Guidelines for Blended and Online Learning
AY 2023-2024

Definitions

Blended courses utilize online and onsite learning options in a carefully designed mix of both. The specific format of each blended course will depend on the learning objectives and style of the instructor. Typically, a blended course balances online instruction and activities with face-to-face meetings to ensure the total workload equals a traditional course. A blended course's onsite meeting schedule is determined in advance by each individual instructor.

Flipped learning occurs when activities typically completed inside and outside of the classroom are reversed. For instance, students may receive direct instruction before a class meeting and then participate in more active types of learning during the on-campus class session. A flipped class session can be used for many purposes including practice, discussion, application, evaluation, and creation focused activities. Some regard flipped learning as a type of blended learning, and for many reasons this makes sense. However, at PLU, we distinguish between flipped and blended learning by noting a difference in how these two classes are scheduled. Blended courses balance a significant amount of online learning with a reduction in face-to-face meeting time. Flipped courses preserve all face-to-face meeting time and simply re-purpose the types of activities traditionally completed before, during, and after class.

Online courses provide all instructional activities through web-based interactions, with no campus meetings required. Online courses achieve the same learning objectives as traditional courses, but include instructional activities tailored to be most effective in the online environment. Online courses may include online lessons, recorded lectures, assigned reading, online discussion, group and independent activities, virtual meetings, and technology-enabled projects.

Synchronous online learning occurs when faculty bring students together at the same time for a virtual class session using an online meeting platform such as Zoom or Google Meet. **Asynchronous online learning** is typically delivered through lessons presented in a learning management system such as Sakai. Asynchronous learning can be self-directed or scheduled. **Self-paced learning** allows students to work at their own pace to complete the requirements of a course. **Scheduled asynchronous learning** directs all students in the class to complete lessons and activities according to a specified schedule.

Goals/Vision for Online and Blended Learning at PLU

Undergraduate Learning

- Support best practices that foster student learning through the use of effective and engaging technologies.

- Support faculty development and curricular design that promote interaction and community, while also responding to the student need for flexibility and access.
- Maintain the residential, campus-based identity during fall and spring semesters that both PLU faculty and students value and embody.
- Offer a small, but strategic and targeted, number of online and blended learning options for students in every program to provide some schedule flexibility and keep students connected to campus during summer and J-term.

Graduate Learning

- Support the design and implementation of blended or fully online programs.
- Support best practices that foster student learning through the use of effective and engaging technologies.

These goals support the call in the [University Strategic Plan](#) to "expand PLU's reach to a broader population of students through expansion and creation of new blended and online programs where appropriate."

Expectations and Recommendations for Undergraduate Education

General expectations for designing blended and online courses are outlined in [Recommendations for Designing Online and Blended Courses at PLU](#) published by the Educational Policies Committee May 2019.

Blended (BL) Courses

- Blended courses may be offered during any academic term.
- The exact ratio or blend of face-to-face instruction and online instruction will vary according to the nature of the course, the vision of the instructor, and the approval of the instructor's department/program chair. When selecting a schedule for blended campus meetings, we recommend instructors keep in mind the goal to maintain residential learning experiences for undergraduate students during the fall and spring semesters by providing a balance of campus learning alongside online learning.
- In Banner, blended courses are designated with a BL as the instructional method and list an alternative campus meeting schedule. The designation of Blended (BL) is **not** used for courses that might occasionally have an online meeting.
- Individual faculty who wish to teach a blended course are encouraged to participate in PLUTO training and regular course reviews.
  - We recommend each newly designed blended course participates in an instructional design review, with existing courses reviewed every four years.

Online (ON) Courses

- To preserve the campus learning experience for undergraduate students, online courses are restricted to J-term and Summer.

- - Decisions about which core curriculum courses to offer online should be made by department chairs in consultation with their dean and the dean of the core curriculum to ensure that offerings are appropriately balanced.
    - Decisions about which courses to offer online within a degree program should be made by the department chair in consultation with their dean, with attention paid to the timing and breadth of options offered.
    - Should departments need to offer online courses during Fall or Spring term or want to design either a low-residency or completely online program for a particular cohort of students, they should contact the Associate Provost for Undergraduate or Graduate Programs, as appropriate.
  - Online courses at PLU are offered 100% online, with no campus meetings required.
  - In Banner, the instructional format of online courses is identified with an ON. If the course is offered in a fully asynchronous format, no course meeting schedule is listed. If synchronous class meetings are required, the dates and times of these meetings should be listed in the comments.
  - Individual faculty who wish to teach an online course are encouraged to participate in PLUTO training and regular course reviews.
    - We recommend each newly designed online course participates in an instructional design review, with existing courses reviewed every four years.

Expectations and Recommendations for Graduate Education

Colleges/Schools/Divisions have flexibility in determining the modalities of their graduate programs, contingent upon program design, market demand, and university strategic planning.

Support of Online and Blended Learning

PLUTO Essentials helps faculty develop basic skills for using Sakai and online teaching technologies in any course. The Essentials program is delivered through self-paced, asynchronous lessons in Sakai. PLUTO Essentials training is available anytime throughout the year to both PLU faculty and staff; in particular, **all new faculty are encouraged to participate in PLUTO Essentials** so they can become familiar with Sakai and other key technologies for teaching at PLU.

FAQ section

Are faculty required to complete training or course reviews in order to teach online?

No, faculty are no longer required to complete a PLUTO Institute before teaching an online or blended course. We hope that deans and chairs will encourage faculty with and without PLUTO training to participate in faculty development opportunities (such as the PLUTO program described above), but they are not required.

An instructor would like to teach an online course during fall or spring semester to better accommodate scheduling issues for a particular group of students. How do they get this approved?

Generally speaking, the guidelines prioritize blended and face-to-face learning for undergraduate courses offered in Fall and Spring semesters. Should a faculty member (or department) determine a need to offer a course online, approval by their college dean is required. In reviewing the schedule, the Associate Provost for Undergraduate or Graduate Programs will continue to monitor for balance in online offerings. The Dean of the Core Curriculum should be consulted if a core course is in consideration to be offered online.

A faculty member is interested in helping their department develop a blended/online minor/major. What is the process for exploring this?

The faculty member should work in consultation with their chair and dean, including the Associate Provost for Undergraduate or Graduate Programs as their plan develops.

Is there a minimum number of onsite class sessions that must be scheduled for a blended course?

PLU has chosen to focus on providing a robust campus-based learning experience for undergraduate education; therefore, blended courses should be designed to provide students with an appropriate balance of onsite and online learning. Many faculty find that meeting once a week on campus works well, however the specific class meeting schedule should be determined by the instructor in consultation with their department chair and the Associate Provost for Undergraduate or Graduate programs. For General Education/Core Curriculum courses, consultation with the Director of the Core Curriculum is required. Also, see EPC guidelines: "Recommendations for Designing Online and Blended Courses at PLU".

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