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November 26th, 2021

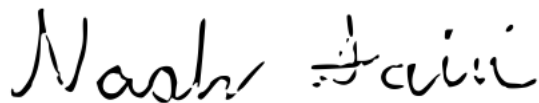
Dr. Leslie Cormack
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) of UBCO
Computer Science Student Society at the University of British Columbia 2366 Main Mall
Kelowna, BC V1V 1V7

Dear Dr. Cormack:

Below is my report, which details the feasibility of improving the accessibility of hybrid learning at UBC Okanagan. The goal of this report is to make recommendations to benefit students during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The report aims to understand how students feel about their experience with hybrid learning. Students are the backbone of a university, and their opinions, health, and education format matter. Consequently, UBC-O's interpretation of students' situations and recommendations will better the learning opportunities overall, thus improving UBC-O.

The research and other information in this report are limited. Further research is required and involves administrators, faculty, and teaching assistants. Students can only provide so much input, and other stakeholders must be surveyed, interviewed, and consulted. Also, the current pandemic is not guaranteed to continue or disappear. Although students' opinions require additional support, their voices must be heard, and the instructional format can genuinely help them. Thank you for considering the recommendations in this report. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns at nsaini99@student.ubc.ca.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Noah Saini". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Noah Saini

Determining Feasibility of Improving the Accessibility of Hybrid Learning at UBC Okanagan

for

Dr. Leslie Cormack

Deputy Vice-Chancellor

University of British Columbia, Okanagan Campus

Kelowna, British Columbia

by

Noah Saini

ENGL 301 Student

November 16, 2021

Table of Contents

*Determining Feasibility of Improving the Accessibility of Hybrid Learning at UBC’s
Campuses*..... 5

Data Section 7

Usage of Hybrid Learning..... 7

 Student Acceptance and Usage. 7

 Interpretation of Data 10

Implementation 10

 Resource Requirements..... 10

 Interpretation of Findings..... 11

Conclusion..... 12

Recommendations..... 12

Final Remarks 13

References 14

Abstract

The pandemic has altered teaching at post-secondary institutions, including hybrid (blended) learning at The University of British Columbia's Okanagan (UBCO) campus. Students at UBCO want to see an expansion of hybrid learning across the campus and increase its accessibility. In contrast, in-person learning has some components that are difficult to replace. For hybrid learning to be more accessible, UBCO needs to increase funding, training, policies, flexibility, support, and research relating to the hybrid learning format. Together, these changes can make hybrid learning a norm across the entire campus.

Determining Feasibility of Improving the Accessibility of Hybrid Learning at UBC Okanagan

In today's everchanging work environment due to COVID 19, post-secondary education learning formats are an essential consideration. The recent switch to hybrid (blended) learning at UBC Okanagan (UBCO) has created more learning opportunities for students. Hybrid learning is defined in many ways, but for this report, it is known as the extent to which online learning replaces in-class learning (UBC, 2019). Unfortunately, hybrid learning will most likely stop by Fall 2022, and students who live abroad fear contracting COVID-19, care about their finances, and face other accessibility issues. As a result, these students will be left uncertain and in a worse situation.

Hybrid learning expanded at UBC Okanagan in Fall 2021 with "Approximately one quarter of UBCO courses ... [being] online or hybrid" (UBC Okanagan News, 2021). At UBCO, hybrid learning "range[s] from 100 to 500 level courses, mandatory, prerequisite, capstone, specialization courses, theory and laboratories, experiential and community service. Reported enrolments range from low (~20 students) to high (500+ students)." (UBC Flexible Learning, 2021).

Specifically, UBCO's Faculty of Management (2021) stated in an email:

For the 2021W academic year, all MGMT courses will be delivered as fully online ("online") or will be online and will have optional in-person components ("hybrid").

Hybrid courses will be delivered online with optional in-person components. The choice of how [students] participate in a hybrid course is up to [students] and does not impact [their] registration.

Before this uptake in the alternative learning format, classes were online since spring 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Pre-pandemic, courses were in-person, with UBC students only being able to access online learning through Distance Learning at UBC.

The purpose of this report is to assess the feasibility of improving the scope of hybrid learning at UBCO. The overall goal is to have UBCO's administration review the information and consider recommendations; in time, it would be expected that the school's administration would act upon the recommendations. An expansion of hybrid learning across all faculties can provide students and staff with flexibility, accessibility, security, and safety, regardless of public health guidelines. This model could allow international students, for example, to potentially stay home and help their families (while saving money) if necessary. Notably, the applicability of hybrid learning is broad and can assist students and faculty across many contexts.

To understand how UBCO's students feel about hybrid learning, surveys and secondary research involving scholarly articles are mobilized as research methods. Given the scope, time, and student participation challenges, a survey was conducted with a hybrid course in the Faculty of Management, MGMT 442. The sample size for the survey, although limited, was 21 students. Although studies were completed at other post-secondary institutions, no relating surveys or interviews have been conducted this fall, where an entire faculty have utilized a hybrid and online learning approach.

Data Section

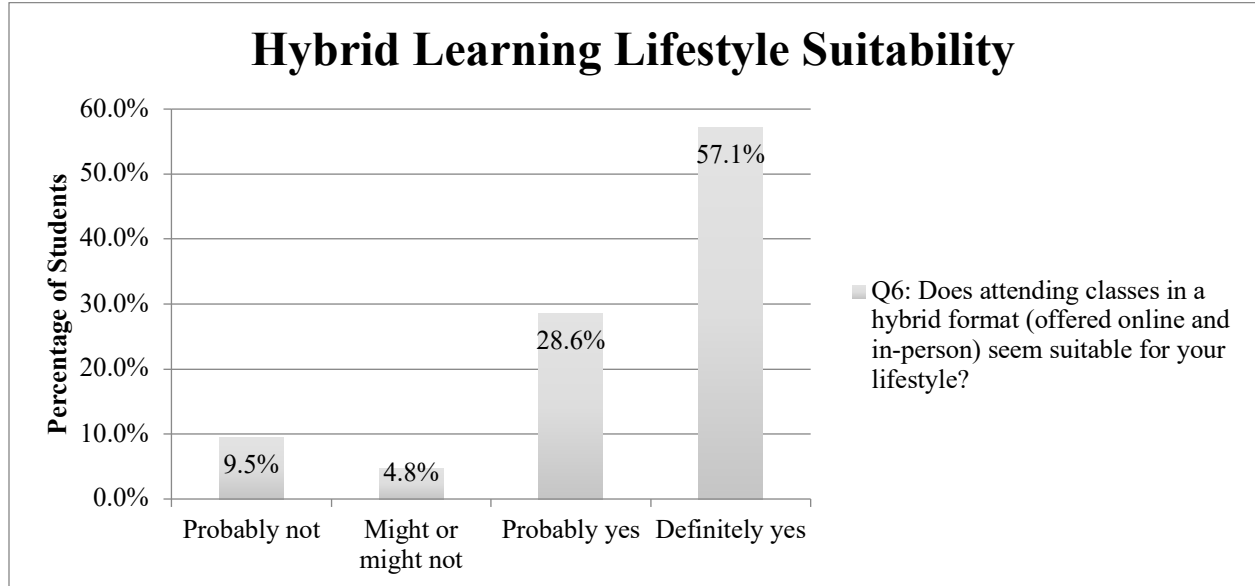
Usage of Hybrid Learning

Understanding how hybrid learning is currently used by students and faculty is essential to proposing learning style changes. These individuals will be most impacted by the proposed alterations to hybrid learning styles.

Student Acceptance and Usage.

Current use.

The current uptake in hybrid learning by students is significant. In the survey conducted in the fourth-year management (hybrid) course at UBCO, 81% of students stated that they would prefer learning online or in a hybrid format (portions online and in-person). Specifically, 38.1% state that they are likely to choose hybrid learning. In terms of student lifestyles, 85.7% of students state that hybrid learning suits the way they live. The power of choice is highly valued by students, as 95.2% of students enjoy choosing whether they attend in-person or online. In total, 85.7% of those in our sample size state that they are currently attending classes online and in-person. Some benefits noted by survey participants included overall flexibility, the ability to watch lectures at your own pace, a sense of safety from COVID-19, and accessibility.

Figure 1

Domestic students play a vital role in the potential expansion of hybrid learning.

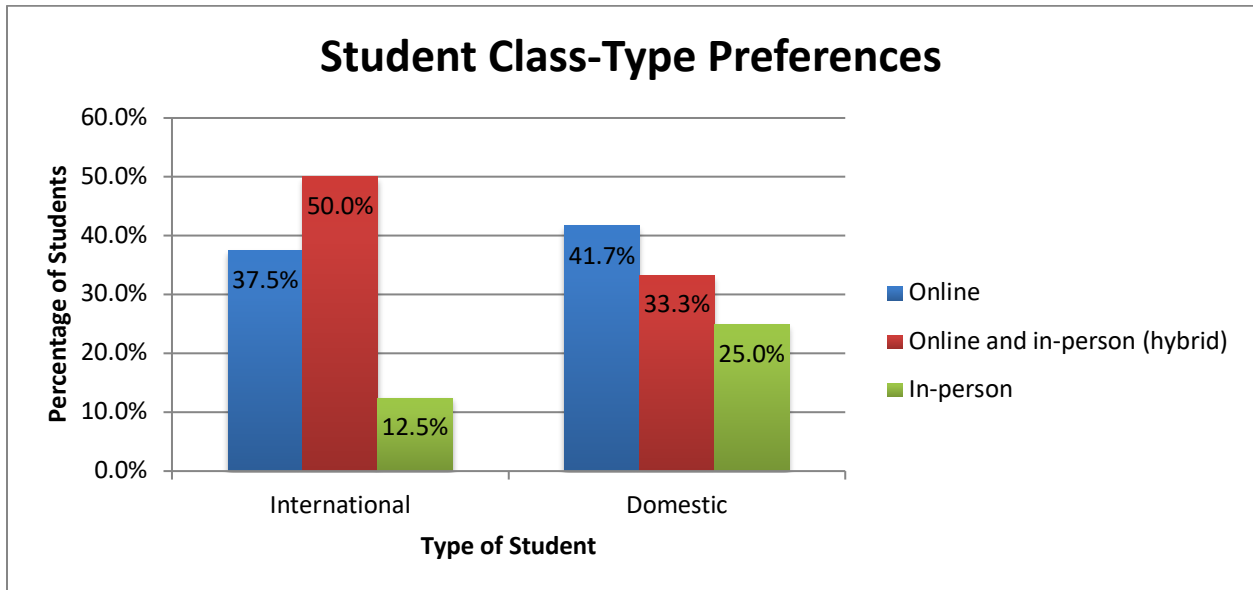
Although some people may think that most domestic students may be attending in-person, of the total domestic students in our sample group, 33.3% of them are domestic students; students taking the course online have a domestic student makeup of 62.5%, making them the majority. Students in the MGMT 442 course embraced hybrid learning overall, but many prefer having a sense of community.

International students display a strong inclination to hybrid learning. The survey found that 50% of those preferring the hybrid format are international students. Some of those responding to the survey stated that they could support their families back home, save money, and work. With the pandemic still looming, students are somewhat worried about attending classes during the pandemic and flu season.

Students in the MGMT 442 course were asked about their wanted changes to the current learning format. Most students want to see changes in hybrid learning to expand it, make it more accessible, ensure in-person components are recorded, decrease tuition fees for the learning

format, mandate webcams during classes, and more. Altogether, views from students on hybrid learning are generally positive.

Figure 2



Issues

Students have reported having issues like the lack of community, the quality of teaching, confusing faculty, length of online aspects of classes, collaborative work, class participation, and more. Furthermore, there is still a significant urge to be on campus, and hybrid learning may not address that, as students recognized that the campus seems less lively. With the campus community in mind, it must be noted that most students enjoy having the social aspects associated with in-person courses, something that hybrid courses can limit. Students also feel that in-person settings better their mental health because of the socializing it entails. Lastly, students noted that group activities and a sense of value are sacrificed if in-person classes are not occurring.

Interpretation of Data

Both international and domestic students find that hybrid learning can positively impact their learning experience and support their way of living. Given the current use of hybrid learning, changes need to be done to improve the learning format (found later in the report). For domestic students, the survey responses support the idea that students in closer proximity to UBCO utilize hybrid and online learning. The research results determined that hybrid learning should remain in place and that the online portion of learning should remain an option for all.

The uptake in hybrid learning among international students is high and for good reason. It is widely known that international students in British Columbia do not have a tuition cap for annual fee increases. UBCO can increase equity by saving students money, such as international students. For these reasons, learning is significantly beneficial for international students.

Implementation

Resource Requirements

Firstly, COVID-19 rapid testing can be reduced, thus reducing testing costs. The present situation with testing is as follows:

If you are a student, faculty member, or staff member and are not fully vaccinated, or prefer not to disclose your status, you will need to take part in COVID-19 rapid testing when working or studying on one of UBC's campuses. If you are working or studying at home or at an off-campus facility controlled by UBC, you are not currently required to take part in COVID-19 rapid testing (UBC).

In a hybrid learning setting, students would be able to opt-in or out of testing depending on if in-person attendance was necessary. UBCO would still see reduced costs due to the reduced

in-person activities overall. Also, students who may feel uncomfortable with vaccines are able to visit campus less frequently.

UBC has already evaluated the different approaches to blended learning through research articles. Each approach has its own set of costs associated with it, thus determining the exact costs of implementation is unknown and variable. STEM courses can involve labs, for example, therefore, hybrid learning expenses will be different from sociology courses. "In 2020/21 UBC invested over \$13.7M centrally to create an enriched online learning experience in response to the pandemic" (UBC, 2021). It is assumed that part of the technology funding will go towards training new and current staff (on hybrid learning).

Issues

UBC has summarized the following problems with hybrid learning resources:

- Design and implementation challenges
- Instructors are required to feel comfortable working with and managing technology
- Instructors need time and practice to develop the skills required to achieve the intended outcomes of an increased use of teaching and learning technology

(n.d.)

Interpretation of Findings

The findings from the secondary research on hybrid learning resources lean towards a greater amount of funding being required. Although the costs can be offset by students not using campus resources (such as rapid testing), it will still be a financial, and human challenge.

On-campus doubts (including COVID-19, travel restrictions, altered instruction, and more) may be caused by some students not being vaccinated, despite BC's Ministry of Health

statement, "Educational settings are low-risk settings for COVID-19 transmission, particularly in the context of a highly immunized population." (2021).

Conclusion

The research results determined that all forms of learning should remain in place for all. It points out that in-person components additionally provide social and some educational needs for most students, while hybrid and online learning settings assist those with general and specific needs. Furthermore, hybrid learning can create opportunities for more students to be enrolled at UBCO. UBCO can see growth due to hybrid learning without major relative costs. As the pandemic is still looming, changes are prone to occur, thus adding to the list of issues. Despite all of the issues mentioned by students, these problems can be addressed with time and funding, as most require small classroom changes.

Recommendations

- Have professors change classroom policies to mandate webcams to be turned on during certain classes or labs
- Delve deeper into the different types of blended learning to apply each type of learning and its extent to specific classes
- Train lecturers on how to utilize technology properly for the class' setting
- Allow for teaching assistants to specifically focus on the online portion of the course if the professor needs assistance
- Create a positive environment for those attending courses online or partially online, as they are isolated from the professor and their peers
- Make all classes accessible fully or partially online
- Mandate classes to be recorded and have the content posted on sites such as Canvas

- Ensure that students have access to technology funding if they require it
- Conduct further research at both UBC campuses (with greater sample size) to look into the effectiveness of hybrid learning on a greater scale. Not all research done by other schools is adequate, as each school is different

Final Remarks

Overall, students and staff need better accommodations with hybrid learning. There are many variations of hybrid learning, which can allow UBCO to can find success if they match the best type of hybrid learning to specific courses. A balance in hybrid learning and its impacts on in-person and online components must be carefully considered before moving forward. However, hybrid learning is a step in the right direction, and its benefits make it an ideal choice for students. All in all, greater investments in research, finances, human resources, consultation, and technology can make hybrid learning a normal and reliable form of learning at the University of British Columbia.

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