

Blended Learning at Griffith

Strategies for teaching and curriculum design

Context and key issues

Griffith University uses the term 'blended learning' to describe the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to enhance learning and teaching. The defining characteristic of blended learning at Griffith is that ICTs are used to enrich the quality of student learning through interactive learning activities beyond those attainable through face-to-face classroom interactions.

In many cases, academic staff are already using blended learning strategies very effectively. The Learning@Griffith system is a good example of a set of online tools designed to engage students in such activities as online discussions or computer-based assessments that add value to students' face-to-face classroom interactions.

Blended learning is best understood as spanning a continuum that covers a wide spectrum of activities between conventional face-to-face interactions and those that are fully online. As shown below, elements of face-to-face and online approaches may be blended to a smaller or greater extent, depending on a range of contextual factors and pedagogical decisions.



Blended learning approaches vary according to such factors as: discipline, year level, student characteristics and needs, and course or program learning objectives. The following ideas may be useful to guide your thinking about ways in which you might start or further develop your use of ICTs to enhance your students' engagement with learning.

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1. **Assess the fitness for purpose of blending in your class/course/program**
 - Why do you want to move some of your students' learning activities out of the campus-based classroom and into an online environment?
 - What value does the technology add?
 - What are the limitations?
 - If you do decide to integrate face-to-face and online learning, what is the optimal blend in the context of what you want your students to learn?
2. **Consider learner differences**
 - Your students range in age, background experience, level of computer literacy and ability to access information in different ways.
 - When considering blended learning strategies, take account of the learning needs of your students, particularly those with disabilities and those who may not have easy access to high-speed internet services off campus.
3. **Decide on the appropriate blend for your context**

Having decided to blend face-to-face class interaction with online learning activities, you may select from a range of blending options. These include:

- **Blending technologies.** Consider the range of technologies available, including: use of MP3 files, SMS messaging, online discussion forums, interactive CDs and simulations. Also, think about how you might make the most of wireless technologies and laptop computers when students are working together in face-to-face groups. What blend of technologies will best suit your purposes?
 - **Blending time.** ICTs enable you and your students to engage synchronously (at the same time, eg, instant messaging, videoconferencing) or asynchronously (not all parties are present at the same time, eg, email or discussion boards).
 - **Blending the locus of learning.** Use ICTs to connect with students, and their supervisors, on clinical placements or in other work-based learning environments. Send students on a virtual fieldtrip to a series of websites or research databases, followed by a report back session to the class, face-to-face or online.
 - **Blending participants.** Bring the workplace into the classroom through a live videoconference with industry partners or community members. Feature overseas or interstate researchers in your teaching through a podcast of an interview that you may have conducted on a recent research visit. Establish links with a comparable class of students in another university. Use online discussion boards or instant messaging technology to involve students in shared problem-solving activities. Involve a guest lecturer who makes a scheduled synchronous contribution to a real-time online discussion group, or who provides an expert contribution to an asynchronous online discussion forum.
 - **Blending teaching approaches.** Try using ICTs to move between teacher-centred approaches (eg, powerpoint slides in a lecture) and learner-centred approaches (eg, students using 'clicker' technology in lectures, followed by brief small group discussion or an independent written activity).
 - **Blending learning and assessment activities.** Combine large-class learning in a lecture theatre with self-paced online quizzes or interactive computer-based activities. Use e-portfolios to motivate students to document and publish their work. Develop online discussion groups and fora that continue the discussion or debate that you stimulate in your face-to-face classes each week. Create a wiki site where students work together in groups to formulate, organize and present their solutions online. For instance, students might work together to build a wiki-based glossary of the key terms learned during their course. Provide electronic feedback on student assignments (electronically submitted) using track changes or a bank of appropriate feedback comments. Follow up or precede with a whole group feedback session in a lecture to achieve the best blend of face-to-face and online feedback.
 - **Blending roles.** Develop a range of skills among your students by giving them different roles in online discussions or assignments. Roles could include: organiser, main researcher(s), online discussion moderator, editor(s) responsible for final submission and online publication of a group task. These roles may be an extension of small group activities in face-to-face environments.
4. **Use technology to build community, develop responsibility and achieve outcomes**
A primary goal of higher education is to develop independent learners who have the capacity to think creatively and critically. Social networking (or Web2.0) technologies, such as blogs, wikis, podcasting and RSS-feeds can be particularly useful for engaging students in online learning communities using familiar technologies. Consider how you might use these ICTs to build learning communities, both on and off the web. The main success factor is to integrate them into your curriculum in educationally purposeful ways.
5. **Start small and blend progressively**
If you are considering blended learning for the first time, or planning to expand your repertoire of blended learning strategies, remember to start simply, with a focus on learning processes and outcomes. What learning goals do you want your students to achieve? Then, what technology tools will best suit the purposes, needs and skill sets of yourself, your teaching team and your students?
6. **Monitor, evaluate, review and revise**
Once you have decided on your blended learning approaches and strategies for the semester, monitor the success of these progressively. Talk to students and colleagues about their view of the ICT-face-to-face blend. Evaluate formally and informally. Review and revise your curriculum in light of your evaluation.

For Griffith staff, the Learning@Griffith Support Site (<http://www.griffith.edu.au/ins/learningatgriffith/>) provides resources to support blended learning in your teaching and curriculum design.