Students as Producers in Hybrid Courses: Case Studies from an Interdisciplinary Learning Circle

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Abstract

Using five case studies from the hybrid course initiative at Guttman Community College, City University of New York, this paper explores a focus on students as active participants in the learning process, ways to foster inquiry in the out-of-classroom space and how to maintain the dynamic nature of producing knowledge through innovative and engaging assignments in the teaching and learning process. It relates the experiences of faculty members, who were inaugural participants in an interdisciplinary hybrid learning circle, in designing and teaching hybrid courses (50% in class and 50% online/out of class) to increase student engagement and the student creation of products beyond written assignments for the online space, using multiple technologies as tools. It also highlights benefits and challenges of discussing and developing hybrid courses in community with a focus on the simultaneous co-development and integration of pedagogical strategies and technological components to promote inquiry, connection, active learning and, ultimately, social justice through the collaborative co-production of knowledge with both colleagues and students.

Keywords: Hybrid Course; Experiential Learning; Social Media; Active Learning

Introduction

Educators who are skeptical of online or partially-online education often reference the problematic nature of online content delivery, arguing that it creates passive student consumers (Richardson and Newby 2010, Hoskins and Van Hoof 2005). At Guttman Community College, CUNY, our hybrid course vision, and corresponding collaborative hybrid training, highlights the high-contact, interactive learning environment integral to our unique model of early higher education. It focuses on the student as a co-producer of content, and on technology as a way to connect this productive learning out of the classroom back to the classroom space. Rather than creating a disconnection between students and professor, or students and course materials, asynchronous online course materials are used by both the professor and students to expand the walls of the classroom, using the city as a laboratory to conduct research and report on those experiences in a way that meaningfully applies course content to everyday lived experience.

Learning outside the classroom space, and connecting in the digital space, gives opportunities for students with a variety of learning styles, comfort levels, and schedule constraints to thrive through

the use of a variety of modalities. Recent meta-analyses of studies involving both two and four year colleges show that blended (or hybrid) courses produce better outcomes than face-to face or totally online (Means et al 2014: 20). While students at community colleges often perform more poorly than their counterparts at four-year institutions, and have higher attrition rates (Jaggers 2011, Summerlin 2003), they also benefit from a hybrid model as opposed to a fully online model. Drawing on these studies, the hybrid course (defined as 50% in-class and 50% outside of class) development at Guttman aims to address these disparities by taking an intentional approach to addressing the challenges faced by urban community college students for whom independent, passive consumption of course materials often leads to attrition and poorer outcomes.

There are many documented successes related to the "active learning" approach in hybrid courses. In his lesson on sustainability, Dengler (2008) noted that an online discussion forum improved student learning when paired with a classroom-based active learning approach. Similarly, Goomas (2015) found that students benefitted from the use of a "real-time interactive rubric" in an out-of-class writing assignment, which resulted in "less rework and fewer omissions."

The active and "high-touch" approach guides the teaching and learning process in the diverse student environment at Guttman. Speaking to the variables of ethnicity and STEM performance, Wladis et al (2015), found "no significant interaction between the online medium and ethnicity, suggesting that though Black and Hispanic students may do worse on average in STEM courses than their White and Asian peers both online and face-to face, this gap was not increased by the online environment." The study goes on to note that "prior online course outcomes was a more significant predictor of future online course grades and retention than G.P.A." In this sense, creating a "culture of creativity and connectivity" in the design and teaching of our hybrid courses is critical to student success- and, particularly, the success of students who learn in different contexts, modalities and levels of connectivity. As Means (2014) observes, it is critical to remember that "student outcomes arise from the joint influence of implementation, context and learner characteristics interacting with technology-not from technology alone." Meyer's (2014) findings suggest that "faculty can and do find ways to use different tools in different ways to improve student learning productivity in community colleges." This is certainly true of Guttman's faculty in general and, it is important to note, that many of the technologies and techniques used to connect with a diverse community college student body originate in fully in-class courses and transition easily to the hybrid model, both for students and professors.

Gatta (2008), also a Guttman faculty member, notes that unequal access to education exists because the social supports needed for those members of the low-wage economy to attend classes are absent. Working within the space and time constraints are difficult for students. Using technology to make courses and material more accessible to those traditionally unable to access higher education helps to break the cyclical nature of limited education, low wages, and the limited access loop. If done mindfully, hybrid courses can address issues of inclusion and social justice, supporting the Guttman Community College mission in addition to the Guttman Learning Outcomes (GLOs), which include civic engagement and responsibility as well as applied learning.

Different course materials benefit from different pedagogical strategies and different technologies for the building and delivery of course content. To facilitate the maximum benefits for the teaching and learning process, professors teaching hybrid courses at Guttman participate in an interdisciplinary hybrid learning circle. In the hybrid learning circles, instructors discuss pedagogical strategies and

outcomes in tandem with a variety of technologies, including ePortfolios, blogs, Blackboard and social media platforms. Course content is examined through these lenses. The diverse perspectives brought by an interdisciplinary team have facilitated a diverse group of hybrid courses taught by faculty with a wide range of experience and comfort level with out-of-class time formally integrated into courses, and with technology in a general sense. The following case studies aim to give a sense of the diverse content, pedagogical strategies, and technologies used, highlighting the benefits and challenges of both the development of courses in this way and the courses themselves. They are written as both reflective and instructive, typical of our teaching and learning practice at Guttman.

Results
Case Study 1: ANTH 227 Sexuality and Gender in Urban Life
The broad topics of the course, sexuality and gender, seemed to immediately lend themselves to an expansion of the walls of the classroom both in that they are integral part of everyday life in the City. Teaching the course in the hybrid format in both 2015 and 2016, Baines sought to design assignments that led students to view activities undertaken in their out-of-class time through a "gendered lens."

As a first step, she developed a three-part assignment (Baines 2015) in which students are required to employ ethnographic methods of observation and taking of field notes, and apply basic theories related to gender norms to those observations. The assignment was successful in linking the "knowledge" students gained during the "in class" portion of the course (the theories related to gendered norms of behavior) with the independent observations they made in the City. The linkages between the "in class" content and the out-of-class community space were further strengthened as students created short videos in which they were required to share the results of their observations through their newly for "gendered lens" with a popular audience. This final part of the assignment was cast as a civic responsibility- students had a duty to share important information about everyday behavior with their peers and family outside of the college space. The use of the video format allowed for both the production of the knowledge by the students but also facilitated easy sharing and peer review, both using ePortfolio within the college and outside the college on more public and accessible video sharing networks. Both the out-of-class time spent doing ethnographic research and using the video format to create and share knowledge were successful examples of students producing their course content as part of their learning process. While similar assignments may be conducted during in-class meetings, the flexibility of the hybrid model allowed students to do lengthy observations in areas not as easily accessible from campus. It also allowed for continued interaction and communication through the video format and created an investment in the creation of work for the public. Some students found the management of their time challenging without the constraint of a class period. Indeed, the flexible nature of the time in which course assignments could be completed was challenging for many students across the course.

Discussions of both popular and scholarly articles related to the sexuality and gender are an integral part of the course. For the first iteration of the course, the Blackboard discussion feature was used. Baines found that participation in the discussions in this format was sporadic and opted to move the discussion to a closed Facebook group for the next iteration. It was hoped that this change of platform would promote more continuous engagement and that did prove to be the case. Students developed ideas in a more complete way on Facebook and there was more "real time" interaction with comments being posted and responded to as a conversation. Meeting in class allowed Baines to discuss what had happened in the Facebook discussion in a more comprehensive way, as well as guiding the discussion

framework for the upcoming week. This "bookending" technique of using the in-class meeting to both follow up on the online conversation from the previous week, and introduce and lay the scholarly framework for the next week's online coursework, added to the cohesion of the two spaces. The social media platform, Instagram, was also used in the course and students were able to gather likes and comments from their friends and followers outside of the course in addition to sharing images reflecting the weekly topics with each other via the hashtag #gendergutt. This assignment utilized a daily platform to keep students engaged and directed a mode of content production, the Instagram post, in a scholarly manner. While some students found the assignment difficult because they needed to change the way in which they used a familiar platform, many felt the benefits of those outside the class thinking they were smart or "deep" for their gendered posts.

Additionally, in the second iteration of the course, Baines added a service learning component in which students were required to complete volunteer service projects and then post reflections of their experiences highlighting the gender dynamics at play during the experience on their ePortfolios. This assignment also expanded the classroom to include sites around the City, while utilizing technology as a space to connect these experiences back to the course. The range of service opportunities in terms of time and location allowed students to essentially choose their own experience, while the reflections helped them guide themselves through the meaning-making process. While, again, challenging for students in terms of the independent management of time during these experiences, they proved to be some of the richest in terms of student learning, particularly in terms of applied learning and civic and social engagement. Students reported that they did not really think that the theories of gender norms of behavior applied in today's urban society until they participated in the volunteer projects and then started noticing them everywhere. Being out of the classroom and in an experiential learning setting allowed them to see the in-class course content at work in the world. Exploring different volunteer worksites in this way also encouraged independent learning and an increase reliance on themselves as co-creators of their course experience.

The hybrid course design facilitated positive learning experiences for many students, however the challenges of managing out-of-class time independently proved difficult for many and attrition did prove to be high. Maintaining the urgency required to complete assignments in a timely fashion was difficult and the benefits of real time communication seem. Replicating this in more ways using other digital communication platforms is in future plans.

As the leader of the hybrid learning circle, Baines sought to encourage and employ pedagogical strategies, such as the cross-posted explanatory videos and social media feeds, which encouraged colleagues to create an environment where students would be tasked with a high level of content interaction rather than just reading and typing a post. Both the design and teaching of these types of courses are labor-intensive and the multi-faceted group allowed for many of the ideas for course and research about best practices to be shared, keeping Baines in a collaborative rather than instructor role, modeling in the hybrid learning circle what we would ideally like to achieve with our students in our courses.

Case Study 2: ECON 223 Economics of Social Issues
Buttet joined the hybrid learning circle with the idea of exploring whether the hybrid format could enhance the benefits of adding an experiential learning component to ECON 223 Economics of Social Issues, an introductory economics course in the Liberal Arts major program, which illustrates how to

use economic theory to study and understand pressing contemporary social issues including: (1) How will raising the minimum wage affect economic activity, including the unemployment rate and inflation level? (2) How does a widening income gap between rich and poor and a shrinking middle class affect economic growth and the well functioning of U.S. democratic institutions? (3) What will be the impact of making public college tuition free on enrollment, graduation, and the value of a college degree?

Guiding discussions in the learning circle focused on two important and related concepts to change pedagogy and curriculum: that students use time inside and outside of the classroom to become producers (rather than consumers) of knowledge, and that students use technology to connect what was learned outside of the classroom back to the classroom space, professor and peers. Buttet's angle to encourage students enrolled in ECON 223 become producers of knowledge was to use the time outside of the classroom for students to utilize NYC as a laboratory to study the three aforementioned social issues.

As part of their research project requirements, students were asked to attend economic forums around NYC related to one of the above social issues. For example, on November 2nd 2015 students attended a panel discussion hosted by the Center for New York City Affairs at the New School on the impact of raising the minimum wage for fast food employees to $15 an hour incrementally over the next few years. The panel, which was composed of economists, labor leaders, activists and policymakers offered a balanced and rich analysis on what a raise in minimum wage may mean for employees and their employers. Students also designed surveys to find out how much New Yorkers know about these social issues and interviewed people all around NYC. Additionally, they participated in service learning activities to their research topics. Examples of projects include students visiting a high school and provide counsel to high school students on how to apply for and be successful in college. The service learning activity related to studying income inequality consisted of visiting a food pantry and getting to know the clients.

To create an online learning community and ensure that students remain connected outside of class, Buttet created a Facebook group page where students were asked to post photos, videos, or narratives to document their experiences outside of the classroom and to comment on each other experiences. Buttet also used ePortfolio as a communication channel between the instructor and students, for example to post course content as well as information about event locations, due dates and assignment scripts for outside activities.

According to the course evaluations, students found that the hybrid format worked well to enhance the benefits of experiential learning. Activities undertaken outside of the classroom made the learning environment richer and helped students understand how to apply economic theory for making practical decisions in their daily life. For example, one student in her course evaluation wrote that she liked "how well everything was related to real life and made me understand things and learn things about my own economy that I did not already know." Another student noted that he liked "the format of the class because it made it easier to connect practical experiences of the daily life with economic theories." Students also commented that the Facebook page worked well to provide an informal learning environment where they felt safe to share their learning experiences outside of the classroom and to relate these activities to the academic material taught during regular class sessions.

Most courses at Guttman are delivered in a traditional setting and it took time for some students to adjust to the hybrid model and learn how to use the time outside of the classroom productively. For example, perhaps due to imperfect communication of information at the beginning of the semester, a small number of students did not participate in the activities outside of classroom in the first couple weeks. Also, the level of engagement with the Facebook page was mixed with some students going to great length to document and share their experiences outside of the classroom and think about how these experiences relate to the economics curriculum and social issues, while a small number of students never fully engaged with the Facebook interface. In the future, it would thus be worthwhile for the instructor to supplement the Facebook page with other technology platforms in order to enhance student engagement and interaction with one another and the instructor.

Overall, Buttet found that teaching ECON 223 in the hybrid format contributed to support Guttman's pedagogical model by providing a "high-touch/high-tech" learning experience to students. The hybrid format supported by the learning circle, which emphasizes students as producers of knowledge and the intentional use of technology to share outside of classroom experiences with peers, the instructor and the community at large, facilitated the integration of experiential learning activities to the Economics of Social Issues class, for example by providing time and space for students to complete their projects and assignments outside of the classroom, and thus enhanced the well-documented benefits of bringing experiential learning activities to the classroom (e.g. Kolb, 2014). Not surprisingly, Buttet noted that the students who did best in the class were those who best understood how the experiential learning activities support and enrich the economics curriculum and felt comfortable with the use of technology as an essential part of the learning experience. Finally, Buttet also found that the hybrid format helped the instructor and students commit to using the experiential learning approach throughout the semester since every week, the instructor had to design new pedagogy that connects the learning taking place outside of the classroom to the more academic material taught in regular classroom sessions. For example, Buttet and students used classroom time to design survey questions and later that week, students used the time outside of the classroom to interview New Yorkers and collect data. Similarly, the service learning project goals were discussed and reviewed in class before students carried volunteering projects during time outside of the classroom.

Case Study 3: MATH 201 Precalculus
Fisher taught a hybrid Precalculus course using Wordpress blogs. There is always a temptation in education to focus on those learning outcomes that are easiest to measure. For example, it is easy to measure whether or not a student can solve a mathematical equation; it is much more difficult to know what the solution means to the student or how they perceive related abstract concepts like variables and functions. In the absence of face-to-face communication, many hybrid mathematics courses neglect difficult problems. They focus almost exclusively on rote, procedural learning, asking students to watch a video and mimic what they see.

Fisher sought to inject a heavy dose of inquiry into the hybrid course. The class was largely inspired by Jim Groom's digital storytelling course, DS106 (Levine, 2014; Rodriguez, 2012). Groom coined the term "edupunk," which Tom Kuntz (2008) described as "an approach to teaching that avoids mainstream tools like PowerPoint and Blackboard, and instead aims to bring the rebellious attitude and DIY ethos of '70s bands like The Clash to the classroom." In particular, he eschewed traditional course management systems in favor of more public mediums of communication like blogs and Twitter. As students began to build compelling digital stories, people flocked from outside the class to

read the blogs, creating an authentic learning experience for the students. The question at hand was, "could this type of experience be replicated in a math class?"

In the Precalculus course, students were asked to create their own blogs on Wordpress.com. The school used RSS feeds to aggregate these posts to one central class blog. This course ran twice, in Spring 2015 and then again in Spring 2016. In the first iteration, Fisher posted a prompt on his blog each week and students had the entire week to respond to this prompt on their own blogs. Students were not required to comment on each other's blog posts out of fear that making blog posts compulsory would discourage authentic participation. With only one blog post a week and no exogenous incentive to comment on their classmate's blogs, the students never developed a culture of online participation. Student evaluations and in-class comments suggested that not everyone saw the purpose of the blogs. In particular, every student responded to the same prompt. There was nothing individualized or personal about their blogs, making the blogs feel more like a place where students dumped completed work rather than a hub of authentic self-expression. Choice is a key ingredient in one's sense of ownership.

In the second iteration, students were given a menu of four assignments each week. They had to choose two assignments to complete on their own blog, and for each of the remaining two assignments, they had to comment on a classmate's blog post. The due dates for these activities were spread across the week so that a more regular routine of participation developed. With more room for individuation, students began to develop very different voices on the blogs. Students established different niches of expertise in subjects that interested them or preferences for certain types of assignments. For example, some students preferred assignments with real-world applications whereas others focused on more abstract mathematical content. Some preferred assignments that used the software GeoGebra, whereas others preferred Desmos. Each week, rumors would circulate about which assignments were most difficult. Some students chose the purportedly easier assignments while others chose to challenge themselves, often going to great lengths to attract the readership of their peers.

Designing assignments for a blog is very different than designing face-to-face course work. Through trial-and-error, Fisher developed a design language based on the ideas of Ito et al (2009). They distinguish between two different "genres of participation" for new media: "messing around" and "geeking out." The first genre refers to casual forms of interest-driven participation with vaguely defined goals. For example, a student might poke around on a website, clicking on random links, or play a cursory game on their phone. On the other hand, geeking out requires a bigger, more focused investment from the student and usually has a very narrowly focused goal. Solving a complicated math problem with a right or wrong answer would be one example of geeking out. As Ito el al. note, messing around can often lead to geeking out. Another important design component was the idea that each assignment requires students to produce a personalized artifact, something they can share on their blogs. This makes the mathematics expressive and generative, and it also provides a reason for students to read each other's blogs.

Most of the assignments in the hybrid class used software like GeoGebra or Desmos to develop interactive apps or online lessons. Students messed around with the apps before producing and sharing an artifact on their blog. For example, one assignment asked students to use the graphing software Desmos to draw their initials. Although the idea sounds easy, the task actually requires a very strong understanding of domain, range, and linear functions. Students were able to mess around with

different formulas until they stumbled across patterns, and everyone had a unique graph to share that told a story about who they were.

For the final project, students researched a Precalculus topic of interest to them and produced their own blog assignment on this topic. These projects became the menu of assignments for the last week of class, thus completing the cycle of students as producers.

Fisher certainly met challenges implementing the course. Most students expressed a feeling of isolation. There was no one immediately available to answer questions when they ran into problems, and many expressed a feeling of anxiety about getting the right answer. A lot of learning is based on tacit knowledge, but the internet is much better at delivering explicit knowledge (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In Fisher's class, chat rooms were set up for students to work on problems together with the hope they could fill-in the gaps in each other's tacit knowledge. However, students were not required to use the chat rooms and few ever did. In a future iteration of the course, Fisher plans to assign students to specific teams and ask them to complete one of their two weekly blog assignments with their team in a designated chat room. This idea follows the work of Stahl (2009) and the Virtual Math Teams.

The biggest challenge came in integrating the face-to-face and online components. Students still had traditional homework and traditional exams, and not all of the ideas they learned on the blog translated to the more sterile textbook problems. There was little time to discuss homework problems in class, and it was difficult to plan ahead so that students encountered new ideas first through inquiry on the blogs, then more formally in the classroom, and finally as practice on the homework.

The learning circle proved useful throughout the planning and teaching of the course. Fisher and Baines regularly traded ideas, discussing the limited availability of tacit knowledge online, challenges with student engagement, and integrating the online and face-to-face components of the class. Working with instructors in different disciplines helped triangulate these challenges and put in perspective precisely which features of these challenges were discipline specific.

Case Study 4: ENGL 100 Critical Reading and Writing

Naidoo used the hybrid learning circle to restructure the way students interfaced with content in ENGL 100 Critical Reading and Writing, a space where students prepare for the CUNY Assessment tests in reading and writing, CAT-W and CAT-R. Having taught this content at CUNY for years, and after publishing a text, The Complete CATW Book: Preparation for the CUNY Assessment Test in Writing, Naidoo is primarily focused on growth mindset and the role of anxiety in test performance. Much of the testing process involves the development of self-regulation in addition to the ability to let go of past performance in order to achieve proficiency in these tests. Her course was modelled on practice for the reading exam (CAT-R) which involved a three pronged approach, namely recreating testing conditions for students, analyzing performance during practice and discussing both positive and negative feelings associated with test taking.

The students met in class on a biweekly schedule and contributed feedback about their test preparation experience in a discussion forum on Blackboard when they did not meet in class. The application Naidoo assigned to the students for reading practice allowed students to see how long they spent on a given exercise or practice test and the scores they received. From this data, Naidoo worked with students to help them monitor their own performance in terms of the method they employed for

practice, the space they chose to practice, their energy level while they practiced and what kind of positive or negative messaging they were sending themselves during their practice period, essentially, teaching them that multiple variables are at play when partaking in the test taking experience. When students reconvened in class, the data were analyzed and discussed in a group setting.

Students shared their previous testing experiences, fears and anxiety about the implications of not passing these tests. Not achieving proficiency in both the CAT-W and CAT-R prevent students from taking class in their major, drains their financial aid and whittles away at their confidence. Back in the classroom, two things were happening. First, students were becoming self-aware about how they engage with the content and talk to themselves and, second, they created a support network amongst themselves were they understand how to share in other classmates success and failure. Some students were motivated by the idea of succeeding for their instructor and honoring daily practice schedules by sending pictures of themselves in front of their computer with the application open to document their commitment. This was a fascinating observation about various types of motivation and how technology can support that sense of interconnectedness needed in challenging situations.

The composition of students in this class range from non-native speakers of English, students that require testing accommodations to students that did not receive substantial feedback on their ability to develop their reading and writing skills during high school. Yet what they did have in common was the prohibitive role that fear and anxiety played in their ability to perform to the best of their ability during a standardized test. Through mindfulness, compassion and thoughtful examination of performance, eight out of nine students reached proficiency on their reading test in the hybrid class. When compared to an in-class experience, the hybrid model was superior in the sense that it placed responsibility on the student to review content for the test, in order to qualify to stay within that bi-weekly meeting schedule. Part of the arrangement to participate in this model, was agreeing to a contract that states assignments must be completed in a timely fashion. By not completing the weekly tasks, the student was indicating they needed in-class support on a weekly basis.

Unsurprisingly, this model worked best for students who are able to prioritize their daily tasks and who start with a high level of motivation. These students in particular excelled after reviewing the data collection on their testing habits, such as information on what areas they should focus on to improve their test results, their ability to revise content independently and how much time they were taking to complete the practice exercises online. All that data is stored in the application used for test preparation for the CUNY assessment test in reading (CATR), which allowed for meaningful conversations in class when we met to discuss their mindset, specifically how positive or negative messaging influenced their performance.

In contrast, those students that had difficulty creating time and space for review, struggled with these deadlines, and ultimately benefited from the in-class experience, as they required support with testing in person. For them, it was not a matter of adjusting negative thought patterns, but rather just sitting down to review and building self-esteem related to test taking. The benefit if the hybrid model for them, was the ability to use technology to facilitate the development of a work ethic. In one instance, a student used iPhoto to record himself reviewing exercises on a daily basis to prove he was sticking to his schedule. It was a way for him to create accountability and get the kind of support he needed from the instructor. It was an unorthodox method that allowed him to satisfy the test requirements and release him from the monotony of being trapped in a test preparation course that is non-credit bearing.

Developing course content within the hybrid learning circle was useful because the collaborative course design allowed instructors to reflect on various ways information is disseminated across disciplines; from research methods to discussion format. Planning as a group was beneficial because the process involved sharing, reflection and goal setting, which comprise the foundation essential to test preparation. As an instructor, it is important to be able to contextualize the student experience directly. The hybrid learning circle created a space where that was possible. Furthermore by engaging with this experimental course framework, the student experience moves from punitive test prep to enrichment. The hybrid learning community afforded the opportunity to think about the following: as an in class experience, it was generally successful because it cultivated a sense of accountability that was absent in students with strong test taking skills by developing the self-regulation needed to meet the test requirements. Alternately, the sense of community built by the in-class experience, allowed the independent learners to share their methods with less confident test takers, thereby lowering their affective filter enough to reconfigure negative perceptions of ability. This model addresses the practical components of test taking, such as content review and timing, while probing psychological aspects of the learning process related to overall scholarly identity.

Case Study 5: HIST 221 History of Urban Life

Naish taught the History of Urban Life as an in-class course twice before attending the hybrid learning circle, always with a broad agenda. Emphasizing the history of cities in the United States in the last two hundred-plus years, he began in the ancient world to emphasize the characteristics that successful cities always share- particularly their diversity of people, goods, skills, jobs, ideas, interests, which lead to exchange. Also, while foregrounding the history of New York, he used other cities for the purposes of comparison: Washington, Boston, New Orleans, Cincinnati, Chicago, Los Angeles. Finally, while presenting the landmarks of urban history, he reinforces what students already know about U.S. history in general.

Naish's original intent was to focus and streamline the course for its hybrid incarnation. He initially felt anxiety thinking about some of the technological specifics of conducting this class. However, he soon fleshed out ideas in collaboration. He decided to use the structure of the hybrid class to overcome what he had always considered a shortcoming of the class as previously conducted: the absence of a good book of the history of New York. He had the students produce a workable substitute for a New York history textbook using a newspaper assignment, and for assigned readings he used the selections from primary and secondary sources that cover such topics as city planning, the transformations wrought by the railroads, the effects of red-lining. He made a timeline of events in New York City (and national) history and divided them into ten segments. The students were responsible for writing six articles and three responses (letters to the editor) over the course of the semester. This "living timeline" served to give them get a sense of when certain events happened in relation to each other.

While the newspaper was relatively simple translation exercise in which the students read some basic presentation of the facts of a particular historical event then reported those facts using the standard conventions of newspaper journalism, it was not as easy as it sounds. The students had to engage actively with the material, reporting it as if the events just occurred and without knowing what will happen next. More critical thinking was involved in the letters to the editor. When producing these, the students had to think how individuals from particular backgrounds or social groups might react to specific events and the way they are reported. Interacting with and producing the material in this

way seems to be helping the students actually remember major events of New York history and the order in which they occurred in a way that interacting with a textbook or an online page of static text often does not.

Naish also had success in developing and implementing a video assignment in which students were required to produce short videos using footage they collected in locations around the City, relating information about particular historical periods while in front of buildings constructed at the time they occurred, for example, talking about the War of 1812 in front of Castle Clinton. He learned how to use iMovie, and made a sample short film for the students, which he posted on the course ePortfolio. He also make a demonstration Powerpoint with recorded sound in case some of his students are resistant to the idea of a video. As the course was taught, Naish was surprised at the ease with which students embraced the production of the videos. Technical accomplishment was less important for the grade earned. More important was the choice of style or tone to convey a particular message.

The major course project was a biography designed to show students that good history is argument. To support this project, Naish required students to use Blackboard's Wiki feature to collaborate in developing arguments about the person they were profiling. Discussions in the hybrid learning circle helped Naish conceptualize the wiki as a tool for group-work mirroring the small-group work Guttman students are accustomed to participating in in class, which is different from a blog with comments. Overall, the combination of assignments were successful in enhancing student learning through their active engagement and creation of tangible products to exist in the digital space. The hybrid model allowed Naish to creatively address the shortcomings of the absence of a high-quality text and the stereotypical perception of history as "static" or "boring" topic of study.

Discussion

The hybrid learning circle was designed to go beyond professional development or technological training, modeling the guiding philosophy that learning is a process that leads to the co-production of knowledge. Just as students across the five courses were encouraged to become inquirers and producers, pushing beyond difficulties and fears in that process, so, too, were the participating professors in the design and implementation of their hybrid courses. Learning, both in-person, online and in the world is a "process that takes place in a participation framework, not an individual mind" (Lave and Wenger 1991:15). The differences in perspective, in terms of discipline and philosophy, among co-participants, in this context, was an asset in fleshing out the framework. Those tentative with the hybrid format, not unlike the students, were supported in their independent inquiry into best practices and forms of knowledge and knowledge generation. In this sense, the initial phase of hybrid design and implementation at Guttman Community College was a success, producing ongoing collaborations and experimental course designs, which were thoughtful and deliberate.

Students, too, learned much taking these courses. The hybrid model does come with limitations, which were reflected in the success of coursework and attendance, however the ability to make students producers of knowledge and the possibility that is unlocked by an unconventional course model are potentially limitless. Fostering independent learning and a sense of trusting in their abilities to take on the role of inquirer and co-producer among students was challenging across all courses. Integral to our guiding philosophy, the hybrid course design provided a pathway to discuss how best to foster these skills and tacit knowledge that many community college students have yet to learn. The hybrid course model helped to begin to contextualize the learning institution, situating the college with the City and

the lives of the students. The problematic observation that learning takes place in very specific contexts and yet we often attempt to decontextualize it in the institutional classroom setting (Lave and Wenger 1991:40) goes some distance to being both highlighted and address with the Guttman hybrid course model.

Conclusion

While hybrid and online courses are subject to an ongoing and varied response from researchers, educators and students, there is no gray area in recognizing that they are a growing part of higher education. Through deliberate, collaborative design, with a focus on students are co-creators of their experience, the hybrid learning circle at Guttman Community College takes steps to support an interdisciplinary faculty and a diverse student body in navigating the learning process while connecting the in-class and out-of-class experiences in the technological space. Continuing to reflect the "high-touch" model outside of the classroom allows for the building of useful skills for navigating the innovative educational spaces of the future.

Dedication

This article is dedicated to the memory of our friend and colleague, Paul Naish, who played an integral role in the first hybrid learning circle and in many initiatives at Guttman Community College, CUNY. We, and our students, have suffered a great loss with his unexpected passing but we so fortunate for the time we had with him.

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