Evolution of the BlendKit Course: Fine-Tuning a Professional Development MOOC

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The BlendKit Course

Distinctives

While many MOOCs modeled on traditional university curricula may be undertaken as sources of professional development, the BlendKit Course was designed by the University of Central Florida specifically for the professional development of higher education faculty and designers preparing to design and teach blended learning courses. As a result, it has been crucial to us as designers, facilitators, and evaluators to determine the correct balance between unfettered openness and the clear (and perhaps more familiar) curricular path of traditional professional development offerings.

The BlendKit Course exists to assist instructional designers and teaching faculty in transitioning from traditional face-to-face (f2f) or ad hoc technology-enhanced courses to a more deliberately designed blended learning model in which the affordances of f2f and online contexts are integrated into a seamless whole, often with a reduction in the number of f2f class meetings. To this end, the BlendKit Course website (http://bit.ly/blendkit) contains many open educational resources (OER) for self-study (e.g., do-it-yourself task guides) or collegial collaboration (e.g., scholarly readings with discussion guide) to facilitate the blended course conceptualization and design. These materials are publicly available in perpetuity and are offered under a Creative Commons license for reuse and adaptation. However, we have found that many faculty and instructional designers are motivated by the facilitation inherent in a cohort experience centered around learning with these materials.

A cohort based around OER courseware may lead one to the assumption that the course design follows a content-centric xMOOC approach. However, in its initial design BlendKit2011 was approached as more of a cMOOC. With the open courseware a necessity, emphasis was placed upon bringing the materials to life in personally meaningful ways through interactions and emergent connections within a loose, semi-porous community of participants. As with the course materials, all interactions were conducted in public web venues (e.g., blogs, Twitter, GoogleDocs) with no reliance whatsoever on password-protected spaces (e.g., learning management system). While facilitative communications (e.g., weekly email messages, weekly webinars, daily emailed summaries of participant contributions) bounded the five-week cohort, participants were encouraged to make of the experience what they wished with no set criteria

for "completing" the course.

Feedback received from BlendKit2011 participants through weekly and end of course surveys indicated that, while some individuals appreciated the cMOOC-style self-direction of the course, many longed for more structured expectations with some even expressing a desire for a more "conventional" online course design. Apart from personality or learning style preferences, at least some of these comments seemed to be associated with participants who were 1) looking for concrete assistance in designing a blended learning course for the first time and 2) inexperienced with interacting via various "loosely joined" (Weinberger, 2002) web tools. As a result, the second cohort, BlendKit2012, was enhanced to offer criteria for more delineated participation roles (i.e., auditor, participant, completer) and more options for participating in less public venues (e.g., traditional assignment submissions and a learning management system home base in addition to the existing elements). Thus, the subject matter and the primary audience of the BlendKit Course have each exerted a conservatizing effect on this professional development MOOC designed for faculty/designers new to blended learning.

Having addressed at a high level the distinctive nature of the BlendKit Course and its relationship to xMOOCs, cMOOCs, and OER, in the remainder of this article we hope to provide enough detail on our experiences with offering multiple iterations of a professional development MOOC that others with similar interests may benefit from our successes and lessons learned. We begin with background influences on the design of the BlendKit Course and the impetus for its creation as part of a grant-funded project. We then trace the evolution of the BlendKit Course from its initial design through past offerings to potential future developments. We share the lessons learned from evidence-based practices implemented within each iteration, including our experiences with current MOOC-related trends (e.g., alternative credentialing, monetization, etc.). We close by using our experience to shape recommendations to others who wish to offer MOOC-based professional development unrelated to traditional university curricula.

MOOC LINEAGE

Several past MOOC-related models and experiences shaped my (Kelvin's) design of the BlendKit Course materials and the initial BlendKit2011 cohort experience. In this section I will recount these influences on the design of the BlendKit Course. I can recall lurking in CCK08, the famed "Connectivism and Connective Knowledge" course led by Stephen Downes and George Siemens in 2008, popping in and out of video sessions, exploring the distributed resources which participants created on platforms across the web, and generally getting inspired by the way that this disparate group of learners from around the world ebbed and flowed in a fuzzy cohesiveness to learn together. I think I first became aware of CCK08 via postings on Twitter from someone in my personal learning network (PLN). I kept tabs on how CCK08 played out, but I was hesitant to commit to participating "officially." I recall being a bit intimidated by the public engagement of this group of open learners. I wasn't sure I could dedicate the time and effort necessary to engage at this level, and I think I was hesitant to "put myself out there" in the public sphere where my own technical and intellectual inadequacies would be made evident.

Toward the end of 2008, I was challenged to consider further these dynamics through a blog posting by Gardner Campbell on the "network effects" of humans interacting via the public web and the necessity of "commit[ting]" to "joining in the conversation" in order to experience personally these beneficial network effects. As a result of my subsequent interaction with Gardner (and my reading of his interactions with other readers) through the blog posting's comments section I began to ponder more deeply the relationship between "openness" and human connection, the ability to connect with disparate others via the networked resources and communication venues of the public web.

During 2009 I observed indications on Twitter of how Alec Couros was opening up his small University of Regina graduate course, ECI 831, via interaction opportunities with a wide range of outside others on the web. I read student blog postings and the interactions in their comment sections, and I was impressed by the level of engagement with the participants (official students and others). After asking Alec and Tom Woodward for some input, I began to design blog-based interactions for my own graduate

students on the public web.

In early September 2010 a colleague at the University of Central Florida (UCF) sent an email invitation to connect locally with "a virtually networked study group" (S. Wegmann, personal communication, September 7, 2010) made up of teams from a number of US institutions who were meeting to discuss the *New Media Reader* at the instigation of Gardner Campbell. Gardner was leading a discussion group at Baylor University and had encouraged participants to blog about their reactions to the readings. He extended this collegial group by encouraging the formation of groups at other institutions and then attempting to connect them as a "networked faculty development seminar" via a homebase on the web. I was fascinated by the idea of a common reader studied and discussed across multiple institutions. However, since my attention was co-opted by front burner projects, I didn't meet with any colleagues face-to-face, and it was difficult for me to keep track of how to connect with others who were more engaged. As time allowed, I accessed those segments of the reader that were available online (most of the reader is accessible only in print and via an accompanying CD-ROM). I wished for easier access to the full reader and clearer opportunities to connect with others on my own schedule.

During the 2011 EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative (ELI) Annual Meeting, I heard Wendy Drexler speak about her experience with Chris Sessums in designing and facilitating the "Personal Learning Environments for Inquiry in K12" (PLEK12) MOOC that had just launched. I reviewed their combination of university web pages and GoogleDocs that formed a home base for this University of Florida graduate course to which they invited the world. I noted the clarity with which they provided access to synchronous online sessions (and the archived recordings) and other weekly learning activities in the context of a weekly schedule. A couple of months later, as I started development on the BlendKit Course materials and began planning for BlendKit2011, I reached out to Wendy for any advice she might offer from her experience as both a MOOC participant and as a MOOC designer/facilitator. While many cMOOCs at that time (including PLEK12) were scheduled for an eight-week time frame, Wendy Drexler (personal communication, May 23, 2011) observed that there was typically a dip in participation around the third or fourth week. We discussed the possible advantages of offering a shorter, five-week schedule in BlendKit2011. I summarized some of Wendy's accumulated advice for MOOC participants in a series of tweets.

With apologies to Louis Pasteur I might note that in MOOC development as in the advancement of science, "chance favors the prepared mind." In my case at least, the background experiences summarized above represent the "prepared mind" and the circumstances detailed below constitute the "chance" that has worked out favorably for many who have engaged with the BlendKit Course.

ORIGINS [1]

The University of Central Florida (UCF) teamed with the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) to receive funding through a Wave I Next Generation Learning Challenges (NGLC) grant to distribute proven blended learning practices to faculty designing new courses at 20 participating AASCU institutions; or as our colleague Chuck Dziuban observed wryly, "Ron Popeil (of US infomercial Ronco fame) meets the Home Shopping Network." The project started with 20 partnering AASCU institutions that identified new blended learning courses (particularly English composition and college algebra) targeted at low-income students under the age of 26. The focal point of this effort is an enduring publicly accessible, web-based resource (coordinated by Linda Futch) called The Blended Learning Toolkit based on UCF's long history of success with blended learning courses. The Toolkit contained summaries of blended learning best practices, strategies, models, and course design principles; two open educational resource (OER) prototype blended learning courses in composition and algebra; blended learning faculty development resources; and assessment and data collection protocols for blended

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[1] An earlier version of the "Origins" section of this chapter appeared on the NGLC blog as Spinning Challenges into Increased Impact: The UCF Blended Learning Toolkit. at http://nextgenlearning.org/blog/spinning-challenges-increased-impact-ucf-blended-learning-toolkit and is adapted here with permission.

learning (based on the work of Patsy Moskal and Chuck Dziuban), including survey instruments, standards and resources to help others disseminate their research through publications and presentations. (For more details on UCF's NGLC project see Moskal & Cavanagh, 2013).

Many of the AASCU participating faculty were quickly designing blended learning courses during summer 2011 in time for a fall term 2011 implementation. So, there were obvious concerns about faculty availability and motivation for participating in faculty development during the summer months. Initially, we relied exclusively on the grant-mandated algebra and composition faculty development courses developed and facilitated by UCF faculty members Tammy Muhs and Elizabeth Wardle respectively. However, it became quickly apparent that more than one-third of participating faculty were developing courses other than English composition or college algebra, necessitating a subject matter-neutral faculty development option. I (Kelvin) recall discussing this issue in a planning meeting and asking, "What if we were to design [the subject matter-neutral course] like a MOOC?"

As part of the Blended Learning Toolkit, I conceptualized a sub-section of the website, dubbed "the BlendKit Course," which, as the website says, is "a set of subject matter neutral, open educational resources related to blended learning available for self-study or for group use." The goal of the BlendKit Course is to provide faculty with practical assistance in designing and developing blended learning courses from general consideration of design issues through guidance with implementation logistics. The BlendKit Course contains a five-chapter reader (with discussion guide) on blended learning topics; a series of do-it-yourself task guides; recorded interviews with veteran blended learning faculty; and a set of traditional instructional modules (Thompson, 2012).

In order to better meet the needs of non-algebra/composition faculty participating in the UCF/AASCU NGLC project, we formed around the BlendKit Course materials an "open online course" with a variety of participation options. An open online course allowed us to combine participating project faculty with faculty and designers outside the project who also had an interest in blended learning. As a result, there would be a greater likelihood of project faculty having others with whom to interact and a greater likelihood that the project faculty would engage with the materials in order to develop their blended learning courses. I suggested we give this open online course a hashtaggable name like previous MOOCs. Thinking a portmanteau of **Blend**ed Learning Tool**kit** had a nice ring to it, I proposed we name the OER courseware the BlendKit Course and the open online course BlendKit2011.

The OER BlendKit Course materials remain online, licensed for re-mixing under a Creative Commons license and see on-going regular usage from points around the world as indicated by server logs of supporting file downloads, Google Analytics of site traffic, and statistics provided by a url shortening service used to promote direct access to particular materials. The availability of the BlendKit Course materials has been promoted via numerous conference presentations, professional meetings, and social media. Representatives of various institutions have reported reusing and remixing the BlendKit Course materials for use in their own faculty development initiatives (Thompson and Futch, 2013, July 8). Additionally, based upon lessons learned from BlendKit2011, a second facilitated open online course cohort was offered during the fall of 2012 (BlendKit2012) to a far larger number of participants. This ancillary off-shoot of the UCF/AASCU NGLC project has become an unexpected vehicle for rapid scale and impact in the support of blended learning initiatives. Challenges in one project have given rise to opportunities for learners around the world.

EVOLUTION OF THE BLENDKIT COURSE

BLENDKIT2011

As we prepared to launch the first BlendKit MOOC, we decided to make all content and interactions (with the exception of email) available through the publicly-accessible Blended Learning Toolkit site (http://blendedlearningtoolkit.org), without relying on a specific learning management system. Being mindful of the MOOC literature regarding open online courses, we focused not on completion of the course, but instead on allowing participants to be self-directed in participation by selecting and choosing weeks with topics of interest to them. Certainly, participants could linearly complete the assignments

(and, in essence the entire course) but we realized that this is not the nature of the openness feature of typical MOOCs and many might be interested in only one or several topics rather than course completion. The short, five-week duration was similarly chosen with the realization that maintaining interest and time commitment in such a MOOC is often difficult for working professionals.

The modules were designed from open online course research and best practices to create a low pressure, easy access, supportively engaging environment focused on blended learning. Table 1 illustrates the breakdown of topics covered in each of the five weeks, organized so that participants would achieve the necessary skills to actively create blended course content. The do-it-yourself (DIY) tasks centered around these topics that were covered in the weekly readings, and webinars. The environment was highly engaging and interactive and the summer course included weekly, 30 minute webinars with experienced guest instructors and facilitated discussion and question and answer opportunities around the topics. Weekly readings, activities, and reflection prompts reinforced concepts and allowed for interaction between participants and with instructors. Additional social networking opportunities were also infused to allow for more interaction and to allow participants to interact through various social media, including Twitter, blogs, etc, for those who were comfortable with these communication tools. Participants had flexibility and could choose how much, or how little, they wished to engage in the course each week, and had freedom to choose their method and amount of interacting with others as well. The goal was to remove obstacles that might lead a participant to disengage in the course, while still providing a wide range of possibilities for interaction and course engagement for those who had the time and motivation.

Week	Topic
1	Understanding blended learning
2	Blended interactions
3	Blended assessments of learning
4	Blended content and assignments
5	Quality assurance in blended learning

Table 1: Weekly topics for BlendKit course.

A weekly rhythm was quickly established to provide consistency for those who were continuously engaged. This also helped those who may have disconnected with the course rejoin smoothly and those who were new to the week become acclimated quickly. In addition to developing the BlendKit Course materials, Kelvin Thompson also served as the course moderator for BlendKit2011, facilitating communication as well as establishing interaction with guest speakers. Each Monday, participants received an informational email with the weekly theme and the various means in which they could interact with the course. As the week progressed, participants were encouraged to engage in readings on the current topic and work on hands-on course design and development tasks. Interaction was encouraged through participants' preferred social media choices. Consistent with the findings of Fini (2009) on tools most effective in CCK08, an RSS feed of the interactions was channeled to all registered participants in a "daily digest" email message (in our case using the email service MailChimp rather than a homegrown tool). Each week ended with a wrap-up 30 minute webinar, featuring a focused practitioner interview as well as the opportunity for participants to synchronously interact in a Q&A session. These sessions were archived for those unable to participate synchronously. Finally, each participant was asked to provide feedback on the week for future improvement and refinement of the course.

PARTICIPATION IN BLENDKIT2011
BlendKit2011 was conceived and administered to fill a need for the UCF/AASCU NGLC grant. The participating schools who wanted to offer blended learning courses that were not tied to the English or math specific targets of the grant needed direction and we wanted to fill that need. However, because the course itself was advertised as an open online course, word quickly spread beyond the NGLC communication boundaries. Less than 150 faculty were participating in the grant. But nearly 200 individuals from throughout the US, Canada, and several other countries registered for BlendKit2011. In

fact, several of the composition/algebra faculty participating in the NGLC subject matter-specific faculty development courses also chose to participate in BlendKit2011. Ultimately, 76% of BlendKit2011 participants were unaffiliated with any of the 20 partnering AASCU institutions. Blended learning faculty development resources were clearly in high demand.

EVALUATING THE BLENDKIT2011 EXPERIENCE

In offering the course, we wanted to capitalize on the ability to examine how and why participants interacted with such an open online course. Detailed data were collected on those who participated in BlendKit2011. In registering for the course, participants provided their contact information including name, organization, and preferred email. They also were asked (optionally) to provide a phone number, Twitter username, and Blog URL. Google Analytics and Mailchimp data provided details on participants' clicks and interaction with the website and who interacted with or downloaded resources provided to participants via email. Participants were asked for feedback each week via an anonymous form, and all who registered were emailed an evaluation questionnaire when the course ended that requested demographic data in addition to their reactions regarding their experience with the course.

Our philosophy of gathering all data possible provided us with a large volume of data from many sources. We likened it to "reading tea leaves" as we found ourselves often trying to find the accurate picture in the myriad patterns that appeared to be, at times, overwhelming, but fascinating as well. Not surprisingly, the analytics illustrated spikes in accessing and downloading resources related to a specific topic on the week that topic was discussed. The most downloaded files during the life of the course included the course blueprint (28%) and the file containing the course documents (10%). (DIY resource files are available for review at: http://bit.ly/blendkit_diy.)

PARTICIPANTS' DEMOGRAPHICS AND REACTIONS TO BLENDKIT2011

Perhaps the most valuable data we collected was the demographic data on who enrolled in BlendKit2011 and the feedback from participants regarding their interaction with the course as this has also helped us refine and (hopefully) improve future iterations. Sixty-six participants provided end-of-course feedback (33% response rate), and the demographics indicated that 25% of those were instructional designers, 54% were in an instructional role (adjunct to professor), and 22% classified themselves as "other." While roughly half of the respondents (51%) had taught fully-online prior to enrolling in BlendKit2011, 62% of respondents said they had never taught a blended learning course yet 81% noted they were currently developing a blended learning course or would be within the year. Seventy-nine percent of respondents said they felt that BlendKit2011 aided in the development of their next blended learning course, and 74% said that BlendKit211 had helped in making them more comfortable with blended learning.

Table 2 illustrates the respondents' self-reported weekly participation and also how useful they felt each of the five covered topics was. The second week, covering Blended Interactions, was the most active week for participants, while Understanding Blended Learning, Blended Learning Interactions, and Blended Content and Assignments were viewed as most helpful. Perhaps surprisingly, Quality Assurance was seen as less helpful (46%).

Week	Topic	Participation	Helpfulness
1	Understanding blended learning	62%	62%
2	Blended interactions	68%	62%
3	Blended assessments of learning	61%	56%
4	Blended content and assignments	59%	62%
5	Quality assurance in blended learning	49%	46%

Table 2: Participation and helpfulness (percent) for weeks and topics of BlendKit2011 (n=66).

Participants had many opportunities for interaction during the 5-week course. Table 3 shows the self-reported activities they engaged in most frequently. Email appeared to be the preferred method of

obtaining information, with the majority of respondents saying they opened a Daily Digest email (92%) or a weekly email (89%). Posting (15%) or commenting (14%) to a blog or other social media (14%) were the least preferred methods of interacting. Not surprisingly, these were the most active means of interacting with the course, as well as requiring interaction beyond the confines of the course.

BlendKit activity	Percent
Opened Daily Digest email	92
Opened a weekly email	89
Read from Blendkit Reader	86
Opened a document associated with DIY task	70
Accessed after-the-fact webinar recording	64
Read a posting on someone else's blog	62
Attended in-real-time webinar session	42
Read a posting on a social media site	39
Performed a DIY task	38
Created a posting to your own blog	15
Posted a comment to someone else's blog	14
Create a posting on a social media site	14

Table 3: Activities participants did at least once during BlendKit2011 (n=66).

When asked what they liked best about the course, the majority of comments mentioned 1) the far-reaching impact, diverse viewpoints and sense of community fostered by the course interaction; 2) the weekly webinars and live sessions; and 3) the tie-in to applicable skills and real-use activities. A number of participants indicated that the flexibility of an open online course was what actually allowed them to participate in and benefit from this professional development opportunity.

Participants indicated their biggest challenges included 1) a lack of time, being unavailable in "real time;" 2) the lack of structure; 3) the use of Twitter and blogs, or 4) not much interaction or participation. In essence the flexible, open nature was either loved or hated by participants, depending on their preference and comfort level with the encouraged activities.

BLENDKIT2012

While BlendKit2011 was created to fill a required need for the purposes of the NGLC grant, it was clear from the experience that demand far exceeded the scope of this one five-week session. We heard from many who wanted another iteration and asked "are you doing another?" So, with the lessons learned from the first iteration, we began considering offering a version of a BlendKit MOOC that would be targeted at a broad audience rather than focused primarily on the needs of grant participants. Content was refreshed for the weekly webinars, new interview case studies with faculty experts were documented, and new guest faculty participated in weekly webinars. Expecting an increase in enrollment, UCF's Linda Futch joined Kelvin Thompson as a co-facilitator.

INCORPORATING LESSONS LEARNED FROM BLENDKIT2011

We also examined some of the "what would you change" comments that our participants had provided in BlendKit2011, focusing on those items which we could influence. In designing BlendKit2011, the focus was on providing as much variety as possible for participants to interact with the course. In addition, the course was not tied to a specific learning management system (LMS). However, there were many who commented that they would have preferred more structure. So, in designing BlendKit2012, we chose to go with an LMS central communications hub in which to ground the material for registered participants. While all resources were available publicly as well, the LMS provided structure to those who desired "course-like" components. Participants were provided with an invitation to a free Instructure Canvas account and the familiar structure of modules allowed them to interact with a more "traditional" course.

The interaction opportunities in BlendKit2011 were very open, but many participants were unfamiliar with or uncomfortable with blogging and tweeting. The Canvas interface available during BlendKit2012 provided participants with a more formalized course-like ability to interact via the discussion forum that was not open to the world. Those who preferred to tweet and blog were still encouraged and free to do so.

BLENDKIT2011 VS. BLENDKIT2012

BlendKit2012 opened in fall 2012 and enrollment quickly grew. Table 4 provides the comparison of scale of BlendKit2011 vs. BlendKit2012. While connection to the NGLC grant greatly influenced participation and scale of BlendKit2011, the new iteration was advertised through personal networks and professional associations (e.g., social media, blogs, email, listservs, etc.). Prior to the course going live, over 1,000 participants had registered. Before the course ended, that number grew to over 1,200 registrants from around the world, representing both K-12 and higher education settings.

BlendKit2011	BlendKit2012
200+ registrants	1,230 registrants
U.S. + 5 countries	US + 27 countries
No K-12 registrants	~10 K-12 districts

Table 4: A comparison of participants in BlendKit2011 and BlendKit2012.

Figure 1 illustrates the change in U.S. scope from BlendKit2011 to BlendKit 2012. The NGLC grant schools who served as the impetus for the BlendKit creation are represented by stars and are located in the eastern half of the U.S., but BlendKit2011 had participants scattered across the country. With the scope of participation in the next iteration (BlendKit212) being six times larger, nearly every state was represented by participants. In addition, there were schools with multiple participants, as illustrated by the larger scaled circles.
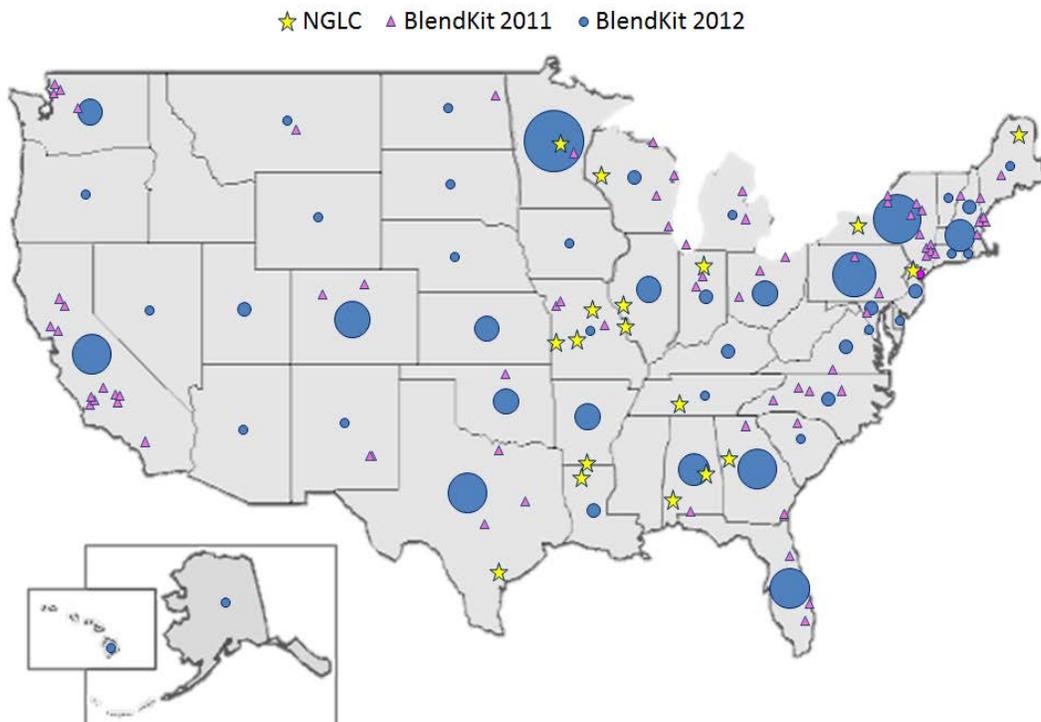
Figure 1: Participant locations in the U.S. for the NGLC grant, BlendKit2011, and BlendKit2012.

The international reach of BlendKit2012 was even more signficant. While colleagues from Canada, Sweden, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand participated in BlendKit2011, the scope of BlendKit2012 was more far reaching including participants from 27 countries (Figure 2).
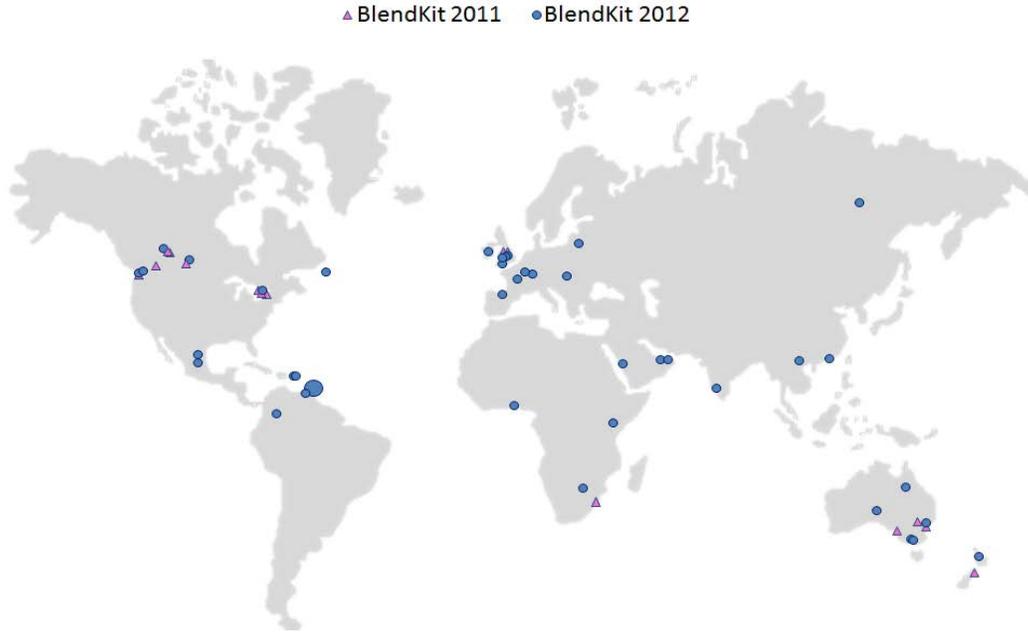
▲BlendKit 2011   ●BlendKit 2012

Figure 2: Worldwide participant locations for BlendKit2011 and BlendKit2012.

THE MOTIVATION FOR BADGING

Given the come-and-go-as-you-will emphasis of BlendKit2011 and the fact that a portion of the participants were motivated by their schools' participation in the NGLC grant, we did not delineate criteria for "completing" BlendKit2011. However, in reviewing feedback data, it was apparent that many participants wanted such criteria. Further, MOOC completion rates were receiving much critical attention as we were preparing BlendKit2012.

To both help us try to frame these varying participation rates, and possibly encourage as much participation as possible, we opted to implement badging through the use of the Mozilla open badges framework. Each week provided an opportunity for 5 badges (Figure 3).

IN ORDER TO RECEIVE THE BLENDKIT COMPLETION BADGE,
YOU MUST EARN AT LEAST ONE BADGE IN EACH TOPIC AREA.

DESIGN   INTERACTION   ASSESSMENT   CONTENT   QUALITY

EACH TOPIC AREA CONTAINS FIVE DIFFERENT FUNCTIONS

WEBINARS   DIY TASK   READINGS   BLOG POST/COMMENT   INFO STREAM CONTRIBUTION

Figure 3: Badging within BlendKit2012.

Registered learners were classified as ***auditors*** if they registered for the course, but completed no badges. ***Participants*** completed at least one badge throughout their experience with BlendKit2012. Finally, ***completers*** were those who earned at least one badge per weekly topic and they were also rewarded with a certificate at the end of the course. There were five opportunities for participants to earn badges each week, but only one badge per week was required for one to be considered a "course completer." These individuals made some attempt to engage in each of the five weeks of the course and while they may not have completed every assignment, their continuous engagement was still unusual for a MOOC and we wanted to be sure to reward that.

Figure 4 illustrates the participants' engagement in weekly activities. Not surprisingly, the written reactions to the weekly readings and the webinars were consistently the resources most completed. Those activities that required more interaction and engagement---interacting with blogs, DIY activities, and contributing to the information stream--were consistently the activities with the lowest participation. While it was clear that there were a select few who actively blogged and tweeted, they were also in the minority.
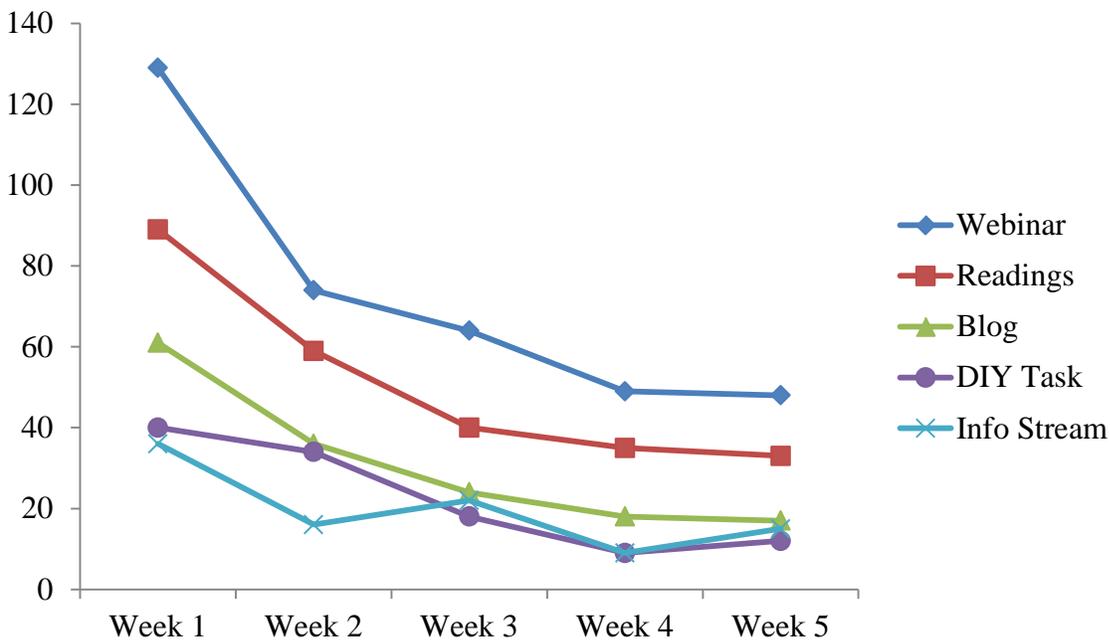

Figure 4: Participant interaction with BlendKit2012 weekly activities.

In addition, the data indicated that participation tapered off as the five weeks progressed. So, week one had more people interacting with the course in each of the five activities. This steadily declined each week. The open nature of the MOOC allowed participants to enter the course at any point during the 5-week duration. However, the decline in participant interaction is certainly steady with each progressive week. So, this steady loss of momentum would imply that time is of the essence in designing MOOCs for busy participants. This is consistent with the literature on MOOCs as well (Ahn, Butler, Alam, & Webster, 2013; Aiken, Lin, Schatz, & Caballero, 2013, Breslow, Pritchard, DeBoer, Stump, Ho, & Seaton, 2013, Kizilcec, Piech, & Schneider, 2013, Mackness, Mak, & Williams, 2010).

By the end of BlendKit2012, 51 participants achieved badges for completing the requirement of one activity for each of the five weeks to earn certificates of course completion. Approximately 16% of registrants (202) were identified as active "participants," achieving at least one badge over the entire course. The remaining 84% we classified as "auditors," consistent with academic terminology, as they evidenced none of the activities required for badge completion (Figure 5).
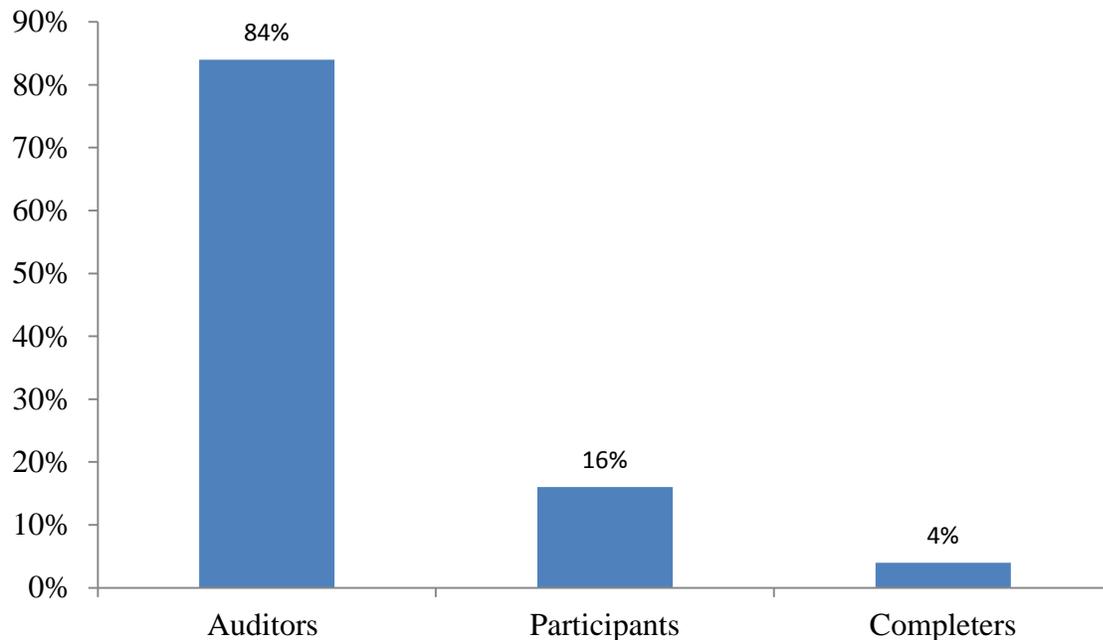

Figure 5: Levels of participant completion for BlendKit2012.

While the implementation of digital badges in BlendKit2012 had the positive effect of formalizing course participation, and thus completion rates, the logistics of managing a semi-complete, homegrown badging system were quite burdensome. As BlendKit2012 concluded there were delays in notifying participants of their course completion status, and as a result this activity distracted from sending out the course evaluation questionnaire. Nevertheless, we found ourselves with a great deal of data to sift through in evaluating the effectiveness of BlendKit2012 and in considering improvements for any future offerings.

NEWER ITERATIONS

Despite the fact that the OER BlendKit Course materials are designed and open-licensed for adaptation by others in their unique faculty development contexts, we have continued to field inquiries from various institutions asking "when is the next BlendKit?" Based upon those with whom we've corresponded, time to adapt existing materials is in short supply, and for many there is something motivating about participating in a group learning experience. There are indications that there are still large numbers who could benefit from the BlendKit Course but who are unfamiliar with it. Thus, while we've made no formal commitments, we expect to continue offering periodic cohorts built around the BlendKit Course materials. We find that experimenting with open course design innovations and engaging with participants from diverse institutional contexts refreshes our own perspectives on faculty development models and blended learning course design. This is of benefit to our own institution.

In the latest iteration (BlendKit2014) we incorporated ideas from several MOOC-related trends. First, all registered course participation was conducted within the Canvas Network platform (http://canvas.net) in line with other universities' xMOOC offerings. The marketing efforts of the organization and the efficiencies of routing through the learning management system allowed us to

provide a better learner experience for a greater number of participants. Second, while the five-week course remained free of charge, we partnered with the higher education information technology organization EDUCAUSE (http://educause.edu) to co-sponsor a professional credential for a nominal fee. While some MOOCs have served as prerequisites for fee-based testing (leading to academic credit in some cases), we elected to pursue a portfolio-review as the basis for indicating professional competencies. Third, we applied lessons learned from past digital badging implementations to enhance the course engagement badges offered during BlendKit2014. This includes the use of third-party badge platform Credly (http://credly.com). We are currently reviewing the data obtained from this most recent cohort. We hope to report results from this and future iterations in later publications.

To supplement the MOOC iterations, we are also attempting to document some of the successful institutional adaptations of the BlendKit courseware. Capturing these stories allows us to better gauge the reach of the BlendKit Course, but doing so also helps us identify applications and adaptations of the course materials that can potentially feed back into the BlendKit Course as new material. (For instance, Oregon State University's "Hybrid Course Initiative" website contains modified versions of BlendKit materials and new, spin-off files.)

CONCLUSION

Since its initial version as a cMOOC based around OER courseware, the BlendKit MOOCs have grown steadily more conventional over time. The most recent iteration (BlendKit2014) was facilitated completely within a learning management system (LMS) via the Canvas Network xMOOC platform. However, this movement has represented an effort to better serve the needs of the target learner population (i.e., faculty/designers new to blended learning) rather than a philosophical shift away from the principles of openness that guided the original design. All BlendKit Course materials remain accessible on the public web, and public interaction venues abound. At its heart the BlendKit Course remains focused on connections resulting from the free flow of information related to blended learning so that individuals and institutions can innovate.

In evaluating the effectiveness of the various iterations of the BlendKit MOOCs we have attempted to stay open to multiple definitions of "success" as we have collected a variety of quantitative and qualitative data from a number of sources (e.g., automated "system" data; user-generated data; and facilitator-initiated data). We found that it was difficult and time consuming to sift through the noise of much of this data. And, while more is better, perhaps there is a saturation point that is impacted at least partially by time and cost-benefit of information the data contains. While the sheer volume of data can be overwhelming, we have found that we have learned much from going back to these data again and again as we seek to understand this still-new learning environment and as we attempt to improve each iteration of the BlendKit MOOCs. Interestingly, we found that an added benefit (and unexpected side effect) of implementing badging is the ability to provide a structure to "participation" that better allows us to define levels of completion and course interaction.

To those considering the development of a professional development MOOC unaligned with traditional university curricula, we offer the following recommendations related to openness, performance, interaction, numbers, experience, and data.

1. **Consider how you can harness the network effects of the public web to connect people and ideas.** Identify potential obstacles to engagement (e.g., technological, timing, perception, etc.), and remove as many as you can. For instance, you can never say enough to people "make this experience work for you; take what you want/need." By contrast, university-like 16 week terms can be intimidating and may dissuade many from even starting. Be explicit about open licensing of materials (e.g., Creative Commons) and the open sharing of ideas/resources.

2. Despite the perceived emphasis on lecture content in many xMOOCs, **think in terms of what your target audience needs to be able to *do*.** What problem(s) are you trying to solve? Design

experiences and provide resources that will foster that performance. In what ways can you encourage self-assessment and/or peer evaluation? Are there potential opportunities for more formal credentialing/certification options in which a third-party (e.g., a professional association) might validate the learning (i.e., demonstrated knowledge, skills, and attitudes) arising from the MOOC?

3. **Design multi-faceted opportunities for interaction between and among participants and facilitators.** The scale of the MOOC can mitigate what is feasible, but look for diverse ways to connect people/ideas. Even a little facilitator interaction (e.g., a timely group email; a personal tweet; etc.) can go a long way. In BlendKit2012 numerous participants posted excitedly to Twitter when they received a digital badge because they saw the badge as a communication from the facilitators recognizing their performance. One participant characterized BlendKit2012 as a "real class" because "the instructor is present, and engages with students."   In considering the strengths and weaknesses of MOOCs, traditional online courses, and higher education courses in general Joshua Kim (2012, July 22) remarked that "Any course not built around dialogue between faculty and students will quickly be understood as fundamentally lacking."

4. While the "**M**" in MOOC stands for "massive," **numbers can't be the sole determinant of success.** There will be many factors outside of your control affecting numbers of registrants, participation patterns, and completion rates. Recognize that individual participants may have personal learning goals different than those of the designers/facilitators (Bruff, 2013). Make peace with the fact that you may never have a 100% accurate picture of who has benefited from your efforts in ways that you never imagined. Stay mindful of the individual experience of each participant. Look for ways to collect personal success stories.

5. **Engage in a variety of MOOC-related experiences before you attempt to design one yourself.** If you can find a MOOC or similar experience that is close to what you're envisioning, give it a try. Don't worry about completing everything. Even if your experiences are incomplete, you will learn something. Make note of what worked for you and what did not. Dialogue with others about their experiences. Identify principles you will employ in your MOOC. Some things have to be experienced to be understood.

   6. **Collect data.** In my (Patsy's) work at UCF's Research Initiative for Teaching Effectiveness we have a slogan that has guided our evaluation efforts for years: "Uncollected data cannot be analyzed." It is important to plan for data collection of various types. Are there data being generated automatically from systems you are using? Are your participants generating data (quantitative or qualitative) as they engage within the course? How can you capture this? What questions do you want to ask your participants about their experiences in the course? Ideally, you will have questions to guide the data you collect and analyze, but data you don't collect is a missed opportunity. Because we couldn't find the time to update the course evaluation for BlendKit2012 in the way we wanted, we missed the opportunity to compare participant responses to existing items between BlendKit2011 and BlendKit2012.

It is our hope that through this article we have provided a thorough enough depiction of our experiences, so that those tasked with developing similar open online professional development resources may build upon our successes and learn from our challenges. At the very least, we have hopefully convinced readers that using MOOCs for faculty development is worthwhile and desired. If you build it, they will come. We look forward

to seeing how you adapt the learning experience currently called "MOOC" as you seek to meet the professional development needs of those you serve.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Website	URL
Blend Course Website	http://bit.ly/blendkit
CCK08 - Connectivism and Connective Knowledge course	https://sites.google.com/site/themoocguide/3-cck08---the-distributed-course
Blog posting by Gardner Campbell	http://www.gardnercampbell.net/blog1/?p=637
Blog posting's comments section	http://www.gardnercampbell.net/blog1/?p=637&cpage=1#comment-1338
ECI 831	http://eci831.ca/
Alec and Tom Woodward for some input	https://twitter.com/kthompso/statuses/3438264292?tw_i=3438264292&tw_e=details&tw_p=archive
Blog-based interactions for my own graduate students	http://ofcoursesonline.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/blogging-_evolution_eme5050_2012.pdf
New Media Reader	http://www.newmediareader.com/book_contents.html
Homebase on the web	http://gardnercampbell.wikifoundry.com/page/NMFS_Network_F10
Personal Learning Environments for Inquiry in K12	https://docs.google.com/document/pub?id=1PTAu07tm1rEhh3tLa4ibX85oXr-EQbZuEeLhCnl8j4k
University web pages and GoogleDocs	http://community.education.ufl.edu/community/pages/view/77059/plek12-welcome
Advice for MOOC participants in a series of tweets	https://twitter.com/search?q=%23blendkit%20wendydrexler%20tip&src=typd&f=realtime
Ron Popeil	http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ron_Popeil
Home Shopping Network	http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Home_Shopping_Network
The Blended Learning Toolkit	http://blended.online.ucf.edu/
The BlendKit Course	http://blended.online.ucf.edu/blendkit-course/
Blended Learning Toolkit Site	http://blended.online.ucf.edu/

DIY Resource Siles	http://blended.online.ucf.edu/blendkit-course-diy-project-tasks/
Canvas Network Platform	https://www.canvas.net/
EDUCAUSE	http://www.educause.edu/
Credly – Badge Platform	https://credly.com/
Oregon State University's Hybrid Course Initiative	http://oregonstate.edu/ctl/hybrid-course-initiative
Participant in BlendKit2012	https://plus.google.com/+BernardoTrejos/posts/Pi61dRNBrMS

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[ii] **Patsy Moskal** is the Associate Director for the Research Initiative for Teaching Effectiveness at the University of Central Florida (UCF). Since 1996, she has served as the liaison for faculty research of distributed learning and teaching effectiveness at UCF. Patsy specializes in statistics, graphics, program evaluation, and applied data analysis. She has extensive experience in research methods including survey development, interviewing, and conducting focus groups and frequently serves as an evaluation consultant to school districts, and industry and government organizations. She has also served as a co-principal investigator on grants from several government and industrial agencies including the National Science Foundation, the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation and Gates Foundation funded Next Generation Learning Challenges (NGLC). She frequently serves as a proposal reviewer for conferences and journals and also has been a reviewer for NSF SBIR/STTR and DoE proposals. Patsy has co-authored numerous articles and chapters on blended and online learning and frequently presents on these topics. In 2011 she was named a Sloan-C Fellow "In recognition of her groundbreaking work in the assessment of the impact and efficacy of online and blended learning."