Hybrid Learning in Extension: Teaching at the Crossroads

(ABRIDGED VERSION)

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Executive Summary

Extension is at a crossroads. With the advent of widespread high-speed Internet connectivity, mobile devices, and advances in online pedagogy, teaching and learning is clearly undergoing major disruption. The way in which our clients want to learn is changing. To explore how Extension might respond to these new forces, EESC and the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) collaborated on a bold experiment in hybrid teaching, an approach that could change the face of educational programming across our organization. This paper summarizes a pilot effort to train, encourage, and support 10 Extension faculty in the design and delivery of educational programs using a hybrid (also referred to as *blended*) approach where instruction is a carefully designed integration of online and on-site activities. Participants in the pilot also generated ideas on adapting the campus-based hybrid learning model to Extension.

The results of the pilot effort indicate that this approach--if appropriately supported---could be highly successful across the Extension learning landscape, invigorating our teaching and increasing impact. Hybrid teaching methods and technologies can transfer well to many Extension teaching environments, and can potentially provide new efficiencies, expanded reach, convenience, leveraging of teaching capacity, adaptability and cost savings.

Successful implementation will involve conceptual, cultural and technological considerations in Extension. Key questions raised by the authors and participants include resource allocation, release time, and technology support. Broad implementation will also call for bridge-building between Extension, EESC, CTL, PACE, Ecampus and other on-campus units.

...[Hybrid course] development does take time, but once it's boxed it is infinitely scalable. It should be considered an investment now that will pay future returns, but certainly worth the time and effort. We simply don't have the capacity to serve in the model we currently use.

---Todd Williver, Extension Hybrid Learning Study Group Participant

Value Proposition

Hybrid teaching methods and technologies can transfer well to many Extension teaching environments, and promises significant return on investment. In particular, hybrid learning provides:

- **Efficiency** - Participants were in agreement that producing modular, sharable, and easily repeatable learning activities would be a more efficient use of their time.
- **Expanded Reach** - Extension stands to better meet the demands of new and broader audiences, and draw more learners onto our landscape.
- **Convenience** - The online learning component offers today's non-traditional learners the flexibility to learn when they want, wherever they want.
- **Leveraging of teaching capacity** - The hybrid approach effectively clones our faculty through the creation of easy-to-distribute online learning modules and activities.
- **Adaptability** - The hybrid approach has promise to broaden our educational product distribution regionally and nationally. Networked faculty can easily share and modify courses to fit local parameters.
- **Cost savings**
    - Hybrid courses, once built, are easier to repeat, and require less travel and on-site facility expenses.
    - Hybrid programs reduce duplication of effort by providing a more portable means for faculty to distribute their course at a lower cost.
    - This approach frees faculty up to do other things instead of repeating expensive, on-site teaching commitments.
    - Hybrid courses can fit the many shapes and sizes of Extension programs, leveraging teaching capacity, efficiency and impact.
    - Unique and significant new sources of funding are available, including:
        - Open Oregon State initiative
        - Enrollment fees
        - Grants: obtain broader impacts with hybrid course capacity
        - ENG funds for credit courses

Issues and Challenges

1. **Identifying the best candidate programs for implementation.** Best decided by informed faculty on a case-by-case basis, guided by hybrid teaching experts.
2. **Scale issues** - Extension learning activities cover a very different spectrum of length, locations, and classroom cultures.
3. **Resource issues**

a) **Time and Money**
   - Startup costs - faculty release time for faculty to develop hybrid curriculum. (Note: traditional in-class teaching also requires significant development time; it may be only an issue of "trading" one for the other.)
   - Access to tools to develop and deliver online modules and activities. Some available at no charge through OSU (e.g., Canvas), others not.
   - Broader implementation will require more robust, regular training in hybrid pedagogy and the use and support of the newly adopted OSU LMS (Canvas.)

b) **Cultural Issues -** The technology adoption report (Diem, et al. 2009) revealed cultural biases and concerns, that still plague us to some degree:
   - a bias to serve only local audiences due to political and funding boundaries
   - a perception that online learning cannot engage clients
   - the view that use of technology is an add-on responsibility to a full plate
   - lack of access, training or interest in learning technologies.

Available Extension Resources

- EESC has some expertise, but limited due to current staffing levels and wide-ranging commitments to Extension and AES.
- ECTU - potential support for use of an LMS (Canvas)
- Leveraging existing on-campus resources such as EESC, PACE, CTL, Technology across the Curriculum (TAC) and Open Oregon State. However, funding models challenge collaboration with PACE or Ecampus.

Extension Administration - Suggested Actions

1. Support continued pilot of hybrid course development through funding additional 8-week Extension Hybrid Learning Study Groups, with the next offering in Winter 2015.
2. Include hybrid teaching in any future strategic planning for the support of teaching expertise in Extension.
3. Encourage and support mentoring of other Extension faculty by participants in hybrid study groups.
4. Recognize, encourage, and reward hybrid teaching efforts by early adopters and new faculty. Modeling by example will play a key role shaping the adoption curve for hybrid teaching.
5. Provide continued financial incentives for participation in hybrid teaching, including mini-grants and release time.
6. Resolve technical support issues by re-thinking the associated roles of EESC, ECTU; and leveraging of other OSU support providers, including PACE, Ecampus, and CTL. The authors urge that an instructional designer/course developer be hired for Extension and housed at EESC.

7. Market the hybrid concept organizationally through newsletter articles, webinars, blogs, awards and other forms of recognition.
8. Encourage scholarly work in the area of hybrid learning in Extension settings. OSU Extension stands to be a national leader in this innovation if support and resources are brought to bear.

Next Steps

Authors (Kahn & Hino) will:

1. Seek approval for a second cohort for Winter 2015.
2. Conduct a 2-hour workshop on Hybrid Teaching at the Extension Conference in September 2014.
3. Conduct literature review for hybrid teaching in Extension.
4. Revise this report and submit it to the Journal of Extension.
5. Continue to provide support, training and counsel for those faculty who undertake hybrid programming. The authors are well aware that attending an 8-week workshop "does not a hybrid expert make."
6. Provide regular updates, blogs and other communications to the organization about hybrid teaching opportunities and developments.
7. Continue to foster the relationship between Extension, EESC and CTL.

Conclusions

This pilot project demonstrates that the hybrid teaching model has great potential for implementation within OSU Extension. As with any emerging technology, it will be necessary to nurture its adoption carefully and incrementally, provide the necessary resources for its success, and communicate its impact across the organization and beyond.

But the rewards are legion: Hybrid teaching offers an opportunity to reach larger, untapped audiences; to release faculty from time-consuming and repetitive teaching chores; to bring efficiency through the sharing of modular teaching resources, and to engage Oregonians in a manner that better reflects their lifelong learning preferences. It also offers OSU an opportunity to once again demonstrate national leadership in adopting innovation to better serve its clients.