Improve higher education through blended learning.

Connectivity solutions for students and faculty

The principles of blended learning—mixing in-person with online instruction and study—have existed for decades, though the term itself was first used in 1999.[1] Blended learning, also called hybrid learning, gained prominence during the COVID-19 pandemic, when colleges and universities were suddenly forced to provide remote-only instruction.

Over the course of the pandemic, an EDUCAUSE "2023 Higher Education Trend Watch"[2] report says, "higher education institutions shifted from emergency response to long-term adaptation and strategically planning for what's next."

In fact, a growing body of research points to blended learning being more effective than either online-only learning or face-to-face instruction.[3] The idea is that blended learning allows students and faculty to combine advantages of both in-person and online learning into something that is better than either one alone.

Hybrid learning in higher education is here to stay. The goal now is to figure out how to make it as effective as possible for students, faculty and higher education institutions.

Lessons from the pandemic

Even early in the COVID-19 pandemic, there was recognition that education might be permanently altered. A Forbes article[4] from April 2020 sums it up in its title: "The Coronavirus Pandemic has Unleashed a Revolution in Education. From Now On, Blended Learning Will Be the Benchmark."

Universities pushed all at once into online learning by COVID-19 restrictions had to figure out, quickly, how to make education work without physical classrooms. Now that those restrictions have mostly lifted and in-person instruction has returned, academic institutions are finding that retaining at least some online options is very popular, especially among students.

A recent global survey[5] found that by mid-2022, 82% of higher ed students reported wanting at least some of their courses to take place online. Often, students prefer blended learning to in-person courses.[6] And when McKinsey surveyed more than 7,000 students in 17 countries in 2023, they found that "most higher education students want to continue to incorporate at least some aspects of online learning into their education."[7]

Blended learning: the best of both worlds

By combining the best features of in-person and online instruction, blended learning offers advantages for college students and faculty that include:

Gain more flexible access to higher education.

Given that many college students work a significant number of hours a week, augmenting on-campus learning with remote access gives them greater flexibility to manage work and studies and can reduce the time they spend commuting to and from campus. Blended learning can also attract new students, including those working full-time who find the flexibility of online classes the only practical way to pursue higher education. And blended learning has the potential to be "the most relevant, beneficial learning environment possible for students"[8]—providing students with greater autonomy, responsibility and flexibility in navigating their educational path.

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Avoid pitfalls of online-only instruction.

Students in the McKinsey survey[9] cited above named three reasons for hesitating to embrace fully online programs: "fear of becoming more distracted by studying online, getting bored if the learning experience is not motivating, and lacking discipline to complete the online program." Add the serious socioeconomic differences, highlighted by the pandemic, in students' ability to learn in completely online environments. A 2021 Pew Research survey[10] found that for lower income Americans (below $30K), 24% don't own a smartphone, 43% don't have home broadband service and 41% don't have a desktop or laptop computer. By also including in-person instruction, blended learning can help overcome these challenges.

Support different learning styles.

It's common knowledge that different people learn best using different styles, whether visual, auditory, kinesthetic, logical, social, solitary or written modes. Blended learning environments make it easier for students to gravitate to their ideal ways of learning and for universities to offer a wider range of options.

Provide access to wider learning and support networks.[11]

Students can expand their on-campus networking options by using digital platforms to access additional learning resources, academic and student support, and ways to connect to outside experts and potential employers.

Encourage greater student engagement, comprehension and retention.

Students uncomfortable with speaking up in class often engage more enthusiastically online. Conversely, other students thrive when learning in physical proximity to faculty and their peers. For all students, instructors can mix different kinds of interactive and in-person tools and approaches to make their curriculum more engaging, which can boost both comprehension and retention.

Support individually paced learning.

Because online instruction can happen any time, it's easier for students to choose their own place and time to study, and to progress at their own pace. Students who need additional help can spend extra time one-on-one with faculty, teaching assistants or small peer groups.

Make better use of faculty time.

By eliminating or automating some administrative tasks required for in-person instruction—such as printing handouts or hand-grading assignments—online options allow faculty to spend more time actually teaching.

Utilize data to help improve student outcomes.

College administrators can use the data generated by the online portion of blended learning to analyze trends and pinpoint where they might focus improvements, whether it's identifying individual students who need more assistance or entire course materials that a majority of students missed.

Blended learning: necessary but not always easy

While blended learning seems inevitable in higher education institutions, implementing it still faces challenges. An article

in *The International Journal of Management Education*,[12] focused specifically on business schools, summarized: "Important barriers to the adoption of blended learning include institutional culture, infrastructure difficulties, deficiencies in technological usability, lack of pedagogical and peer support, and lack of clarity about universities' purpose for its adoption."

An insights report titled "Adapting to a New Tech Era: Three Challenges Facing Higher Education"[13] from *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, sponsored by Verizon, put it more succinctly: "There may be a consensus around offering hybrid learning, but institutions are still struggling with the best ways to do it."

How Verizon supports blended learning

To help both students and faculty navigate the online portion of blended learning, Verizon offers a range of devices, network plans and collaboration tools. The goal is to help higher ed institutions make the most of their instructional options.

Verizon makes it easier for higher ed students to stay connected remotely, any time and from anywhere. Solutions we provide include:

- Digital devices such as smartphones, hotspots, laptops and tablets
- Connectivity plans to our reliable, secure network
- Mobile Device Management solutions
- OneTalk mobile unified communications
- Video collaboration tools including BlueJeans by Verizon, Microsoft Teams and Cisco Webex

More broadly, we help:

- Reduce the digital divide by empowering all students with reliable, readily available access to online learning, regardless of their socioeconomic status, race or whether they live in rural communities.
- Deliver the interactive, immersive and engaging experiences that today's students require.
- Provide accessible, safe and reliable digital experiences that expand learning with new capabilities.
- Leverage the power of 5G to open up new learning possibilities, including augmented reality and virtual reality to provide immersive context to courses, as well as innovative new ways for instructors to engage and excite their students.
- Keep students and learning networks safe with advanced security solutions that help protect students and faculty from cyberattacks.

Learn more about Verizon solutions for Higher Education blended learning.

Visit Verizon.com/highereducation

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