

TO TEACH ONLINE, OR NOT TO TEACH ONLINE? THAT IS THE QUESTION!.....FACING MANY COLLEGE PROFESSORS.

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A passionate and dedicated professor of international business courses has taught his beloved GB-400 course in the traditional classroom setting, in an online setting, and in a hybrid setting. Although he understands the need for more and more colleges and universities to offer online instruction and the value that such courses offer, he is unconvinced as to whether his students are receiving as much as they could from an online format. This case is appropriate for both undergraduate and graduate introductory educational administration courses and/or seminars to provide instructors insight into the merits of various teaching methods.

INTRODUCTION

As with every semester, Bob Belafonte looked forward to teaching his beloved GB-400 (Global Marketing). In the past he had always taught it completely in-classroom with lectures, videos, and guest speakers. After having been requested to teach GB-400 as an online course last semester, Bob decided to utilize some of the tools from his online class in order to offer it as a hybrid class. Bob was curious as to whether a combination of the online tools and the in-class experience would optimize his students' comprehension of global marketing principles and concepts. Would such a course make a difference in helping to prepare students for an increasingly competitive global market?

THE INSTRUCTOR

Bob Belafonte was a passionate and concerned professor at Seaside State University (SSU). He enjoyed interacting with his students and convincing them how much their lives were affected by marketing, particularly international marketing. He challenged them to realize not only how international marketing surrounded them, but also how different their lives would be without it. He was very concerned that students do the work that was expected of them and emphasized that education was a "proactive" investment. At the end of every class he reminded his students to contact him if they had any trouble with the

course material. One of his favorite lines was “I cannot help you unless I know you need help!” In addition to helping his students with his course material, he also made sure to ask how their other courses were going. Bob was truly concerned for his students.

Before entering academia, Bob had earned his Bachelor’s degree in Public Administration from a private university in the Midwest. However, his family’s extensive multicultural and international background led him to earn an M.A. in International Affairs and an MBA in International Business. He then worked for over 15 years in the field of international business development, including managing an overseas office. During that time he had taught International Business as an adjunct professor at a couple of colleges. This teaching experience led Bob to realize his true passion for higher education and preparing students for an increasingly globalizing world. As a result, Bob earned his Ph.D. in Marketing with an emphasis in International Business from a well-known public university. Needless to say, Bob was fully prepared to carry his international experience, knowledge, and passion to the classroom. Plus, he had taught international business courses for 15 years in the classroom before creating and administering his first online course.

THE INSTITUTION

Seaside State University (SSU) is a highly accredited educational institution with approximately 10,000 undergraduate students and 2,000 graduate students from every state in the nation and over 50 foreign countries. Established in the late 19th century as a small local college, SSU has grown over the years into a valuable regional university in the state. It now offers over 50 undergraduate degrees, 35 minor degrees, and 38 graduate degrees in over 60 majors from its 8 colleges and schools. SSU’s College of Business recently started offering a major in International Business and Bob served as an active member of the committee that led to its creation.

THE COURSE

GB-400 is a 3-credit hour course at SSU and is a required course for all business majors at SSU. As a result, at least one section of GB-400 was offered every semester. Class sizes averaged around 30-40 students, so the opportunity for interaction was good. In fact, Bob emphasized his interactive approach to teaching in his syllabus and stressed it on the first day of class. He even encouraged his students to share their experiences and applications of international business concepts at the beginning of class everyday through what he called the “Warm-up” period. This period was the first 5-10 minutes of the class when Bob allowed anyone to share anything that they had experienced or seen that would apply to international business and could be explained in terms of

concepts that were included in the course. This period gave students both an opportunity to “warm up” for class participation, but also to apply course material to their daily lives. In addition, Bob made use of videos and guest speakers, as in all of his in-classroom courses. His organization of GB-400 was the same for all three delivery methods; he covered the same chapters in the same order and his assessment of students’ progress included homework, quizzes, and examinations.

IN-CLASS INSTRUCTION

When Bob taught GB-400 in the classroom the class met for 75 minutes twice a week. He began his class, like all his classes, with announcements that were relevant to students, such as guest speakers on campus, club meetings, internships that might be available, etc. He would also allow students to make similar announcements that would be of interest to their classmates. He then took roll, as was required by SSU policy, after which he would ask, “Hey, what time is it?” A student would then shout “Warm-up time!” and the next 5-10 minutes would be spent on discussion of experiences or applications of global business concepts that students may have had. After the “Warm-up” period, discussion would begin on the assigned chapter for that day. Bob was known for giving real-life examples of concepts based on his years of international business experience and his extensive travels. His students seemed to enjoy and appreciate his ability to put the text’s concepts into contexts to which they could relate. Students would often comment on Bob’s enthusiasm for the subject and how it made the class enjoyable. He encouraged participation and took advantage of the group dynamic to promote discussion and interaction. However, he noticed that some students succumbed to peer pressure and did not participate in class discussions. He especially urged these students to speak, stating “Take an active role in your education! Don’t worry about what someone else in class might think of your comments or questions, because they won’t be signing your paychecks after you graduate! It is YOUR education!”

Bob also took pride in making himself available to his students. He emphasized that if students could not make his posted office hours, they should let him know so different arrangements (e.g. phone or Skype) could be made. Many students came by his office to look at their old exams, for extra help, or just to chat with Bob. They would also contact him at home over the telephone.

When it came time for quizzes or homework assignments, Bob personally constructed the questions. Homework assignments, which were due at the beginning of class on the day the chapter was to be discussed, were designed to help students understand and apply the concepts. Quizzes were taken in class and were designed to measure a student’s knowledge of the concepts utilized in the chapter. Exams, the questions for which Bob personally selected or wrote, were

multiple-choice, but were predominantly conceptual and application oriented. During these exams Bob urged his students to ask questions if they needed clarification on a term or the overall meaning of a question. In other words, Bob wanted to make sure there was a “psychological overlap” between the question that was being asked and the question the students thought they were answering. From student questions during exams Bob sometimes discovered that an exam question he thought was totally clear to him would actually be read and understood totally differently by his students. During these exams students were not allowed to use any reference material or have access to any electronic devices.

The last time Bob taught GB-400 in an In-Classroom setting, the average score for Homework was 82.37, for Quizzes was 93.20, and for Exams was 75.60 (see Table 1).

ONLINE INSTRUCTION

The first time Bob taught GB-400 totally as an online course he was extremely concerned about the ability for his students to interact and actually “participate” in class discussions. As a result, Bob spent a great deal of time planning and constructing the course in its new format. Bob was able to do this with the assistance from the textbook publisher’s representative that served SSU. The publisher’s rep demonstrated to Bob the different online programs and communication tools that were available to construct such things as assignments, quizzes and exams, and to facilitate discussion and student interaction. Bob found that utilizing the book publisher’s resources and experience was much more helpful than depending on the limited help that was available at SSU for online course construction and management.

For this online course, which ran from early June to late July, Bob emphasized that students had the flexibility of working in their own environment, but needed to pay close attention to the scheduling and timing of assignments. He also emphasized that although there were no classroom meetings, he was available for questions and discussion every day via 1) an online chatroom from 10:00-11:00 am, 2) email, 3) Skype, and 4) the telephone. Bob designed online homework assignments and quizzes for each chapter that followed a simple and easy to understand timeline. This timeline explained when the assignments were available and when their availability would close. Consequently, if students did not follow this timeline closely they would be precluded from completing that particular assignment.

Homework assignments required students to answer a series of questions chosen randomly by the program from the chapter. These assignments were not timed and could be paused to allow the student to re-read portions of the chapter before

submitting their answers. Obtaining a score of at least a 80% on the homework for a chapter was a prerequisite for the student to take the quiz for that chapter. For each chapter quiz students had to answer 10 questions that were randomly chosen by the program. Students had 15 minutes to complete each quiz after they started it. If they did not finish within the allotted 15 minutes, any incomplete answers were marked as incorrect. Bob's online exams for the course were scheduled every four chapters, composed of 40 multiple choice questions that were randomly chosen by the program, and had to be completed with 60 minutes of starting the exam. The class seemed to run nicely with few noticeable technical problems.

However, since GB-400 was more of a conceptual course and more than likely included concepts that some of students may have never heard before, Bob was concerned for his students' willingness and ability to communicate and interact. Without active participation there was no way for Bob to assess and help their comprehension of concepts. Much to Bob's surprise and disappointment, no one seemed to take advantage of the daily chat room, nor did they use any other means to communicate. During his online course Bob did not hear anything from his students except a couple of emails regarding technical issues. None of his online students ever called him on the phone for help. The average class scores for his Online class were 96.77 for Homework, 77.84 for Quizzes, and 92.39 for Exams (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
Average Class Scores

	Homework	Quizzes	Exams
In-Classroom	82.37	93.21	75.63
Online	96.77	77.84	92.39
Hybrid	98.40	76.54	72.88

HYBRID INSTRUCTION

Based on his experience with his online offering of GB-400, Bob decided to construct a "hybrid" course by combining his usual in-class methods with the program tools he had utilized in his online course. He thought this would offer "the best of both worlds" and provide his students with more flexibility. As with Bob's In-Classroom instruction, this class met for 75 minutes twice a week. Bob would start the class in the same way as his traditional "classroom" method, i.e. announcements, attendance, and warm-up period. His class periods were very interactive in nature and he encouraged student participation. He would also emphasize that he was available for anyone having trouble with the class. As with his online course, Bob made himself available every day via a chat room for an hour. Although these hybrid students, like the online students, did not seem to

take advantage of the chat room, many did stop by his office to discuss exams and/or questions they had. In addition they took advantage of sending Bob emails and calling him on his cell phone as his in-classroom students did in the past. Bob enjoyed having this interaction with his students that was lacking in his online course.

Chapter homework assignments were online and made available after the class meeting in which the previous chapter was discussed. Students then had to complete their homework an hour before the class in which the chapter was to be discussed. As in the online course, these homework assignments were composed of a series of questions randomly chosen by the computer and were not timed. If students did not complete the homework assignment with a score of at least 80%, they were then ineligible to take the quiz for that chapter.

Online quizzes for each chapter were 10 multiple-choice questions that were randomly chosen by the computer and had to be completed in 15 minutes. These quizzes were made available to the students after the class in which the respective chapter was discussed. Each quiz had to be completed by 11:00am the following day. Bob felt that this online homework and quiz system would encourage his students to prepare for class and provide them with the benefit of class discussion before taking the quiz. Some students experienced technical difficulties with the online portion, but eventually resolved these difficulties. However, a few continued to have such difficulties throughout the class.

As in his In-classroom course, exams in Bob's hybrid class covered every four chapters and were made up of 50 multiple choice questions. These exam questions, as in his In-classroom course, were either personally constructed by Bob to provide application scenarios or chosen by him from a test bank. Students were not allowed any notes or electronic devices during these exams and were given 75 minutes to complete it. The average scores for his Hybrid class were 98.40 for Homework, 76.54 for Quizzes, and 72.88 for Exams (see Table 1).

After teaching his GB-400 course in the three different formats and seeing such a difference in interaction and scores, Bob was having trouble in identifying any clear academic benefit from offering his course material online. In planning for his future classes Bob had to ask himself, "What is the best method to optimize my students' learning of this subject? Is online instruction really worth it?"

APPENDIX

From Bob's GB-400 Syllabus

Participation Policy

Class participation is encouraged and expected. Asking questions and making relevant comments reinforces your understanding and knowledge of the material and the knowledge and understanding of your classmates. Your participation may prompt others to participate, which, in turn, benefits you! “*Participation*” means adding meaningful content to the discussion and not simply agreeing with or rewording the comments of others. Your proactive and thoughtful participation enlivens class discussions, stimulates thinking, challenges ideas, and maximizes the learning experience. Most importantly, your ability to succeed in business will be reflected in large part by your ability to participate intelligently and confidently in future meetings, conferences, sales encounters, and other such venues. Please take advantage of this class to develop your participation skills.

Note: Each class will begin with a “Warm-Up Period” during which students are encouraged to discuss global business concepts that they have recently experienced (e.g. from personal travels, TV/radio commercials, newspaper articles, ads, personal observations, etc.). This is an excellent opportunity to participate and will help you understand the course materials and concepts.