

# Blended and Accelerated Blended Courses: An Introduction

## Why does UW-Marquette offer blended and accelerated blended classes?

We know you need classes that match your schedule and allow you greater flexibility. Plus, nationally conducted studies have proven repeatedly that students benefit from learning in a blended format. That's why we at UW-Marquette have made a commitment to offering a variety of classes each year in these two formats. We want to take a moment to explain the course set-up a bit and encourage you to contact your instructor for this course if you have any questions.

## What is a blended course?

In a **traditional face-to-face class**, students and instructor gather together for a prescribed amount of time each week; time spent outside of the class on coursework is labeled "studying" or "homework." A **blended course** differs from a traditional face-to-face course because half of the time usually spent with your classmates and your instructor in a physical classroom is now spent online, usually in D2L. In courses which are **100% online**, when students and instructor never physically gather in the same space, it's easier for most students to understand when and where they're supposed to be working because they're *always* online. In blended courses, some students initially struggle to fully understand that the time spent on D2L/online activities is not "homework"; it is a replacement for the 50% time no longer spent in the same physical location as the instructor and your classmates. Additional "homework" and "studying" time must still be found in your schedule. Therefore, a blended class does not mean that you will actually spend less time on a class. You will spend the same amount of time as you would on a face-to-face class but more of that time will be spent online in D2L.

## What is it like to take a class that's *half* online?

Just as with online courses, the online portion of a blended class is **asynchronous**. That means the students and the instructor don't set a specific time when they will all meet on D2L to have the online portion of the class. Instead, one student may be online from 3-5 on Thursday, while a classmate may log in from 7-9 that same evening and the instructor may be online from 8-10 on Friday morning.

However, asynchronous classes still have rigid **deadlines!** In fact, online and blended classes probably have more deadlines than face-to-face classes. Think about it this way: One "deadline" in a fully face-to-face class is showing up to class on time every day! During that face-to-face class you might have participated in a discussion and taken a quiz. Moving those two activities online means that in a blended course there are several deadlines associated with that one class day's work: specific dates and times when discussion posts and replies are due, when work must be placed in the D2L dropbox, when online quizzes must be completed, etc. In order to succeed in a blended (or online) class, you must read carefully very early on about all deadlines (dates *and* times, as both will usually be specified) and you must adapt to the new rhythm of this type of class. Even more so than when you have only outside commitments to studying and completing homework for a traditional face-to-face class, you must create a schedule for yourself which allows you to complete all the asynchronous work by the various deadlines.

## What if the class I choose to take is also accelerated?

If your blended course is also **accelerated**, that's another new wrinkle in your approach to taking a class. The pace of the course will be much faster than in a traditional 15-week class. While your instructor has been trained in how to make the class efficient and effective in that time frame, it's still an intense experience to take an accelerated course. Early in the semester, look for tips from your instructor on the pacing/rhythm of the course. Let your work and family members know that this course may be a bit more intense but that it will also allow you to complete a course in a shorter period of time. Keep in mind that some accelerated blended courses don't start until the second half of the semester. Starting a class mid-semester (October 27<sup>th</sup>) while other classes are on-going may require a further adjustment in your scheduling.

## Will I read just as much in an accelerated class?

Typically, instructors maintain the same level of reading for an accelerated class as they would have students complete in a full-semester course. That means double the reading each week! In addition, you will likely be reading discussion board posts online, so there's a lot of reading—perhaps even more—in an accelerated class. You should plan to set aside several times during the week to complete the reading; don't plan on being able to fit it all into one session or you won't remember much of what you read.

## Should I take more than one accelerated blended course in a semester?

In terms of **registering** for these courses, if you have the option of taking more than one accelerated blended course in a semester and it fits with your degree requirements, we recommend that you do so, if they occur during different time periods and would thus help balance out your courseload. Because the pace of accelerated blended courses differs from that of traditional courses, trying to take a course in that format and several other full-term classes at the same time presents challenges regarding workload. Be aware of those challenges and whenever possible, take back-to-back accelerated blended courses within a semester.

## What special skills do I need to have to succeed in blended courses?

Students often wonder what **special skills** they need to have to succeed in a blended or accelerated blended class. We recommend that you enroll in these courses only if you are

- comfortable with e-mail, the internet, and Microsoft Word;
- open to learning new technologies such as D2L, the course management system used in these classes;
- able to access a computer connected to the internet and a printer (keep in mind that there are plenty on campus as well);
- able to manage your own time well and remember multiple deadlines;
- willing to take responsibility for your own learning as you work collaboratively with other students and the instructor
- comfortable asking questions and asking for help;
- and, willing to participate in online as well as face-to-face discussions of class material.

Based on student feedback on our campus, in the UW Colleges, and nationwide, we believe you will enjoy your experience in a blended or accelerated blended course this year. However, we strongly recommend that you plan carefully as you enter the class and reach out to your instructor right away if you have any questions.

Technology support for these classes is available on campus but the best way to get help is to check out the numerous D2L Student Resource guides once you log in. We are attaching here the “Quick Start Guide” to help you log in for the first time if you have not already done. If you have any problems logging in to D2L, don’t wait! Follow the instructions in the Quick Start Guide to get assistance as soon as possible.

## What else do instructors expect?

Some instructors for these types of courses ask you to sign a contract similar to the one below indicating your awareness of the special approach taken in these courses. Instructors want you to succeed and knowing more ahead of time about the format and structure of a class can really help you.

### **Sample Contract for Blended and Accelerated Blended Courses at UW-Marquette**

After reading about blended and accelerated blended courses you have a better understanding of what is expected of you. We ask that you read, print, and sign the following. Bring it to your first face-to-face class, and be sure to check D2L in the days prior to your class as there may be important introductory information waiting for you already.

*I have read the document on blended/accelerated blended classes and I understand the out-of-class time commitment required of a student.*

*I understand that face-to-face time in blended/accelerated blended courses is limited; therefore, attendance and punctuality in those sessions is even more critical than it would be in a traditional class structure.*

*I have the required communication skills to communicate electronically and already know or am interested in learning the course management system (D2L).*

*I understand that it is my responsibility to arrange access to a computer with the communication links and software required for this course and that inability to access a computer or printer will not be accepted as an excuse for not completing work.*

*I understand that failure to live up to the required commitment of time and communication could seriously affect my grade in this course.*

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Student’s signature

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Date