



Blended Learning in a First-Year Experience Course

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RESEARCH QUESTION

Do the different blendings of course delivery have an impact on student academic adjustment?

INTRODUCTION

CAS 101: Introduction to the Arts & Sciences. Student development, transition, and retention are at the core of this course. The course is primarily taught to students in their first semester at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, College of Arts & Sciences. Research has demonstrated that first-year courses have a positive impact on student academic success and persistence.¹ The College of Arts & Sciences at UMass Dartmouth ran a first-year seminar course for the first time in Fall 2011. Three objectives were identified for CAS 101: study skills, transition support, and academic instruction to improve student persistence through a sense of belonging. Curriculum development over three years has moved from a hybrid format with only seven class sessions (2011) to web-enhanced but little web involvement (2012) to a “flipped” format where course material is delivered online, but students are fully engaged in fourteen class sessions (2013). This poster demonstrates the results of the three iterations on student academic adjustment.

	<i>Fall 2011</i>	<i>Fall 2012</i>	<i>Fall 2013</i>
Online component	<i>Blended:</i> Delivery of course materials, weekly discussion boards, quizzes, final projects	<i>Web-enhanced:</i> Primarily organizational	<i>Partially Blended/Web-enhanced:</i> Delivery of course materials and quizzes (modified “flipped” format)
Classroom component	7 class sessions	14 class sessions	14 class sessions
Common FYE textbook	Yes	Yes	No: use of 6 videos to teach student skills
Curricular changes	College Studies*	University Studies**and College Studies	University Studies and College Studies
Data collection	Pre- and post-surveys online	Pre- and post-surveys by hand in classroom	Pre- and post-surveys online

Table 1. Variability of important aspects of CAS 101 across the 3 years.

*College Studies: a college-wide graduation requirement

**University Studies: a university-wide graduation requirement

¹ Glass, J. Conrad, and Matthew S. Garrett. 1995. “Student Participation in a College Orientation Course, Retention and Grade Point Average.” *Community College Journal of Research and Practice* 19: 117-132; Schnell, Carolyn A., Karen Seashore Louis, and Curt Doetkott. 2003. “The First-Year Seminar as a Means of Improving Student College Graduation Rates.” *Journal of the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition* 15: 53-76.

SURVEY QUESTIONS USED IN THIS STUDY

Responses ranged on a scale from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5).

1. I possess the skills necessary to be a successful student at UMass Dartmouth.
2. I understand what is expected of me to be a successful student at UMass Dartmouth.
3. I possess the personal qualities necessary to be a successful student at UMass Dartmouth.
4. I plan to continue my education at UMass Dartmouth next semester.
5. I see myself as part of the UMass Dartmouth campus community.
6. I would recommend UMass Dartmouth to a friend.
7. If I had to choose a university again, I would choose to enroll at UMass Dartmouth.
8. I plan to earn my degree at UMass Dartmouth.

DISCUSSION

1. The data present a consistent trend across all three questions assessing students' confidence in their personal attributes (questions 1-3). In 2011, students' assessment of their skills, expectations and personal qualities were marginally negative at the end of the semester. In 2012, their responses were even more negative. However, in 2013, their assessments were either more positive (regarding skills and personal qualities) or unchanged (expectations).
2. While all the indicators of institutional attitudes show negative change over the three years, a pattern similar to that for personal attitudes emerges (questions 4-8). Generally speaking, student responses were most negative in 2012 and least negative in 2013, with 2011 typically falling in the middle. Only the responses indicating whether they would recommend UMass Dartmouth to a friend deviates, as student responses were most negative in 2011.
3. However, only about half of these relationships are statistically significant. Furthermore, the ETA squared statistics indicate that the year of the offering does not explain much variance in these measures.

CONCLUSION

- The “flipped classroom” model eliminated any need to lecture in a class that meets for only one hour per week. Class time was then devoted to informal discussion about what was on students' minds, as well as engaged or interactive learning strategies.
- As part of the flip, we eliminated the textbook and created a series of 6 videos about strategic student skills and linked them on the course website. Students watched videos and took online quizzes about the video. Faculty assigned work that practiced the skill while reinforcing other material delivered online. Class time was devoted to discussion or activities, and many features of the course were better integrated.
- Students consistently report that the most important feature of the course is contact with other students and the instructor in an informal environment that provides a safe place to express concerns and have questions answered.