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INSDSG 697
Module 2 Article Summary
20 February 2013

Introduction

I chose to review Norman Vaughan's article *Perspectives on Blended Learning in Higher Education* because I found it thought provoking and personally relevant. Vaughan's article focused on the benefits and challenges of blended learning in higher education. Specifically, he introduced benefits and challenges from the perspective of students, faculty, and administrators. Additionally, Vaughan introduced characteristics of a blended learning Course and he concludes the article with some thoughts on how transformational leadership can help overcome some of the challenges associated with blended learning.

Analysis

Vaughan started his article with a definition of blended learning. He defined blended learning as "a combination of face-to-face and online learning," (Vaughan, 2007, pg. 82). Upon reflection of last week's group discussions, I found it hard to accept this simplistic definition for something much more complicated to define. Preferably, Vaughan should have included all other forms of learning into his definition to include CD/DVD interactive learning, webinars, CBTs, etc. Nevertheless, Vaughan continued his article with the addition of the term "hybrid" as another way to discuss blended learning (Vaughan, pg. 82). Hybrids are courses in which "a significant portion of the learning activities have been moved online, and time traditionally spent in the classroom is reduced but not eliminated," (Vaughan, pg. 82). Once again, I disagree with this definition because hybrid courses do not necessarily need to spend "a significant portion of time online." If you have a hybrid course that is structured with 40% online and 60% in the face-to-face classroom, it would still be considered a hybrid course.

The Vaughan captured some of the benefits and challenges of blended learning in higher education from the perspective of students, faculty, and administrators. Vaughan argued that the main benefits of blended learning from the students' perspective included: time flexibility and improved student learning outcomes (Vaughan, pg. 84). Students liked the blended learning design because "it provided them with the flexibility to work from home," (Vaughan, pg. 84). Vaughan also argued that previous studies of blended learning environments indicated that "blended learning courses have higher success rates and lower withdraw rates than their comparable face-to-face courses," (Vaughan, pg. 84). As a blended learning student, I completely agree with the flexibility of working from home and/or work, but I am not as sure the studies referenced were large enough to prove blended learning had lower overall attrition rates.

Next, Vaughan introduced four key challenges to the blended learning environment from the student perspective. These challenges included: expectations, time management, responsibility for learning, and technology. Vaughan argued student expectations resulted in a mindset that blended learning courses meant "less coursework," (Vaughan, pg. 85) which many would agree is a fallacy. Time management is a constant challenge for students in blended learning because online activities were usually required to be completed between face-to-face classes. Responsibility for learning is an interesting challenge in that it included the lack of individual meta cognitive skills, or ability to learn how to learn, (Vaughan, pg. 86). Many students are not used to the learning skills required to succeed in the blended learning environment prior to taking a hybrid class. Lastly, the technological issues often found in the first few weeks of a blended learning course proved to be challenging for many students. Personal experience has taught me the importance of being intimately familiar with the online learning environment prior to taking a course. Technology is always changing and students have varying levels of experience with online media and

social applications. It is imperative that students take the time to learn how to navigate required tools and applications prior to attempting a hybrid course.

Vaughan's article included a few points from the faculty perspective. Many faculty members surveyed had a high level of satisfaction with blended learning courses because of enhanced teacher and student interaction, increased student engagement in learning, flexibility in teaching/learning and continued improvement (Vaughan, pg. 87). Faculty is challenged in a blended learning environment to "develop new ways to engage their students online and through the creation of online communities," (Vaughan, pg. 87). Faculty suggested that blended learning environments offer a more engaging environment for students to learn and interact while maintaining a high level of motivation (Vaughan, pg. 87). Additionally, blended learning environments offer a more flexible teaching/learning environment while allowing teachers an opportunity "to experiment with new approaches to learning and new types of educational technology," (Vaughan, pg. 87). I thought all four benefits from the faculty perspective were warranted and require no further clarification.

A few of the challenges offered from the faculty in a blended learning environment included: time commitment, professional development support, and other risk factors. It is easy to understand that blended learning courses require a much greater time commitment than traditional face-to-face courses, especially during the development and implementation stages. Fortunately, once the majority of the course is designed and implemented, updates to the course are often easy to implement. Vaughan offered that many faculty members were upset with the lack of traditional professional development support found in the traditional learning environment. He argued that blended learning is a "solo" activity and the most important time for faculty support is during the initial delivery phase (Vaughan, pg. 88). I agree with this thought because providing initial support will allow faculty to maintain a level of motivation and direction in order to provide the best possible blended learning experience for the students. Lastly, Vaughan argued that risk factors such as fear of losing control of the course and lower student evaluations pose challenges to the blended learning environment.

Vaughan concludes the article with some information from the administrative perspective. He claimed that benefits of blended learning from the administrative perspective included: the opportunity to enhance institution's reputation, expand access to an institution's educational offerings, and reduced operating costs (Vaughan, pg. 89). Although I agree with all three benefits, the latter is of most importance. Educational institutions are businesses. They are in the business of not only developing future educators and leaders of the world; they are in the business of making money. It is no secret that online learning is a cost-effective way to educate students. Once the network(s), servers, faculty and curriculum are developed and implemented, the result is a money-making machine. For example, this course (INSDSG 697) has 17 students at a cost of roughly \$1250 per student = \$21,250. Of that, let's say \$3,000 covers the cost of technology (Blackboard) and \$12,000 covers the cost of faculty; the institution has a profit of \$6,250! Times that by the many courses offered online and you have a money-making machine!

Nevertheless, with the good often comes the bad. A few of the challenges offered by Vaughan from the administration perspective included: alignment with institutional goals and priorities, resistance to organizational change, and organizational structure and experience with collaboration and partnerships (Vaughan, pg. 91). In order for blended learning environments to be successful, technology must be viewed "as a means of achieving the overall strategic goals of the institution," (Vaughan, pg. 91). Additionally, changes with technology are often paired with changes in curriculum and course structure. Institutional leaders and faculty must work together to ensure collaboration and partnerships are maintained for the sake of the students and overall blended learning environment.

Conclusion

Overall, I thought Vaughan included some valid points regarding the benefits and challenges of blended learning environments in higher education. I thought he could have spent more time and effort on the importance of leadership in academia and how strong and effective leadership can drive the development and implementation stages of blended learning environments. Lastly, the article could have benefitted from a better definition of blended learning. Blended learning is simply not “online learning with face-to-face learning.” Blended learning may include both methods in this example but one does not have to mix face-to-face with online learning to be considered blended learning. One could include interactive CD/DVDs, CBTs, webinars, etc. I would recommend this article to anyone interested in reading about blended learning benefits and challenges from the student, faculty, and administration perspectives.

Reference

Vaughan, N. (2007). Perspectives on blended learning in higher education. *International Journal on E-Learning* 6(1), 81-94.