

Examiner Bulletin



Progress Report: Mohawk College's Response to Local 240's Report on Online Learning

In 2011, members of Local 240 compiled a report of their research on Online Learning that included a series of recommendations to the College. Here is our evaluation of the College's response to those recommendations, to date.

1. College administrators provide adequate support to teachers by allotting an appropriate amount of time on SWFs to develop online curriculum, and ensuring adequate technical assistance to ensure faculty can develop that curriculum. **C (Some do, some don't)**
2. The College is not using online learning as a method of reducing the number of faculty positions. **Incomplete (Stay tuned)**
3. The college has carried out a comprehensive college-wide survey of students which addresses the issues raised by the Local's report, including the impact of online delivery on at-risk learners. **F (Not done)**
4. The college has completed a study of best practices concerning online learning at other institutions, looking at course and program completion rates, student satisfaction and success, and employment impacts. **Unknown (We haven't seen anything.)**
5. The College has respected faculty by giving them the authority to decide which courses are good candidates for blending or online delivery, and how such courses are converted. **F (All courses mandated for blending by January 2014)**
6. The College has given students choice regarding how their courses are delivered – either face-to-face, blended or online. **D (Some variation, depending on the course)**
7. The College has worked with faculty and students to ensure the best possible use of online technology at Mohawk. **F (Rule by decree?)**

Management's Latest Revelation on Blended Learning

In recent announcements, College managers have revealed that their plan is for **100% of "lecture-based" courses at Mohawk to be blended by January 2014**. Their specific definition of blended is that 3 hour courses will have 2 hours of face to face time, and one hour fully online. This means that courses that had two 1.5 hour classes per week will either move to one 2 hour class, or two 1 hour classes.

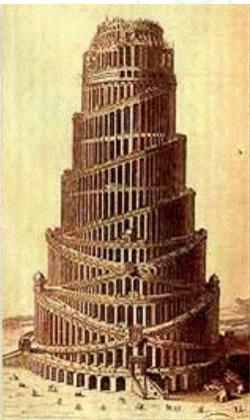
This announcement is the latest in a series of senior management decrees concerning the imposition of blended learning at Mohawk. At first, we were told it meant moving to a single Learning Management System, Desire to Learn (D2L), and having course content, learning plans and grades available to students online. At other times it sounded as if using technology in class, including power point and videos, fulfilled the requirements for blending. It should be noted that both of these definitions have been embraced by faculty and the Centre for Teaching and Learning members, and are seen as appropriate uses of technology to support and enrich the classroom learning environment. In these early formations, blending might have involved a reduction in face to face class time, but this wasn't a foregone conclusion, and it was understood that the decision to reduce face to face time would be made when it was pedagogically appropriate, and supportive of learning outcomes and student success.

With the recent announcement, the College's planned implementation of blended learning is finally clear, and it justifies concerns previously raised by numerous faculty, students, and even managers. **These concerns involve faculty workload, appropriate pedagogy, intellectual property, employment stability, and student satisfaction and success.**



These concerns [about blended learning] involve faculty workload, appropriate pedagogy, intellectual property, employment stability, and student satisfaction and success.

Course Blending and Workload



Tower of Edu-babel

Senior management has decreed that 100% of lecture-based courses will be blended by January 2014, and 25% of courses will be blended by May of 2013. In many program areas, meeting the May 2013 targets means that extensive course re-development work needs to occur. From well-documented experience, faculty know that creating quality blended content is very time-consuming, with between 10 and 20 hours of development required for every hour of online delivery. Development time varies depending on the technical skill level of faculty, the amount of IT support provided, and the nature of course material. Development work to blend courses should be done by the faculty that normally teach those courses, should have adequate IT support, and should appear on a SWF. The union is already hearing reports that some ADs are directing faculty to spend the lion's share of their non-contact time during Reading Week on blending their courses, which is a violation of Article 11.08 of the Collective Agreement. The article states that activities during non-teaching periods are initiated by both faculty and managers and must be agreed to by mutual consent. You

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should refer your SWF to the Workload Monitoring Group if you are expected to do blending with insufficient time, or during time-periods already scheduled for other activities.

Appropriate Pedagogy

Despite numerous requests from faculty, management has failed to present evidence that reducing face to face time improves educational outcomes or presents a superior form of course delivery than does the traditional classroom. In addition, management has continually ignored faculty concerns regarding the supposed uniformity of the term "lecture-based courses", and the suitability of all of these courses for blending. Included in this "one size fits everything" category are courses that involve intensive group-work, interactive discussion of sensitive and emotionally charged material, student seminars and presentations, and guest speakers. All of these delivery methods rely on face to face interaction, and all of them become largely impossible when forced into a 2 and 1 blended format. As such, several pedagogically appropriate, effective and innovative delivery methods will be eliminated by blending, and the current diversity of educational methods will become homogenized. Despite platitudes to the contrary, management's undifferentiated and autocratic blending decree shows a complete lack of consultation, collegiality or discernment regarding appropriate pedagogy. Faculty, the educational professionals who are experts in their subject areas, have been deemed completely incompetent to determine what effective teaching is. This fact makes it hard to, as they say in Hollywood, "suspend disbelief" and believe management's assertion that blended learning is about effective pedagogy, learning, or student success.

"You can have any colour you want—so long as it's black."

Henry Ford



Intellectual Property and Employment Stability

It is now clear that management's drive to implement blended learning is ultimately about reducing the need for classroom space and teachers. It is also clear that fully online courses enable much larger class sizes than are usual in face to face delivery, leading to fewer hours for professors, and more cost savings for the institution. Moving all lecture based courses to 1/3 online makes it much easier to move these courses fully online in the future, and increases future likelihood of further staff reductions.

In addition, with no provisions for academic freedom in the College system, any blended content would be the sole property of Mohawk College, to be used by management as they see fit. The College is promoting "lecture capture" technology, which may then be used by the College in multiple sections of a course and in subsequent semesters. The original professor might conceivably be removed from the course. Although recorded material can soon become dated, at a recent forum, one representative from management gushed that certain programs use learning materials produced in the 1970s because they are still relevant today. In their own education, many faculty have already experienced taped lectures that enable classes of 400, 600, even 900 students to be taught by one virtual professor, with instructors (or if management had their way, facilitators) handling tutorial duties. Given management's clear desire to reduce operating costs through blended learning, the union encourages its members to be highly cautious concerning use of lecture capture technology, and cautious as well concerning what materials are posted on eLearn and hosted on the College server.

Learning Outcomes and Student Success

From the outset, faculty who have taught online and blended courses have reported significant negative feedback from students, especially when the blended courses are a core component of programs, when they have been blended by decree (as opposed to by faculty taking their own initiative), when there is no choice of a face to face alternative, and when the students have no idea the course is blended or online when they sign up for it.

In March of 2011, the OPSEU 240 Political Action Committee produced a report that included the results of a faculty and student forum on online learning, and also the results of a survey of just under 1,000 students in General Education elective courses. Both forum and survey results showed that, while a small percentage of students prefer online learning to face to face, the majority of students preferred the traditional, in-person classroom experience. Students reported better learning outcomes, more satisfaction, and higher grades from face to face instruction, and complained of feeling cheated by online courses. Many students even argued that they should receive a fee discount for taking online courses due to their lesser educational value and greater difficulty.



College management was presented with the results of the Local 240 PAC report, but the concerns of the students surveyed have been largely ignored. Also, the College's commitment to strike a committee to examine issues of online learning, quality of education, and student success has yet to be acted upon. Finally, management has continually refused to survey Mohawk students – the customers whose tuition pays their salaries – concerning how best they learn, and what role online learning should play in their education. To date there has been no

meaningful or transparent survey of or consultation with students concerning this monumental change in their educational experience. This is also despite the mounting research evidence showing that online learning presents serious issues for some students, leads to lower student success, and is a less effective vehicle for content delivery.

As the educational professionals who are in the class with students, day in and day out, Local 240 members are already starting to take the brunt of student complaints concerning blended learning and online delivery. Students erroneously assume that professors are the ones who determine how best to teach their courses, and thus assume that decisions to reduce face to face time are the choice of faculty, instead of the College. Should faculty not direct student complaints concerning the new online regime toward those making the decisions?

How Not to Do Blending 101

Unlike many universities, where online learning has been a bottom-up, faculty-driven exercise based on appropriate pedagogy, research, and respect for academic expertise and student success, at Mohawk it has been a top-down decision with little or no input from those who actually teach. Mohawk professors have long been using online learning technologies with success on their own initiative, and where indicated by their particular course and student needs. In addition, faculty have long acknowledged the importance of new learning technologies, and have embraced them as a complement to the classroom.

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Finally, no faculty member would pretend that online learning has no place in post-secondary education, which makes it a shame that the College decided against working collaboratively with faculty to determine the most effective blended learning strategies for our students. Instead of allowing this new technology to find its own level, and to complement the learning experience of students, management has applied it as an across the board cost-cutting measure. For faculty, the feedback from blended learning is clear: the only way professors can ensure collegiality and respect for our professional expertise is through bargaining. As for the quality of education and student success, we can only hope that management will actually *listen* to the swell of negative student feedback that is sure to come as the blended learning “juggernaut” rolls forward.

Appendix

The following link to a New York Times analysis of online learning seems consistent with many of the concerns raised by Mohawk students and faculty. It references nine studies done by the Community Colleges Association in the US highlighting that online classes to community college students is rampant with problem issues. The comments section is very interesting, many are from faculty across the US.

[The-trouble-with-online-college](#)



...the only way professors can ensure collegiality and respect for our professional expertise is through bargaining.

Join us for an open discussion on on-line learning.
Date: Wed March 27, 2013
Time: 12am-1pm
Place: Fennell Campus, room F120
Lunch will be provided

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