

## Converting to Hybrid Teaching – Realizing the benefits of blended courses for teaching and learning at Lambton College

### Opportunity

Anna Lucy Robinson, a Professor in the School of Liberal Studies at Lambton College in Sarnia, was dedicated to her overheads and reticent around computers for most of her teaching career. But as the overhead projectors deteriorated and the transparencies became hazier, she realized her choice of technology was undermining her teaching effectiveness. Looking for a new approach, she volunteered to assess the hybrid format and its applicability for teaching anthropology.

After taking the course on hybrid learning offered by the Learning Innovation Centre at Lambton, she recognized that the best strategy was to look at how she taught and consider which technologies could be used to support and extend that approach. From this realization she moved to Camtasia, converting her overheads to PowerPoint slides supplemented with visuals and voice-over lectures. From that beginning, Professor Robinson is now offering multimedia hybrid courses and looking at the potential of fully online delivery.

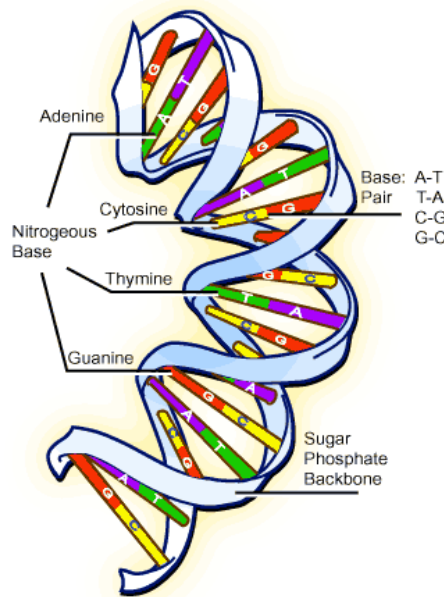
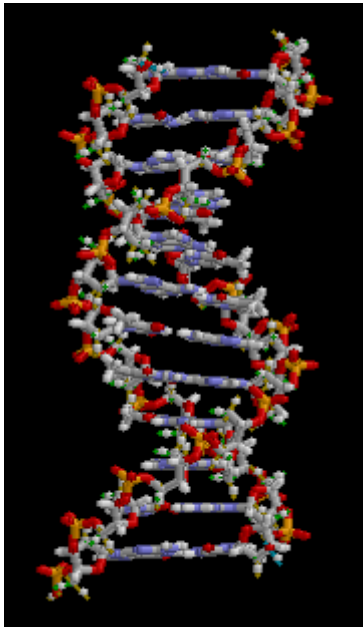
### Innovation

*Introduction to Physical Anthropology* is a first-year course that Professor Robinson teaches using the hybrid format presented in Angel, the college learning management system. Taking the PowerPoint slides created from her overheads, she divided her course content into material best taught in the face-to-face classroom and content best conveyed online. For example, the content that students found particularly complex or had trouble absorbing, she kept for classroom presentation, whereas material that could be learned through visuals and short lectures was designated for online delivery. The division was carefully done so that the online materials included unique topics that were not explained in-class but were essential learning. The material was matched to chapters in the textbook. Building from that basis, the course was restructured for hybrid delivery.

The online site for the hybrid course features:

- A home page that includes a roster of people in the course, course news and events, discussion forums, course mail, a link to resources and the search facilities of Google and Wikipedia, a detailed class schedule, and a statement of rules for in-class behaviour, including technology use.

- The online content is divided into 14 units that include short voice-over PowerPoint lectures as the foundation of the content, each one followed by a voluntary short quiz and/or game to test comprehension.
- Most units have two or three of these short lecture/self-test combinations.
- Each unit also includes videos, images, animations, maps – whatever visual materials complement and extend the content. One unit even includes a rap song that provides a surprisingly accurate summary of the course content.
- The visuals are often supplemented as, for example, the DNA images below have learning objectives, key points, links to the textbook, and a short quiz.



The online site also includes materials, particularly assessment tools, which relate to the content of the entire course, not limited to the online component. For example, review guides feature the key points to be covered in the tests given after every three course units. At the end of each online unit, an optional test covers all the material related to that topic, from class, online, and the textbook.

Professor Robinson has also created extensive crossword puzzles related to the content of each course unit. Students get one mark for every crossword completed with fewer than three errors. These are used as bonus points that can be added to test scores. About 25-30% of students complete all the crosswords, with another 40% doing some of them. The crosswords can be adapted for students with visual handicaps.

According to her estimates, the conversion to hybrid has taken about 10 to 14 hours per unit, a considerable investment in a 14 unit course. When Professor Robinson began, she had to learn everything – the learning management system, Camtasia, PowerPoint, HTML, flashdrives, the gradebook, Excel, and Wikipedia were mysteries. With strong support, she is now an experienced user and so has been able to reduce the preparation time per unit to a 10 hour average.

## Outcomes and Benefits

Students appreciate the flexibility offered by the online components of the course and the explanations offered in support of the PowerPoint slides. The slides cannot be downloaded so students have to take notes and pay attention to the lectures.

As a combination of slides and lecture is used for information delivery in both in-class and online portions of the course, the students have a sense of continuity and familiarity and so do not experience a difficult adaptation to online learning.

The online content can be downloaded to mobiles for maximum access and convenience.

The development of the hybrid materials has greatly influenced the in-class sessions as well, with PowerPoint slides, video, and visuals being incorporated. As Professor Robinson says: “The move to hybrid changed the entire structure of my teaching”. And the model keeps evolving; as she acquires more experience and increased familiarity with online tools, the lessons online and in-class have become more visual and sophisticated in presentation and visual content.

## Challenges and Enhancements

As *Introduction to Physical Anthropology* is a first-year course, convincing students that the online portion is as essential as the face-to-face classes presents some challenges. They may avoid the online portion entirely or only make rare visits, resulting in low marks or failure. One approach to combating this is including online components – such as the review sheets – that relate to the whole course thereby compelling the students to access the online site.

On the other hand, the mature students really appreciate and benefit from the flexibility offered by the hybrid model. Overall, grades have gone down slightly, underlining the challenge of impressing the essential nature of the online portion on younger students.

The time it takes to create the units is considerable – with up to an hour to find each visual or video and up to three hours to prepare one of the crosswords. The preparation of the wide variety of tests, games, and other assessments tools – as many as four in one unit – is also taxing.

Professor Robinson has found that it takes a full year to really assess how a hybrid course is functioning for students and to recognize and correct some of the errors. Issues with content division and numbering became apparent, as well as the need to build a course structure that allows for updates and revisions without requiring massive adjustments.

## Potential

As of January 2013, a course in cultural anthropology is also being offered using the hybrid model of delivery.

The more long-term potential is found in looking at the course material in term of modules, less tied to the content of specific chapters of the textbook and more as treatments of related topics. The modular approach would also allow for easier revision and updates, as well as respecting the content and learning approaches of the students. This is the essential first step in creating a fully online course.

Professor Robinson has made numerous presentations at conferences detailing her 'conversion' to hybrid learning, as well as the challenges she encountered. She is very open to discussions with colleagues in post-secondary education about online and hybrid learning, including their impact on classroom teaching.

## For Further Information

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