



JOURNAL OF THE
RESEARCH CENTER FOR EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY

KENT STATE
UNIVERSITY

www.rcetj.org

ISSN 1948-075X

Volume 5, Number 2
Summer 2009

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Special Issue: Blended Learning (Part 2)

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Introduction to the Special Issue on Blended Learning Part 2: Blended Learning Programs

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This is the second part of the Journal of the Research Center for Educational Technology's special issue on blended learning which we are defining here as the integration of face-to-face and online instruction in a planned and pedagogically sound manner. In his introductory article to the entire two-part special issue, [Blending with Purpose: The Multimodal Model](#), Anthony Picciano writes, "Of all the opportunities for using online technology, blended learning may be one of the more important pedagogical approaches that can help in this regard, particularly for mainstream higher education."

In the first part of the special issue, the articles dealt mostly with blended learning at the class level. In this second part of the special issue, the articles are concerned with blended learning at the program level. It is also international in nature, including articles about blended programs in Ireland and Pakistan, as well as programs from West Virginia, Michigan and Illinois. The variety of blends and lessons learned from these program implementations should be of interest to those considering blended delivery as well as blended learning veterans. In the final article in this second part, researchers from Marquette University address a vital part of any blended program – faculty development designed to get instructors ready to teach in a blended mode.

These articles are described individually below:

In [Finding the Recipe for the Best Blend: The Evolution and Assessment of a Blended Master's Degree Program](#), Camille Ramsey, Andrew Hawkins, Lynn Housner, Robert Wiegand, and Sean Bulger describe the development and assessment of a blended masters degree program in physical education. Assessment of the program was conducted primarily through an anonymous online survey of members of five graduating classes. Additionally, an analysis of standards-based exit portfolios completed by students in one recently graduating class and an analysis from an independent, external evaluator were utilized in the assessment. Results indicated that the graduates were meeting the relevant standards and associated outcomes, and that the blended program was largely responsible for their performance. Graduates were highly positive about both face-to-face and online portions of the program and clearly resonated with the blended approach. Discussion includes observations about curriculum changes made since the program's inception, the enhancement of the learning community through the blended approach, and technological issues that need to be addressed in order to maximize the effectiveness of a blended program.

This combination of student need, technological feasibility, and a professional bias toward face-to-face instruction provides the perfect environment for a blended programs that combine the best features of face-to-face, videoconferencing, and online instruction. In [Increasing Access to Graduate Education: A Blended MSW Program](#), Paul Freddolino, Christina Blaschke, and Sally Rypkema discuss the underlying assumptions and primary components of the blended program model adopted for Michigan State University's clinical Master of Social Work (MSW) Program. The MSW Program was developed to respond to the serious access issues facing students in areas of the state where accredited master's programs were either too far away or did not provide needed flexibility in course loads and/or scheduling. At the time this article was written the first MSW cohort was in the final year of its three year program. Results from preliminary evaluation of the program show good results for retention and access.

In [Blended Program Development: Applying the Quality Matters and Community of Inquiry Frameworks to Ensure High Quality Design and Implementation](#), Len Bogle, Vickie Cook, Scott Day, and Karen Swan describes how two theoretical frameworks, Quality Matters (QM) and the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework, were used to help guide the design and implementation of a blended masters degree program in educational leadership (EDL) at the University of Illinois Springfield. The EDL program was moved from solely face-to-face delivery to a program in which fifty percent of all courses were delivered online to make it easier for working professionals to complete their degrees. As the QM framework is a design model and the CoI framework is a process model of online and blended learning, the former was used to guide the redesign of EDL courses, while the latter was used to inform teaching and learning during program implementation. The use of the two frameworks helped make the changeover successful for all involved.

[Comparing Online Learning with Blended Learning in a Teacher Training Program](#), by Susan Kirwin, Julie Swan, and Nicholas Breakwell, describes the establishment and delivery of a blended learning higher diploma for primary school teachers at Hibernia College in Ireland. This innovative course represents a major departure from the traditional mode of delivery of teacher training in Ireland. The online elements of courses are delivered through a combination of downloadable lectures and resources, synchronous online tutorials, forums, and blogs. However, as teaching is so practical by nature, it was felt that a face-to-face element was essential to the success and quality of the program. To facilitate this, the College collaborated with the Department of Education & Science's existing network of regional education centers, ensuring that students could keep travel (and travel expenses) to a minimum. This article also reports on a comparison of the two primary modes of course delivery – solely online and blended – in terms of clarity of goals, convenience and workload, student support, benefit as a teacher, and final examination grades. Its authors conclude that both modes of delivery are highly appropriate for the training of primary school teachers.

In Pakistan, tertiary education is generally restricted to those who can afford it in urban areas. An ICT equipped blended learning initiative can, however, deliver tertiary education with high levels of interaction to females and underprivileged ethnic groups living in rural and remote areas. In [Access Strategy for Blended E-learning: An AIOU Case Study](#), Nazir Sangi describes a such a plan being initiated at Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU). Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) initiated e-learning in Pakistan about a decade ago, and the program has been continuously evaluated. Owing to its success and cost effectiveness, AIOU planned a major organizational change to incorporate ICT-based blended learning. These ICT-based access models for blended learning are described with multiple accessibility options to provide content delivery over TV, radio, Internet, and video conference-based communications. Dr. Sangi also reports on progress to date in implementing the model.

It is not always easy to get faculty to adopt blended approaches to courses delivery, and it is definitely not easy for faculty to teach blended courses well without some sort of training. In [Using Cognitive Apprenticeship to Provide Faculty Development in the Use of Blended Learning](#), Carrienne Hayslett, Ed O'Sullivan, Heidi Schweizer, and Janna Pochert describe a somewhat unorthodox but quite successful approach to faculty development based on a cognitive apprenticeship model. At Marquette University, faculty interested in teaching in a blended format participated in a two semester course which was itself blended. The focus of the course was the design of a blended module that participating faculty would teach during the second semester in one of their own courses, supported through the courses asynchronous discussion board by the course developers and their peers. The faculty development thus followed the modeling, coaching, and fading framework of cognitive apprenticeship. This article also presents research examining faculty participation in the course to provide guidance for others attempting to add blended instruction to the teaching repertoire of faculty.