Orienting Students to Blended Learning

Talking About... Learning & Teaching

University of Birmingham

Building community requires open communication and information exchange at several levels and should begin on or before the first formal day of a module. It begins with induction activities that help students get to know each other, the tutor, and the module structure, learning outcomes and expectations.

For many students, blended learning will be a new experience and thus it is important to provide them with a proper induction to your module. Students who understand what the tutor plans for the module and why, will be in a much better position to engage positively in the learning activities and to achieve the course learning outcomes.

On or before the first day of the module, your students should learn who you are, what the course is about, how you have designed the course, why you have designed it in a blended format, and what will be expected of them. There are three items, in particular, that you should address:

Description and Rationale for Strategies Employed

A blended learning approach is often selected because it is effective in supporting enquiry, reflection and deep learning. Let students know if you are using an **enquiry, problem or case-based approach** and explain that you expect them to engage in asking and answering authentic questions through an enquiry approach. Consider sharing with them what some of the literature says about the effectiveness of blended learning.

There are longitudinal research studies from the University of Central Florida (Dziuban & Moskel, 2005) that demonstrate blended (or mixed-mode) courses have a higher student success rate than either face-to-face or fully online courses and that 86% of students were satisfied or very satisfied with their blended courses as opposed to only 4% who were unsatisfied or very unsatisfied.

In addition, you can share comments from students who have previously experienced this or other blended courses. This can be in person (persuade some friendly ex-students) get your students to write a letter to the next cohort explaining what it was like to learning in a blended manner.

Some teachers also provide students with an overview to deep versus surface approaches to learning or the Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). They then discuss with students how a deep approach to learning and/or each of the Seven Principles has been incorporated into the design of the blended module.

Schedule, Structure & Expectations

Clearly articulate the module schedule in terms of **face-to-face (F2F)** and **time-out-class (TOC)** learning activities, expectations and student responsibilities. Introduce any enquiry based learning tasks through a series of active EBL group tasks (between 5-10mins each). An important aspect is to explore:

- group rules, roles and responsibilities
- when and for what objectives will the class meet in whole-group, face-to-face situations?
- when and for what reasons will small groups meet?
- what will be done individually?
- when and how will technology tools be used?
- what evidence the students must provide of their independent learning and where must they post this?
- what monitoring and support will be provided by the tutor
- what are the assignments and how will they be assessed?

Face-To-Face Sessions	Group Work
- Introduction to WebCT Room: OLRC	
- Introduction to Module and Task 1 Room: OLRC 108 & Green Room	Task 1 (6th Oct to 26th C
- Introduction Task 1 Room: OLRC 108 / Green Room	
eResources Workshop Tutor: Danielle Hinton Room: OLRC 108	
- *Think Book Journal Reflection* - Introduction to Task 2	Task 2 (20th Oct to 16th

Ensure that the students are able to logon to WebCT (iVLE). A Treasure Hunt activity is a great way to gently introduce an online learning environment. Follow this with a ice-breaker type activity that allows students to explore the communication tools such as the discussion board.

Give Me an Example

Prior to the first module session, send an email to students indicating that you will be using WebCT to support the course and that they are required to log onto the site and complete an introductory survey (perhaps focused on assessing the prior knowledge or experience students have with the course content and/or discovering why students are taking the class and what they hope to achieve through the experience). Create a discussion forum in which you ask the students to introduce themselves to the rest of the class, providing information such as where they are from and where they see themselves headed after graduation. In addition, within WebCT, you might ask students to post a short biography and a digital image of themselves. Ice-breaker activities and opening discussions can then be designed for the first face-to-face session, which capitalize on the information collected and shared within the course WebCT site.

Support and resources

Explain to students what specific resources and software applications will be required, and how they can access support.

For instance, if you are using WebCT or related technologies direct students to the appropriate resources and support, for example:

- Weblearn: http://www.weblearn.bham.ac.uk or
- E-Learning Support:
  http://www.education2.bham.ac.uk/elearning/support/

In addition, the Training and Skills Development and Library teams will have many support options ranging from face-to-face sessions with librarians to online tutorials and instruction:

- Training and Skills Development: http://www.skills.bham.ac.uk/courses/
- eLibrary: http://www.elibrary.bham.ac.uk/
- Just Ask! Chat service: http://www.library.bham.ac.uk/help/ask.shtml

More Ideas

- Ask students to take a learning styles inventory (a number of them can be found on the Internet) and to reflect on their individual results. "What specific learning strategies and study behaviors will help me succeed in this course?" Individual written reflections can be turned in or posted to a discussion forum or shared in small groups.
- Invite a couple of students from a previous class to attend a F2F session or join an online discussion to talk about the nature of the course as they experienced it. They can share study approaches they found helpful and generally give suggestions about how to take best advantage of the learning environment to be successful in the course.
- Consider composing a letter or creating a Photo Story, which welcomes students, briefly describes your teaching philosophy and suggests the role you envision for students in this programme or module. This can be emailed to students prior to the first session with a outline.

Where Can I Go for More Information?

- **Blended Learning Unit CETL**
  University of Hertfordshire
  http://www.herts.ac.uk/about-us/learning-and-teaching/blended-learning-institute/home.cfm

- **Blended Learning: towards a meaning for today**
  Oxford Brookes University
  http://www.slideshare.net/georgeroberts/blended-learning-towards-a-meaning-for-today

- **Blended Learning and Higher Education: Opportunities and Challenges**
  Charles Dziuban and Patsy Moskel, University of Central Florida. Baruch College, New York, NY., 2005.
  http://pegasus.cc.ucf.edu/~rite/Presentations/Chuck%20Dziuban-Baruch%20College.ppt#9

- **Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education**
  A resource page offering a variety of materials regarding Chickering and Gamson's (1987) Seven Principles, provided by the TLT Group
  http://www.tltgroup.org/Seven/Library_TOC.htm

- **Using EBL to Create a Blended Learning Module**
  Hinton, D (2008)
  http://www.slideshare.net/cilass.slideshare/using-enquiry-based-learning-to-create-a-blended-academic-skills-development-module