



Lora Hobbs is a senior instructor in the department of religious studies at Missouri State University. She has an MEd in educational and counseling psychology from the University of Missouri, Columbia, and an MA in religious studies from Missouri State University, Springfield. She began teaching as adjunct faculty at Missouri State University in 1988 and has taught full-time in the department of religious studies since 1997. Hobbs's areas of interest include women in religion. Her "women and religion" students and she have developed both a library and online archive of [The Religious Lives of Ozarks Women](#) . Her research has focused on the scholarship of teaching and learning, specifically in the areas of student motivation and engagement in various course delivery formats. This research is based on Hobbs's development of the "Introduction to Religion" course in blended and online formats alongside the traditional face-to-face format. Most recently, Hobbs has developed Missouri State University's "First-Year Programs" course as a blended course for nontraditional students.

The Challenge of Hybrid Courses

I am a senior instructor in the department of religious studies at Missouri State University. And I have a confession to make... *I'm Lora Hobbs, and I'm an Aggie*. I was born and raised on a farm in West Central Illinois, raised hogs as my FFA project throughout high school, was an FFA (yes, Future Farmers of America) officer and, eventually, an Illinois state farmer. I can't shake it (and, honestly, would never want to), regardless of my career field. So, first let me say a little about the source of this phrase: hybrid vigor. Hybrid vigor is a phrase that my dad and my Ag teachers taught me back when I was in high school. Hybrid vigor is the result of effectively crossing two (or more) pure breeds of hogs (or cattle or goats or...) so that the strengths of the individual breeds are maximized and the weaknesses are minimized in the resulting hybrid. When this type of cross is achieved, the production and health of the hybrid exceeds that of the individual breeds. Thus, hybrid vigor.

Four or five years ago, I first heard the term "hybrid" applied to pedagogy. Karl Kunkel, sociology professor at Missouri State University, had created a hybrid (now also called blended)

course. As he reported on his experience at one of our Teaching Showcases, I had a parallel track of what I knew of hybrids in the livestock world running next to his experience in course design. Is hybrid vigor possible in education? What was the possibility of effectively crossing two course formats, fully face-to-face and fully distance, so that the strengths of each are maximized and the weaknesses of each are minimized in the resulting hybrid? Furthermore, in what ways could I substantiate productivity, effectiveness, and, ultimately, educational vigor (vitality and strength)?

In my desire to understand whatever “science” there might be in crossing course formats, I began reading whatever I could find. The resource that blew the doors open for me was the Sloan-C International Conference of Online/Asynchronous Learning. I attended that conference two years in a row, taking along my graduate assistant who would be the technology “specialist” on the project. Each year, the conference was preceded by a daylong workshop on blending with a purpose and mapping the blend. The resources available at this conference were phenomenal. One of the main presenters both years was Anthony Picciano. I highly recommend any of his publications on blended course philosophy and design, especially *Blended Learning: Research Perspectives* (coedited with Charles D. Dziuban, Sloan-C, 2007).

I also needed a means to assess whether the blend really was effective in producing educational vigor. The typical measures for educational effectiveness are grades and class attendance. However, I am sure there are readers, just like myself, who made good grades in classes that left much to be desired as far as life and vigor are concerned. So, grades and class attendance alone would not demonstrate what I was seeking. At about that time, Chantal Levesque-Bristol, then director of our Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning at Missouri State University (now at Purdue University), had produced a validity-tested instrument that measured student motivation (Levesque, Sell, Zimmerman, 2006) as proscribed by Self-Determination Theory (Deci, Ryan, 1985, 2000). Self-Determination Theory asserts that a positive learning climate promotes higher levels of student motivation. This theory concludes that three ingredients must be evident in a learning climate that is conducive to student motivation. Those three ingredients are autonomy (sense of choice and control), competence (a sense that they can do the work and/or that they have the resources to do the work), and relatedness (a sense of connection to the instructor and to classmates). The Integrative Model on Student Motivation that Levesque, et al., developed (based on Deci and Ryan’s work) asserts that instructors can strategically place these specific ingredients in a learning environment that will result in higher levels of student motivation. Their assessment survey measures for each of those ingredients and correlates those results to indicate the level of motivation reached in a classroom. Measuring student motivation, based on students’ experiences of the learning climate, seemed a suitable means of measuring vigor in the hybrid (or blend).

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