

Proposal for Research
Online Education in the First-Year Composition Experience—A Hybrid Model

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Abstract

My study from Spring 2014 finds that hybrid courses are “a logical place for instructors and departments to start” (Warnock 2009). In this project, I will build a model hybrid course using effective practices for teaching online that I compiled in my Spring 2014 project. It will be useful for any instructor who incorporates reading and writing; thus this project will be beneficial to many departments across campus.

Online courses are a reality at SJSU and previous experiments with MOOCs and smaller online classes have not been successful. If the English and Comparative Literature Department does not want the Administration to force our composition courses into the MOOC format, the alternative will be this hybrid model course designed to show instructors and administrators effective online teaching practices. In addition, the project will highlight the resources, for example student technology training, needed to make the transformation to a partially onsite format successful.

Background and Significance

In the face of the relentless push for online education, the English Department needs to know the best practices for teaching English composition online. California Governor Jerry Brown is demanding more classes online (York 2013). Previous SJSU experiments with MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) and smaller online classes with edX and Udacity have not been successful (Hiltzik, Rivera). Students are failing the courses or not finishing them (Hiltzik, Rivera). Dr. John Engell, English Department Chair, said that he supports this project because “we need to accept the fact that more online classes are in the future of the university.” Freshman English composition is one of the most important courses on campus because all students are required to take this class. Strategically moving the course online is of the utmost importance because large numbers of students are affected. Many of these students are being represented by the AANAPISI grant. If we do not want the Administration to force our composition courses into the MOOC format or another online format that does not fit the needs of our students and faculty, then we must create our own plan with the rationale and best practices to support it.

Administrators may have an idea of how they want online teaching to be, but the English and Comparative Literature Department should be the one that brings the knowledge of our field when planning Freshman Composition. A research project was done in spring 2014 through the AANAPISI grant. It comprised of a survey of teachers and students and a literature review of best practices in the field.

The next logical step in the process is to create a model of a hybrid course that could be piloted in Spring 2015. The model will show what a hybrid course can do, but it will not be a template for an automated course. It will represent idea and options based on effective practices. Instructors ultimately have academic freedom in their courses and are essential to the learning process, so this model cannot be perceived as a template that could then become an automated course in the future. The model would serve as a presentation of potential lessons and strategies for effective hybrid teaching.

Goals of the Grant

- c. Develop, implement, and integrate proactive writing strategies; or
- d. Change the SJSU writing culture from a policy-driven approach to an action-oriented approach.

Project Description

This project will create a model of a hybrid course. According to Beth Hewett, co-chair of the Online Writing Instruction committee of the CCCC, because many instructors currently use their school's online learning management systems (LMS), many courses are already essentially hybrid. In addition, this project would be a logical next step out of the fall 2014 AANAPISI project "Online Education in the First-Year Composition Experience." The goal would be a model to show any instructors that incorporate reading and writing in their courses how to transform their coursework into the online hybrid model. Instructors need to see what they can do in this new environment so that academic standards can be upheld and so that student engagement in the online environment can be optimized for the highest likelihood of student success.

The model will maintain instructors' academic freedom. It will not be a template that administration can use to create an automated course.

The hybrid course will be designed on SJSU's current LMS Canvas, the current campus technology. Most instructors are already using Canvas to supplement their coursework, so it is the logical choice.

Moreover, I will design student surveys using SJSU's survey software, Qualtrics, for instructors to use while teaching a hybrid course. The surveys will ask for immediate feedback from students about what is working and not working throughout the semester. As a result, instructors make appropriate changes.

The goal would be to show instructors what straight-forward and simple methods can be used to create effective learning in the hybrid environment.

Project Methods/Design

- The first step is to design the course. The full semester will be planned with all details in a Word document.
- Then the online component will be designed on Canvas.
- Using Qualtrics, I will design the student surveys to coincide with the course.

- I will present my project to the English Department Curriculum and Composition committees, Department Chair, and the English Department Writing Program Director, the Writing Requirement Committee, and the Department of Linguistics and Language Development. The project will also be made available via the AANAPISI and English and Comparative Literature Department websites.
- If there is demand and interest, workshops could also be offered in a small setting with faculty across campus, potentially in conjunction with eCampus.

Project Timeline

September: Design the semester-length course. The design will specify the content to be covered in both a specific and general nature.

October: Design the online component on Canvas.

November: Review the course with WPAs Richard McNabb and Kelly Harrison for feedback. I may also get feedback from other outside sources.

Late November-Early December and late January: I will present the hybrid model to the Stretch Coordinator(s), the English and Comparative Literature Department's Composition and Curriculum committees, the Writing Resource Center, and any other groups that are interested.

Please note: This project timeline is for a one-semester project, but if the plan goes well, I will reapply to request additional projects and funding.

Potential Contribution to Improvement of Education

This project is a good investment for the AANAPISI grant since its students represent 33% of the SJSU student population (Institutional Effectiveness and Analytics 2013). As a CSU in Silicon Valley, the heartland of technology, we feel pressure to be leaders in the use of technology, but using technology without careful consideration, planning, and rationale is not the best road to success. Our leaders, Governor Jerry Brown and SJSU President Qayoumi, are pushing hard in this direction, with Qayoumi saying "We want to fail fast, learn from it, and move on" (Young 2013) but speed is not the best approach when failure means student failure. Education ultimately needs to serve the students, but it also needs to support the instructors and be supported by the administration. Building a hybrid model writing course that incorporates effective practices and making a careful plan that supports those practices will ensure the highest likelihood of success for the students and in turn the school and all its instructors.

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