Tips and Strategies from Twenty Years of Teaching MIS in a Blended MBA Environment

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Abstract

Based on twenty years of experience, observation, and experimentation I, will share some of my successes and failures in teaching MIS to an MBA class that is simultaneously online, local, and televised. This blended teaching environment was provided in response to business professionals who faced increased pressure to meet personal and professional obligations while pursuing their degree.   These pressures have lead them to choose a distance education solution for their educational needs. Students could potentially attend class locally in a traditional classroom, at a remote televised site, or online. If they could not attend class in real-time, they could attend asynchronously.

Depending on the time allocation, the presentation will include techniques for dealing with class background diversity, content, and size in a blended environment. The presentation will be framed with both empirical data, case observation, and a review of some of the available software support applications. Over the years, the class size has been determined more by student demand than physical location limitations and ranged from 150-200 students.   The potential of peer and automatic grading of projects to help provide meaningful feedback to students in an environment of expanding enrollments will be discussed.

Information systems instructors are continuously challenged by the diverse nature of their student populations.   It is not uncommon to teach an MBA course in which novice MBA students with liberal arts backgrounds are in class with IS professionals with degrees in computer science.   This disparity pits student content needs and desires against each other and creates a nearly impossible dilemma for the instructor.   Novice students many times require instruction on tools and computer applications while technology experienced students are more satisfied with case based management scenarios. The use of self-directed simulations, voice over PowerPoint lectures, and discussion boards can be used to allow students a degree of customization which can address this disparity.

Pairing students with various backgrounds can increase intergroup conflicts while at the same time distance can increase the student group coordination costs.   By structuring the group task and controlling the communication channels, some of these difficulties can be diminished. Depending on the time allocation, the presentation will include an empirical evaluation of the effect of controlling task and communication bandwidth on student satisfaction and performance quality on case based assignments.

The presentation will touch on past, present, and potentially new techniques and software to support MIS in a distance and blended educational environment. The level of detail of the presentation will be tailored to meet the time limitations as determined by the moderator, but emphasis will be placed on allowing the audience the opportunity to network with other participants to support and share with each other after the presentation and conference.