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Previous	Next
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Colleges Aren't Keeping Up With Student Demand for Hybrid Programs, Survey Suggests

April 14, 2011, 4:49 pm

By [Marc Parry](#)

Students want hybrid programs that blend online and face-to-face experiences. But colleges don't seem to be providing enough of them to meet the demand.

That's one message that emerges from the results of a national survey of more than 20,000 current and prospective adult students that were just released by Eduventures, a consulting firm.

The finding is notable because blended education has been hot lately. In 2009, the U.S. Education Department released a [report](#) praising it. And this year, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is pouring [millions](#) into supporting it.

But the Eduventures survey found a gap between supply and demand: 19 percent of respondents said they were enrolled in blended programs, while 33 percent of prospective students listed that format as their preference.

The report on the survey, which is not available free online, questions whether some students are being "forced" into studying entirely online because of a lack of hybrid programs.

"Schools have jumped on the online bandwagon, and students end up with this rather unnuanced choice between more-or-less wholly on ground and more-or-less wholly online, when many of them actually want something that's a more nuanced combination of the two," says Richard Garrett, a managing director at Eduventures.

Mr. Garrett argues that offering that nuanced combination makes sense because of broader trends in online education. As wholly Web-based learning grows more popular, providing it becomes riskier for lesser-known nonprofit colleges. That's because it pushes them into a highly competitive national market. Increasingly, he says, the opportunities to draw in online students will be local.

"There's a strong rationale for many nonprofit schools that lack national brands to use a form of hybrid to get the best of both worlds—to play to consumer interest in online but tack onto it some kind of high-value, on-ground, institution-specific, face-to-face component that allows them to differentiate in an otherwise very commoditized market," he says.

That isn't a new idea. Some universities have been working on it for years, in part through a [program](#) that the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation created to help colleges attract local students online.

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3224243 3 hours ago

Hybrid programs batter an institution's efficiency as far as facilities utilization is concerned. A hybrid

course requires a classroom for a few meetings but that time/day slot in the room is typically reserved for the entire semester (which leaves you with a mostly empty room). Unless there are lots of hybrid classes that have different on-campus meeting times so they can all be put in the same (or same few) classroom(s), utilization goes down - governing bodies, trustees and legislators don't like underutilized classrooms. It's a worse problem if the few sessions needed are in a computer lab. They're much more scarce and typically more heavily utilized.

Until there's some cooperation amongst those who demand their class be taught in "X" room on "Y" day at "Z" time, hybrid programs won't gain favor by those who must explain empty classrooms.



jones41 2 hours ago

At my institution, the opposite is true regarding efficiency. Two classes can meet in the same physical space as two: since a typical class meets twice a week, the two hybrid classes meet once a week on alternate days in the traditional classroom. A competent registrar can figure this one out. When enrollments are high and space is truly valuable, in an urban campus for example, it isn't even possible for faculty to have the type of control over teaching in X room on Y day, as you describe.

2 people liked this.



bsusee 3 hours ago

I suspect that a lot of adult learners say they prefer hybrid, but when it comes down to practicality, they will choose online only because it fits their schedules better. I am not convinced that it is a supply/demand problem.

1 person liked this.



grandeped 3 hours ago

Maybe I am just not into this new math, but since when does 33% constitute "many"? Take away the 19% that wanted it and already have it, and you only have 14% that want hybrid but aren't getting it. Did they look in to why their colleges didn't offer hybrid courses? Maybe the courses they were in also enrolled students from other countries, so hybrid is just not an option? I like the idea of hybrid, but you have to understand that hybrid courses take away the killer value of "anytime, anywhere" learning from online courses. I wonder how many people wanted online courses but didn't have that option? How many students are being "forced" to take face-to-face courses? How come we are not being told the rest of the statistics from this report? How many didn't care what the format was? I suspect the majority are in this last category.

2 people liked this.



mariemrafa 2 hours ago

I'm very uncomfortable with entire programs online, let alone classes. I finished my higher education administration master program last year and found out that it will be completely online starting next semester. That program should not be entirely online based on the material and classes required. Some of my favorite classes met F2F, and I learned more because of hearing other people's experiences. I hate, loathe, despise online textual chats. It takes more time to read, type, and process each thought that sometimes my response was too late. The class moved to another topic.

Some programs and classes I don't think should ever be wholly online. I don't have any issues with online components to a class or program because technology is the way of the future, but some subjects can't be taught online and can't be learned by the individual. I do understand some of the concerns addressed in other comments about wasted space and efficiency. If more classes are moving to this wholly online or blended style, those issues need to be brought up before releasing those classes as such.

I had a blended class, if you want to call it that. We met maybe three times a semester and the rest was online. However, the first day of class, the professor asked if we wanted to meet more often because the room was reserved for us. I jumped for more meeting times, but the rest of my class consisted of 5-year

teacher program students who all had the same schedule and opted for online instruction.

Sometimes students don't know what they want until they have it and don't want it anymore. Not completely discrediting this study, but let's be real. Not having a choice of format worked best for me because I had to adapt or learn a new style of instruction and learning. I know now what I prefer in the way of instruction, but I'm also not a typical adult student. Flexibility should be considered for some of the graduate level classes or classes typically taken by adult/non-traditional students, but I wouldn't put a class online based on this study. I'd try to conduct my own survey because each college has a different make up of students, but I wouldn't let them be the deciding factor for format of classes.

1 person liked this.



grandeped 1 hour ago

I completed my Master's degree program entirely online, and it was the first time I really felt challenged in my academic career. The time that it takes to read and process other text postings is exactly what I needed. Face-to-face courses tend to bore me, mainly because the co-called "interaction" in those courses is limited to whoever can get the instructor's attention. Entirely online programs work beautifully when they are designed properly. Of course, there are also completely face-to-face programs that are designed poorly - so design standards have nothing to do with whether it is online or not. But I couldn't have ever completed my Masters if it wasn't for wholly online programs. So I take issue with anyone that wants to write them off entirely. In some cases, they are better than face-to-face.

2 people liked this.



sanjoaquin 2 hours ago

Before your administration leaps onto this latest bandwagon, they should investigate the costs. It takes at 3x as long to design and 2x the resources to launch and run one of these classes, in my experience. If you have a faculty already proficient in both delivery modes, ask them which courses lend themselves best to this kind of format to maximize learning.

2 people liked this.



jasonnorris 1 hour ago

@sanjoaquin, can you point me to the studies that explain the triple-time to design and the double-resources to launch and run online courses? I'd be interested in learning more about that.

1 person liked this.



Diana Lee 24 minutes ago

In my case, I have been looking for a PhD program that will provide a hybrid learning environment similar to the one offered at the University of Florida for their Classics program. Work is accomplished as a combination of online courses, short summer courses on campus and courses at other campuses around the country. I think schools are going to have to start going more in the direction of offering flexible options to people as to when and where they accomplish the requirements of their degrees, especially for people who work full time but want to earn a graduate degree.

Sal Pellettieri 5 minutes ago

The future is definitely blended learning. With budgets getting cut, schools bulging with students and technology getting cheaper all the time it's just a no-brainer.

