

Tech-Flex: Benefits of Hybrid Learning

In the more than ten years that hybrid learning has been widely practiced*, numerous studies have been done on its effectiveness. The results are pretty clear: not only do students tend to prefer it as their format of choice, but the learning outcomes and academic achievement are stronger with hybrid than for either on-campus or online teaching alone.

Why is this the case?

A big reason is **flexibility** – not just in terms of how time is used, but for how courses are taught, how students can engage with material and demonstrate learning, and how they interact with each other and the instructor. Whereas with on-campus or online instruction, one format is chosen and used exclusively (and thus cut off from the benefits of the other), hybrid learning can offer the best of both in one unified experience.

On-campus teaching, on one hand, allows a kind of immediate, real-time engagement that can be difficult to capture online. Back-and-forth discussions, group work, presentations, and in-depth conceptual scrutiny can often be more robust in this setting, where visual cues (such as confused faces) and immediate interaction can offer meaningful learning opportunities. Deeper collegial relationships can be fostered among students and the instructor, leading to a community atmosphere that can be more difficult to forge online.

Online learning, on the other hand, can excel with independent exploration, innovative collaboration, information and technology literacy, and content mastery. Students can watch videos and read articles again and again to reinforce conceptual familiarity, complete assignments in a time and place that best suit their individual needs, and take more time crafting written dialogue with their peers. Online discussion forums offer opportunities to develop a more sustained and richer exploration of material than the more rapid-fire interaction of a face-to-face classroom, and students who may not be comfortable speaking in a room full of people often blossom as strong contributors online.

Both formats offer unique advantages which can be difficult if not impossible to replicate in the other, which is why combining the two into a single experience can create powerful learning opportunities. But the advantages can reach beyond that – studies also suggest that hybrid learning leads to lower rates of attrition and more efficient use of campus resources (especially classrooms and parking). It should come as no surprise then, that hybrid learning is often cited as the most effective format.

*Specifically, the combination of online and on-campus teaching. Other forms of hybrid teaching have been used for more than 40 years.