

Dear Colorado Women's College students,

Starting in Fall 2013, the Colorado Women's College will offer more hybrid and online courses in the common curriculum and the BBA program. Part of this change is in response to external requirements to increase the number of contact hours involved in CWC courses. One possible solution is to increase the number of learning hours per quarter. Instead of merely increasing seat time, CWC administration and faculty are considering innovative and creative approaches to create greater learning experiences. I want to take an opportunity to clear the air about and give you some insight on what it means to take a hybrid course.

First, what is a hybrid course anyway? Just like in face-to-face courses, there are a variety of ways that professors implement the idea of a hybrid course. I want to share with you how I will approach hybrid development. I am most comfortable with the definition that states a hybrid course is one in which a sizeable portion of the learning activities are moved outside the classroom. That seems a bit vague, but that is how it should be. It gives the professor latitude to tailor the delivery of course materials depending on the subject and the students.

For example, I teach INFO sequence courses in the Daniels College of Business. They are part statistics and part information technology. The courses require students to be very hands on with Excel, the main tool used throughout the courses. I provide weekly, online lectures of the screencast variety. Screencasts are just videos that show my computer screen with my voice narrating what is happening. If you have heard of the Kahn Academy, (www.khanacademy.org) screencasts are the method used for delivery of knowledge. My screencasts alternate between PowerPoint presentations and hands on work using Excel. I break the presentations into short bursts of about 5 minutes at a time.

The beauty of this method is that it allows students to learn at their own pace. Familiar topics are watched once. New or difficult topics can be paused, rewind (is that the right word in the digital age?), and viewed again as many times as needed. Every student is in control of her learning pace, but has access to the same content. This is educational customization at its best.

If you are saying, "This sounds a lot like an online course," I want to note there exists an important difference: weekly, my class meets to do work in class. Hybrid gives you an opportunity in a face-to-face setting to ask and answer questions, seek clarification, enjoy the interaction of a college classroom, and go beyond the basics. Students come to class having heard the lecture, attempted some problems, and tried a quiz. Students already know where their questions are and can clear up misunderstandings quickly.

The in-class portion of the class usually involves hands on projects where students can "go deeper" with the guidance of the professor and the help of their peers. These sessions allow for activities that go beyond traditional homework assignments. The concepts are explored at a more intense level and in theory the learning that takes place is of a higher quality.

I have taught face-to-face classes, online classes, and am now teaching hybrid classes. I really like face-to-face classes because of the interaction I have with students. Due to the amount of content delivered and the current timeframe of the courses, I spend more time in lecture and students have to attempt the homework outside of class where timely feedback is hard to get. Online courses allow for the pace of information delivery to vary from student to student and create a different kind of interaction in different formats. A hybrid course picks from the best of both worlds. "Lectures" are taken care of at a time and place of a student's choosing. The pace of the lecture is also variable based on student background and current material. The in-class portion of the course produces a deeper level of engagement due to students' preparation outside of class. The basics are covered and you come prepared for the higher level learning that occurs when new ideas are applied.

I understand that you might have some hesitancy about the inclusion of new hybrid and online courses. That is understandable. Trust me, as faculty we are taking the move seriously. In order to teach an online or hybrid course, we have to take the appropriate workshop through DU's Office of Teaching and Learning. In TOW (the Teaching Online Workshop), an intensive online workshop designed to prepare faculty members to teach an online course, instructors experience online learning from the student perspective. In the Hybrid 3D (Design, Development, and

Delivery) Workshop, instructors experience the hybrid approach first-hand as they learn about the opportunities of the hybrid approach to improve student learning and engagement, and practice taking advantage of these opportunities in designing their own hybrid courses. Even after completion, we continue to find great ways to improve the quality and depth of your educational experience at CWC.

I ask that you try these courses with an open mind. There will be some bumps in the road, like with all changes. With your patience and feedback, I believe hybrid learning will flourish at CWC. In the long run, I think we will all love it!

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