

Joseph Goodrich
INSDSG 697
Article Summary
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Introduction

I chose to write a summary of *Hybrid Doctoral Program: Innovative Practices and Partnerships* by Alvich, Manning, McCormick and Campbell, because I am currently applying to two hybrid doctoral programs and felt this essay was personally relevant. This paper discussed challenges associated with incorporating technology into the development of a hybrid doctoral program at the Mid-Atlantic Progressive University (MAPU). Specific challenges covered included: rigorous design; reworking a traditional syllabus; consideration of the perceptions and attitudes; and developing internal and external partnerships (Alvich, et. al., 2012, pg. 224). Other thought provoking topics included: positive outcomes of advancements in educational technology, and the role leadership has on program success. The authors discussed three phases of the new hybrid doctoral program and concluded the article with a brief data analysis of the methods and results of their study.

Analysis

The first thing I noticed about this article was the age of the references utilized in the study. The most recent reference was dated 2008, four years prior to the article's publication date. This is an important factor because the data utilized to convey the authors' arguments is based on outdated data. Nevertheless, the substance of the article was present and some of their arguments were relevant to the topic of challenges in the development and implementation of hybrid (blended) learning.

The first two topics discussed included positive outcomes of educational technology and the challenges universities must face when dealing with hybrid learning initiatives. "A positive outcome in the era of a rapidly enhanced technological society is the development, growth, and sophistication of distance education programs," (Alvich et. al., pg. 224). Although this true in most cases, I think the authors could have benefitted from the inclusion of student, faculty and information access as a result of enhanced educational technologies. Additionally, the authors stated, "educators in universities must respond to myriad learner characteristics and personal schedule demands by expanding their continuum of delivery systems," (Alvich et. al., pg. 224). This would have been a good tie in with how advancements in educational technologies help educators respond to various learner needs and characteristics.

During the literature review section of the article, the authors offered a definition of hybrid (blended) learning. "A third delivery alternative classified as hybrid instruction occurs when between 30%-80% of the course content is delivered online," (Alvich, et. al., pg. (224). What I did not appreciate was the lack of discussion on this definition. They accepted it as it was presented to them by Allen & Seaman (2008) and moved on without offering thoughts or insight as to whether or not all blended or hybrid learning constitutes 30%-80% online. As we've discussed in the past 3 weeks, there are no set percentages that constitute a true definition of blended learning as long as the minimum face-to-face and another form of training are included in the curriculum.

One of the stronger arguments of the article discussed the importance of the overall design of a hybrid program. "Universities must also examine critical topics of curriculum design, rigor, flexibility, blended courses, and collaboration to implement successful online doctoral programs," (Alvich et. al., pg. 225). Instructional design professionals understand the relationship between technology and course design and the fact that course tools are only as effective as the design of the course. With proper design and

implementation, hybrid doctoral programs at MAPU could offer multiple assignments, asynchronous reflection, synchronous conversations and a wide range of media (Alvich et. al., pg. 225).

Another interesting argument offered in this article included four factors that affect hybrid course attrition: quality of academic experiences; online learning environment; support and assistance; and student self-motivation. As a lifelong student of online learning, I can speak from experience that student self-motivation is probably the most important factor affecting attrition. It takes a lot of discipline and self-motivation to complete online courses; more so than that of a traditional face-to-face course. Another other important factor not included on this list is faculty buy-in. When faculty buy-in to a hybrid course program it is easier for them to “provide coursework that is meaningful, effective, and adequately supported,” (Alvich et. al., pg. 226). Furthermore, faculty buy-in includes building partnerships among the various internal and external influencers that effect hybrid-based education programs. Partnerships are “critical to the initial implementation and expansion of the hybrid doctoral program,” (Alvich, et. al., pg. 226). More positive relationships with partner influencers result in more positive program perceptions. Hybrid programs must maintain rigor, quality, and scholarship of traditional programs in order to be taken seriously.

The article concluded with a description of the different Phases of Study offered in MAPU’s Doctoral of Education Hybrid Program. Phase I included program courses and a benchmark review; Phase II included courses, seminar, and research project proposal; and Phase III included courses and a final benchmark (dissertation) (Alvich, et. al., pg. 228). Students were assessed via personal journals and end of Phase evaluations on three occasions. Students had to be approved to move from Phase to Phase. Overall, the authors admitted that the results of this study of hybrid doctoral programs may have included researcher bias because many of the students included in the study were members of the first cohort were members of the faculty at MAPU and of the hybrid doctoral program.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Hybrid Doctoral Program: Innovative Practices and Partnerships article was a good read but I found the results to be somewhat predictable. I think the article could have benefitted from more recent research proof sources and from studying a hybrid doctoral program from another school. Researcher bias and other personal factors may have skewed the overall results of this article. Nevertheless, the authors discussed very important factors that affect hybrid programs; perceptions, learner characteristics, positive outcomes of technology, and student self-discipline. I would recommend this article to anyone interested in pursuing a hybrid doctorate degree as a measure of what to expect from such programs.

Reference

Alvich, D., Manning, J., McCormick, K., & Campbell, R. (2012). Hybrid doctoral program: Innovative practices and partnerships. *International Journal on E-Learning*, 11(3), 223-232.