

## Stakeholder Summary

### College study: Successful hybrid classes still depend on instructor abilities

College courses that mix traditional face-to-face instruction with online learning appeal to both students and faculty, but the success of these hybrid classes is largely dependent on the abilities of the instructor, particularly their technological skills, dedication and organization, according to a new study from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

#### Project description

*Hybrid Learning in a Canadian College Environment* examined the impact of hybrid course delivery methods on student success and course withdrawal rates, as well as the faculty and student experience of hybrid instruction. The study was conducted at Sheridan College during the fall 2011 and winter 2012 terms using administrative data, faculty and student surveys and focus groups.

#### Findings

While students seem to enjoy hybrid curricula, the authors note that like traditional course structures, the skills and commitment of the instructor are crucial to success in the hybrid classroom. Well-defined direction and orientation to web-based tools are also essential.

Students achieved slightly lower final marks in hybrid courses as compared to the face-to-face control courses, although the study found that students with high academic standing were successful regardless of course format, while students with low grade point averages (GPAs) performed slightly worse in hybrid classes. The course format did not have an effect on withdrawal from the course, suggesting that the format does not impact course completion.

Overall both students and faculty responded positively to the hybrid mode, say the authors. Students enjoyed learning and engaging online, but did express concerns about reduced access to instructors and/or a sense that lectures were rushed.

Said one Sheridan College student: "It allowed me to really learn beyond my normal scope. Usually in class I can only gain as much as I am taught by the professor... However, with hybrid I can engage in discussion, search the internet to build my responses and really get great feedback that helps facilitate my learning further."

"I didn't understand what was considered online instruction as the online portion of the class was reading the online textbook and notes," said another student. "For this particular class it just felt like an hour less of teaching and more independent work to teach myself the course material."

A Sheridan College faculty member said that the hybrid format gave students more flexibility and better control over their study/work schedule but acknowledged concerns about access to instructors: "I am not certain if students have the chance to develop the same rapport with their instructor/professor – or they feel as supported (time is tight, and we always seem rushed)."

Students embraced online discussion boards and said they should be an integral part of the hybrid classroom. However, they said that teacher accessibility was important to them regardless of the mode of course delivery and suggested that instructors maintain a high level of visibility and responsiveness to student questions both online and in person and that delays in responses to messages should be kept to a minimum.

### **Conclusions / Further research**

The study recommends that colleges continue developing hybrid courses, “as they do provide an excellent opportunity for independent learning and flexibility for students with busy lives.” But the authors also call for additional technical support for students and faculty, mandatory tutorials introducing students to online tools and hybrid course development training for faculty.

They also said that further research could help instructors better understand which online tools are most successful and further explore why students with lower standing GPAs underperform in hybrid courses.

Authors of *Hybrid Learning in a Canadian College Environment* are Jeffrey Waldman, Sheridan College; and Carrie E. Smith.