

“The Blended Course Offering : An Interdisciplinary and Multi-Formatted Approach to Course Development” - by Nanita Mohan (FINAL REPORT)

I would like to thank the Study and Development Fellowship committee for this amazing opportunity to pursue a course design that has become a very important project that has not only benefitted students, but also my own personal teaching and professional development. Since this project began a few years ago, I was given the opportunity to create, organize and teach the new blended offering and this development fellowship has definitely helped in improving and promoting this blended course to a higher level. The fellowship allowed me to invest in numerous professional development workshops, conferences and opportunities to improve the course in a way that can also benefit other disciplines and programs.

Pre-Proposal

Initially, when I wrote this proposal, I had just finished creating a course for the Department of Political Science teamed up with the Office of Open Learning. The course was a new type of blended course for first year students that blend lecture, online components and face-to-face seminars led by graduate teaching assistants. This course replaced the former first year course titled POLS 1150 and became the first blended course offered in the Department of Political science. At the time of the proposal, the course was only offered once as a pilot offering and needed some improvements to ensure a smoother transition for all future offerings.

Phase 1 of this project occurred before the proposal itself where as a co-designer and developer of the course, I was also able to contribute to the pre-development phase as well as provide ongoing changes and improvements on the content and design aspects of the course as I was teaching it. Here are some of my contributions to the course design and development before the proposal:

- A) Working with a committee which consisted of faculty and Open Learning staff to come up with content, design and assessment, specifically I organized all the weeks and provided the learning objectives, introductory and concluding content for each unit and each module.
- B) I was also responsible for creating content that included different styles of online content
- C) I was responsible for teaching the lecture component of the course
- D) I worked with two course specialists during pre-production and post-production to adjust some of the course material and to accommodate students with different needs
- E) I acted a faculty liaison by working and coordinating with 4 different faculty members to ensure consistency with course content and material.
- F) As a committee, we are trying to present this course in conferences (with one successful presentation so far).

Post-proposal

For Phase II, I took all of the above contributions and improved the course further through specific goals, objectives and measurable outcomes. For the purpose of this report, I would like to reiterate my goals and discuss the success of each one of my planned goals and objectives for this proposed course development:

My goals for this proposal were:

Goal #1: To provide support, advice, and assistance to other faculty members and programs in establishing the blended model for future course offerings by creating a manual or workshop for course instructors.

Proposed Measurable Outcome: To develop a survey/tool to gain feedback from both faculty and students on the nature of the blended course and to improve on the course format based on the responses and feedback.

During the course of the semester, I was able to start a Blended Course Toolkit and so far I have completed a 20-page Teaching Assistant seminar and assessment manual, a seminar orientation instruction guide, a pre-development, development and post-development checklist (including projected timeline and due dates for specific phases of the blended course development) and a tentative goals/objectives guideline for the different components of the blended course. I am also in discussions to develop and include additional information on online assessment choices for different disciplines in social science. I was in the process of finalizing this toolkit into one comprehensive document, when I was approached by Dennis Baker and Kate Puddister from the Criminal Justice Program, who expressed interest in creating a similar blended course for the CJPP program. I then realized that my toolkit was very specific to just Political Science and needed more general information that would include online and course development material for other disciplines. I have since been in contact with Natalie Green and Dennis York from the Office of Open Learning to add and build more information towards a universal blended toolkit manual for courses in social science, rather than just one for political science. I also had a few meetings with CJPP faculty members to assist them with the organization and development of a possible blended law/criminology course. Currently, the committee is looking into faculty assistance and other logistical requirements to set up the course for an offering in 2020. They have requested me to assist with the organization of the course once the logistics have been sorted out. I hope to add more to the toolkit before finalizing it or perhaps include a part two and a separate section on other disciplines. I anticipate that this will be a work in progress as I keep adding more to the toolkit while I work with faculty from other disciplines.

Goal #2: To build and improve on course delivery that will further enhance the blended approach in a more cost effective and pedagogically effective manner.

Proposed Measurable Outcome: – Attending and presenting at numerous local and international conferences such as PPSA in September and the ICRTTEL Teaching Conference in Budapest. These conferences have workshops that can teach me how to provide a more comprehensive way to incorporate different teaching elements into one course.

During the course of the Fall 2018 semester, I attended a few conferences to discuss the course design and to learn more about different types of course delivery. In September, I attended the Prairie Political Science Association Conference (PPSA) in Banff with my co-designers to present the blended course. The presentation was titled “Re-Envisioning First Year Political Science: Developing a Hybrid Model of Course Delivery”. The presentation was part of the conference’s teaching and learning panel and was received

with positive feedback from fellow colleagues who are embarking on innovative ways to change courses for both small and big classrooms. The 2-day conference also showcased many other innovative presentations, such as combining design and political science in a cross-disciplinary delivery (which proved to be a useful presentation for the purpose of the blended course). I was able to network and discuss the blended approach with many other academics that were also embarking on similar course redevelopment projects.

I was also able to present the blended design course at the ICRTTEL Teaching and Research Conference in Budapest, at the end of September. For this conference, I presented a similar paper/presentation as I did in Banff, but with more of an emphasis on teaching and challenges associated with blending three different methods of delivery. This conference also included a two full day workshop which was very useful as we were able to not only discuss various other blended approaches used at different international universities, but to also participate in hands-on techniques on how these courses worked. I participated in two specific workshops that I found most useful to be implemented into the blended course in the future. One of them was the BOOC model (blended online and on-campus) meant for large classes with different methods of delivery. I was able to learn a lot about this model, including its design and execution plans which I hope to incorporate into future redevelopments. This was a very successful conference for me, as I won the best paper /presentation for the blended course (voted by participants and the organizers). For further information, please see:

<https://eurasiaresearchcon.wixsite.com/eurasiaresearch/blog/eurasia-research-international-conference-held-at-budapest-september-2018>

Even though I had only planned to present and attend the above two conferences, I was also able to attend one more teaching and learning conference during the Fall semester. The third conference was the Top Hat conference in Chicago, in October. This conference focused more on technology used to prompt participation in large classes and seminars, using a third party tool. I was also able to participate in numerous workshops that provided me with ideas to incorporate in-class participation tools for the blended course.

Goal #3: To research and obtain more knowledge on various methods, tools and delivery mechanisms to further improve the mixed-formatted delivery approach to courses.

Proposed Measurable Outcome #1: To learn and integrate new tools to develop and improve the online components, including new ways to integrate participatory elements that will further link the lectures, online and seminar components. This also includes creating a better evaluation process for the course and Teaching Assistants. This will be accomplished by working alongside Open Learning program specialists.

For this portion of my goals and objectives, I was able to change some of the discussion and seminar requirements based on some of the tools that I was able to learn from the above mentioned conferences. Furthermore, I was also able to develop an anonymous informal seminar evaluation form for this course with permission from the department. The evaluation form is used specifically for POLS 1150 seminars and contains both qualitative and quantitative variables. I was also able to set up end-of-

term meetings with the teaching assistants and the other creators to find ways to incorporate changes. The Teaching Assistant's valuable feedback provided the information necessary to create the Teaching Assistant Manual for future offerings. I also took this opportunity to update the course content based on the expertise of faculty and the teaching assistants.

Proposed Measurable Outcome #2: Create a mini workshop for instructors and departments who are interested in the blended model.

The final outcome was to create a mini workshop for instructors and departments interested in creating a course with a blended model. I was able to do this with the assistance of the Associate Dean's office by initiating and presenting as a panelist in the most recent CSAHS (College of Social and Applied Human Science) Teaching and Learning Hub in January 2019. As a fellow panelist, I presented and explained the nature of the blended course to faculty and staff from the University of Guelph. This panel allowed for a more direct Question and Answer session with interested parties. In addition, I was also able to meet with different faculty members from sociology and criminal justice program to discuss the blended course in detail. I hope to continue with this mini workshop meetings to implement a blended course with other faculties.

Overall it was a very specific semester with the development of the blended course toolkit and the various presentations at national and international conferences. Once again, thank you for the opportunity to continue improving the blended course.