility usage. For example, potential factors in assigning classes to rooms might include class size and technology usage. Additionally, this would maximize the impact of the instructional technology equipment inside classrooms, increasing the university’s return-on-investment in classroom technologies.

**Quality Assurance**
To assure that courses are properly categorized for students’ ability to choose course formats best suited to their learning style, we would advocate the use of the Quality Matters Peer Review Rubric.

The task force recommends that the publicly-available Quality Matters Peer Review Rubric should be used as a guideline for developing a specific rubric for use at Florida Institute of Technology. Either this task force or another committee would need to modify the existing publicly-available rubric to meet Florida Tech’s policies, procedures, and university-specific definitions concerning hybrid courses.

**Requested Actions**

**Coding System**

This committee recommends that the COO establish a new system for the coding of the various types of courses that will be available at Florida Tech to aid students through the registration process. For example, a hybrid biology course could be listed as BIO (H) or a similar coding system that is consistent with current Florida Tech computing standards.

**Scheduling**

To smoothly implement these new course categories, this task force recommends that the COO appoint a new committee with representatives from Instructional Tech, Registrar, Events Planning, and a faculty representative from ACITC. This committee would explore how new course offerings might affect student registration and classroom scheduling and make recommendations on new policies or procedures that should be established.

**Quality Assurance**

Just as undergraduate level online courses have to be vetted through the curriculum committee, hybrid and blended learning courses must also pass through the undergraduate curriculum committee and the grad council. Additionally, the Engineering ProTrack hybrid courses would be part of Quality Matters rubric and guidelines development process.
Bibliography


Notes from the meeting of the Florida Distance Learning Consortium, 2009.