Blended learning

What is blended learning at SCU?

Blended learning is a term commonly used to describe the combined use of face-to-face and online learning environments (Bonk & Graham, 2006).

At SCU the term refers to a blending of teaching approaches to provide equitable learning experiences regardless of location or mode of study.

Blended learning can take different forms:

- **media blends** (e.g. a Blackboard tutorial with student summaries provided in wikis, blogs, or other social networking tools)
- **resource blends** (e.g. text-based readings supported by lecturer's audio summaries, online journals, websites, videoclips and/or simulations)
- **activity blends** (e.g. clinical laboratory workshop or tutorial with synchronous and asynchronous communications or online quizzes)
- **mode blends** combining on-campus, multi-campus and off-campus student activities (e.g. an online unit which has negotiated a two-day face-to-face workshop or residential activity for all students).

At-a-glance

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Designing for blended learning

Decide the fitness for purpose

Ask yourself why you want to design a blended learning environment? Check the key learning objectives that need to be served by your blended learning design. Is your key driver for blended learning design to improve student learning? Are you improving access to knowledge, such as designing for integration of experts, diverse types of media and resources? Find out the size and distribution of your class, and experiences of the teaching team.

Consider the diversity of your learners

Does your blended learning design support student access to content and interaction regardless of their location, background and computer literacy? Do learners need opportunities to encounter multiple perspectives through your unit? Is there support for development of learners' independent learning skills? Are learners able to be self-directed in choosing and deciding how/what to study? If you have included on-campus elements in unit design, have you made this equitable and fair for all students?

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Decide on the appropriate blend for your context

Elements of student engagement for inclusion in blended learning designs			
Live in-person	Synchronous online collaboration	Asynchronous online collaboration	Self-paced asynchronous
On-campus lectures and tutes On-campus labs and workshops Residentials and intensives Field trips and workplace learning	Live online class Online chat/Skype Video conferencing Blackboard Collaborate Twitter	Online discussion boards Email Blogs Wikis	Online self study tutorials Simulations Online self-assessments Recorded lectures and webinars Audio or video clips
Adapted from webjunction.org/blendedguide, (2007), p. 4			

Use technology to promote a sense of community

It is not so much the technology tools employed but the active engagement of people that makes blended learning a success. For this to happen, some issues need to be addressed, including:

- where possible, limit live online classes to one hour or less and provide learning support
- use recordings to explain core concepts or issues (15–20 minute segments can be effective)
- build in interactivity online by using polls, multiple choice questions and chat features to keep learners engaged and help them reinforce their understanding
- build in fun and humour whenever possible, let your personality shine through
- support conversational interaction between individual learners and groups
- provide feedback to support social networks and to extend connections in the group.

Start small and blend progressively

Identify your knowledge and skills gaps for developing and managing a blended learning unit. Become familiar with or willing to learn about technologies and approaches to blended learning. Conscientiously manage the volume of content in order to allow students time to reflect upon and process their learning. Ensure learners are at ease using technologies that are part of your blended learning design. Decide how you will encourage your learners to make time to engage and participate.

Monitor, evaluate, review and revise

Regularly reflect on the effectiveness of your design. Ensure you routinely archive, update and improve materials and learning activities.

From the student perspective, the value of blended learning includes:
• Opportunities for active learning; opportunities to engage and interact with the content • Diversity of learning activities to match a range of learning styles • Different ways available to interact with academic staff and students • Opportunity to link learning across course boundaries and join academic/scholarly communities • Increased skill in using electronic tools and resources and in developing independent learning skills • Flexibility in use of time and resources • Access to supplementary learning resources to ensure adequate preparation for study (formal or informal).

From the staff perspective, the value of blended learning includes:

- Opportunities to work with students individually and in smaller groups
- Efficiency in presenting basic concepts required to establish and maintain a baseline for all students
- Opportunity to link own expertise and research with teaching
- Potential for using face-to-face sessions for learning experiences that are critical to the unit
- Opportunity to respond to a diversity of student needs and capabilities
- Improved quality of interaction with students, supporting a community of inquiry
- Possibilities for providing metacognitive commentary of what and why students are learning
- Learning to use electronic tools and resources effectively.

Sources

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