

A good teacher can inspire hope, ignite
the imagination and instil a love of
learning

Individual project report - final

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1. Title of individual project and research question:

An implementation of a flipped classroom (blended learning) approach and online learning environment to foster industry related skills in a third year Marketing Communication module.

Focussed on student learning and success as well as curriculum and course design (identified TAU themes)

The research question being addressed is:

What would be the ideal flipped classroom (blended learning) approach and type of online learning environment to foster industry related skills in a third year Marketing Communication module?

2. Background of the project

This project is aimed at addressing the issue of what the ideal approach to a flipped classroom and blended learning approach as well as an online learning environment in a 3rd year exit module (2nd semester) in Marketing Communication would entail in order to equip students with the best industry related skills. There are approximately 75 students in this module from the 3-year program BA Communication. It is one of the core modules expected from students in the L327P curriculum.

The module is essential due to the fact that we find ourselves in a communication era. Communication on products and services forms part of most conversations. Marketers are expected to work with communication practitioners to meet the objectives of marketing communication. In some cases a single person may be expected to manage marketing as well as communication within the enterprise. To facilitate this co-operative and multiple skill practice, marketers are also trained in communication. In the course of this module, attention is paid to theories, processes and plans, as well as their management within the marketing communication context (of the organisation). Every study unit is structured around real, industry directed problems and their successful solution. Every study unit refers to the module project as discussed during the first contact session of the semester so that students can integrate the theory and practice.

During the module the students are taught numerous skills so that they are well equipped to enter the communication industry and be able to compile a marketing communication plan for a client which then culminates into how to communicate the best message through the

best integrated system of marketing communication media. In order for the students to learn their skills I have reconstructed my classroom into an environment in which students are constantly faced with industry related problems and how those problems should be best addressed. Students function in advertising agency formats where they hire and fire each other based on their work ethics. The class room becomes a simulated working environment. Every learning unit of the module has an industry related practical outcome. In the end students have learnt numerous abilities which they can then integrate into the final marketing communication plan.

At the end of their 3rd year students can apply for the honours programme in Communication Studies. Some of these students enrol for the honours program in Communication Management in which Marketing Management forms one of their compulsory subjects. The Marketing Communication Module on 3rd year level then becomes a learning section in the Marketing Management Module on honours level.

The NWU has an interactive online learning student platform called eFundi which enables lecturers and students to engage interactively inside and outside of the class room. Learning can thus take place during class but also at the student's one pace by means of the interactive platform and apart from the class time table. This platform provides numerous interactive learning options such as blogs, discussion forums, online assessment methods, online study material etcetera. But my question is which of these technological interactive learning options are really necessary for a module such Marketing Communication on 3rd year level, in order for students to learn all the industry related skills they acquire? Which of these functionalities do students really need and want in order to learn the skills industry requires of them?

The NWU defines blended learning as the “integration of thoughtfully complementary teaching and learning approaches and technologies based on educational merit as determined by factors such as the pedagogical context, the nature of the discipline and the learning material, and the profile of students, so that the strengths of each are blended in a unique learning experience. It is a fundamental redesign that transforms the structure of and approach to, teaching and learning embedded in a range of delivery modalities (North-West University, 2014)”. This then becomes the context in which I am working.

This project thus draws on literature resources from a flipped class room approach and blended learning principles as well as online learning skills. It also incorporates an empirical quantitative questionnaire (in the form of an online survey) and qualitative research methods such as focus group discussions as well as interviews. The design of the research is based

on a Design Based Research Model (**Refer to detailed project report for full description of the model**).

3. Supporting literature review (reference list at the end of the progress report)

In the past decade numerous technological advances have come to the foreground. These breakthroughs along with various tools that have been identified to enhance learning have taken over the context of learning, not only at tertiary level, but also on secondary level as well as practice. Interestingly the incorporation of these online learning tools into academia has opened the door to a new world of teaching and learning, but not without difficulties, challenges and in some cases limitations. According to researchers the use of online technologies in academia has caused numerous problems. Some of which include the following: students often experience a lack of ownership regarding study material and subsequently their achievements when internalising digital text have been reported to be lower than their achievements with regard to utilising written text. Also, students often feel disengaged and lonely when learning online, because of the lack of face-to-face social interaction which is characteristic in contact sessions (which typically form part of traditional learning methods). The third problem that has been identified is the fact that not all students have the same level of technical skills often required from them to access the online learning platforms. Many students do not have the self-confidence to use these online learning platforms in order for them to obtain all the information they require to understand and grasp theory and practice. One more problem that has been identified is the pedagogical approaches that have been transferred to the online environments. These approaches are usually based and aimed at the traditional face-to-face interactions during contact sessions and do not necessarily 'fit' the online environment. This in itself causes high levels of stress and confusion between students (not ignoring teachers) which in turn might alienate them even more.

Based on the above mentioned the blended learning model came into being in an attempt to address these issues and to create a platform where online technology and face-to-face interaction collaboratively work together in order to optimise the teaching-learning experience for both the facilitator as well as the student. Theory indicate numerous blended-learning models, but suffice to say there is no ultimate or perfect approach for blending face-to-face encounters between lecturers and students and online technological options. In the end lecturers at university level are faced with the challenge to develop their own unique

hybrid of face-to-face interaction and online technological advances (this then became the motivation for my research project).

Within literature there are numerous definitions of blended learning, but it seems the best interpretation of the concept is the combination between the physical and online environment. This in itself implies a constant emphasis on redesigning the design aspects of introducing e-learning as well as the process of blending. Furthermore it is important to take into account other factors which of course impact on the capacity to introduce blended learning into a teaching-learning context. These factors include amongst others the student profile, the available technological advances and the variety of settings in which teaching and learning is supposed to take place. It is however a reality that blended learning is here to stay and significantly impact on the teaching-learning approach of educational institutions. In this regard it is furthermore important that the successful implementation thereof is based on the institution itself, the teachers (lecturers) involved, the students and the pedagogy.

4. Applied research design

In order to answer the general research question pertaining to this project I opted to make use of a design-based research approach.

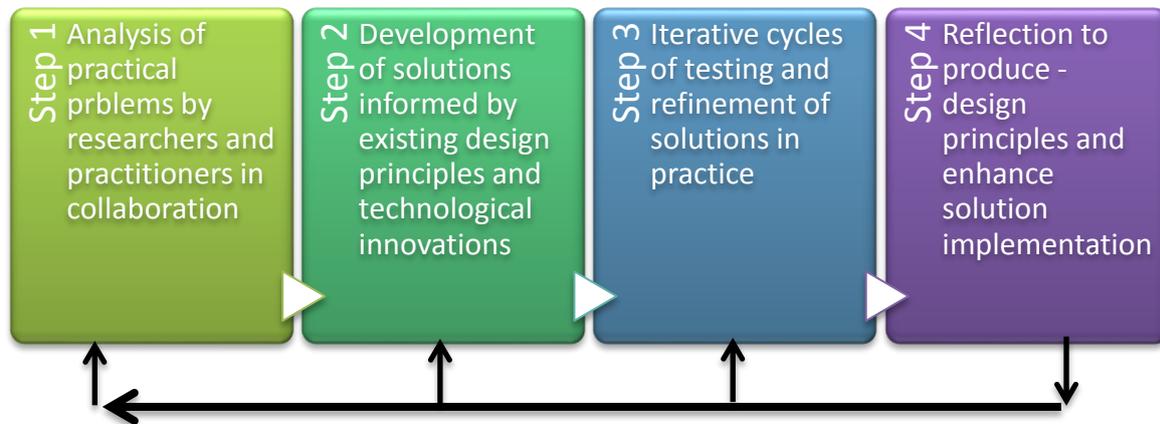


Figure 1: Refinement of problems, solutions, methods, and design principles (4 phases of design based research Amiel and Rooves, 2008:32)

4.1 Research process so far

During the **second semester of 2014** (July to December) I enrolled for the Institutional Teaching Excellence Awards and I was awarded my ITEA for the module: Marketing Communication (KCOM328) on 3rd year level. In an effort to address the strategic priority of the Faculty of Arts to implement blended learning, the learning environment had to be re-structured to include a larger on-line component. A deficiency identified in the Marketing Communication Module was the lack of a vehicle to facilitate the move to blended learning. The development and implementation of an interactive learning environment by means of the NWU's eFundi platform was contemplated to address this deficiency. The research process commenced with the analysis of the problems and deficiencies of my applied educational practices, the formulation of research questions and the review of relevant literature.

The development of an interactive eFundi platform served as a vehicle to help facilitate the move towards blended learning. Given the NWU's strategic move towards a blended learning approach to teaching my aim was to position the KCOM328 module in terms of the NWU teaching and learning policy and to adapt a blended learning approach to my teaching.

During the **second semester of 2015** I incorporated numerous teaching-learning activities into the eFundi platform in order to facilitate the transition from traditional teaching to a blended learning environment even more. I did a very basic needs-analysis (by means of personal interviews and focus group discussions) based on the students then enrolled for the KCOM328 module and I asked them what they felt their needs were with regard to the eFundi platform and what they felt they needed from this platform in order for them to be ready to enter the industry and to be able to cope with industry demands. Based on the students' responses I constructed the eFundi platform. The KCOM328 eFundi platform home page consisted of a welcoming page with a *Voki* to welcome students into the module and to introduce myself. Furthermore, I included personal lecturer details, a content page, assessment structure of the module, and two links to the module plan and lesson planning respectively. Every lesson consisted of: an introduction into the particular section of the work; a structure which graphically explained how to study the particular section of work; learning outcomes; links to study material (referring to the text book, other articles, power points and video clips); and lastly an assignment which had to be completed either before class commenced, during class or directly after class (this became the practical outcome of each learning section).

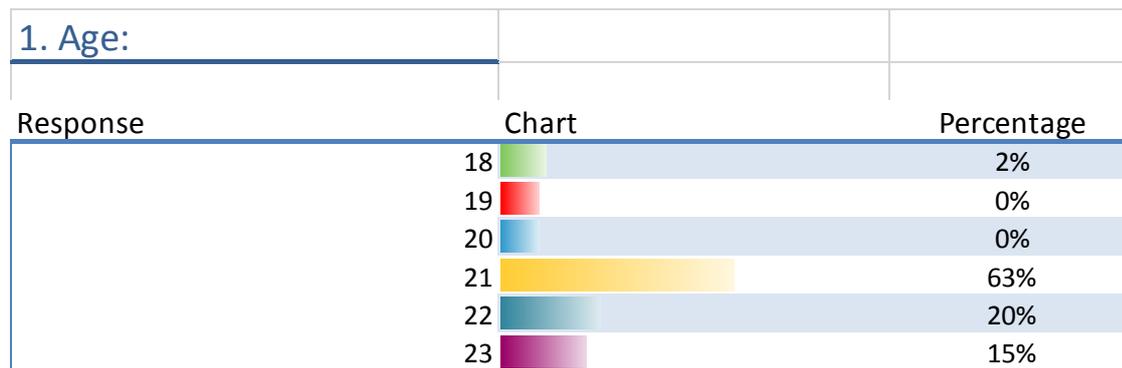
At the end of the second semester in 2015 I conducted an anonymous online survey (Blended Course Student Survey) with the support of our Academic Services. During my assessment of the students' responses I gathered that they were excited about the (at that time) eFundi platform and that they felt it provided them with much needed information and tools in order to successfully complete the module. *Refer to section 5 for a presentation of the results of the online survey.*

During the **first semester of 2016** I continued with the eFundi platform and utilised the findings from 2015 to update, re-organise and revise the platform where necessary in order to introduce a new online environment for students enrolling for the KCOM328-module during the second semester of 2016. From the results of the survey of 2015 as well as planned future research on my 3rd year students' expectations and experiences I hope to reflect on my teaching and ultimately investigate how a blended learning approach should be *developed, implemented and evaluated* to equip 3rd year marketing communication students to acquire industry related skills in order to contribute significantly to the South African Corporate Communication/Corporate Management Context. .

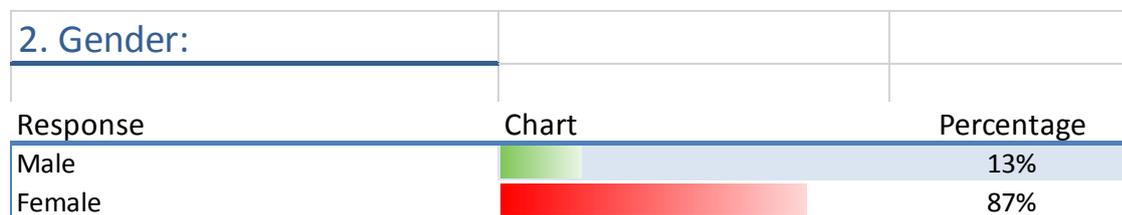
5. Discussion of results from the online survey

In this section the most prevalent findings of the online survey are briefly provided. The completion rate for the online survey was 80.43% (N=75). The majority of the students who completed the survey was 21 years old.

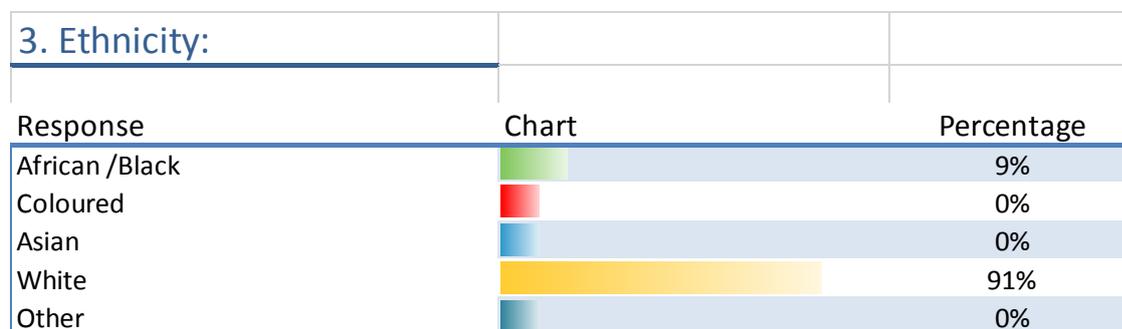
5.1 Basic profile of the students in the KCOM328 module



The majority of the students who completed the survey was **21** years old.



The majority of the students who completed the survey were **female** students.



Students were predominantly **white (91%)**.

4. In general, how satisfied were you with your blended course(s)?

Response	Chart	Percentage
Very satisfied		26%
Generally Satisfied		70%
Neither		2%
Generally dissatisfied		2%
Very dissatisfied		0%

70% of the students indicated that they were **generally satisfied** with their blended learning course(s) and 26% were very satisfied.

5.2 Comments about blended courses in general

Please take note that the responses indicated here and in further sections of this report are both English and Afrikaans due to the "verbatim" comments received.

#	Responses
1	Blended courses helps you remember the work in a creative way.
2	With the new digital era, our concentration span abbreviated and blended learning is a way of adapting to the changes.
3	They are very convenient for students to use.
4	Overall I was satisfied with all my courses and how they were delivered to us.
5	Dit vul mekaar goed aan, kan sien waar alles bymekaar kom
6	The particular blended course seemed to move rapidly and I never felt like I was quite on track / I was always scared that I would fall behind. That being said, if you do your work as you are instructed and are dedicated, it is possible to stay on track.
7	Leer baie van ander se kulture
8	It gives a student the opportunity to alternate between different methods, which is stimulating for the brain.
9	I am satisfied with the overall work ethic
10	I think that most lecturers do their best to accommodate the students, although the main issue for me is the translation services. I get a fever in my ears every time I use earphones.
11	Satisfied
12	Quite effective

5.3 Effect of the technology component when compared to face-to-face encounters

	Much better	A little better	About the same	A little worse	Much worse
<i>a. The amount of your interaction with other students</i>	(21.7%)	(26.1%)	(39.1%)	(8.7%)	(4.3%)
<i>b. The quality of your interaction with other students</i>	(21.7%)	(28.3%)	(34.8%)	(13.0%)	(2.2%)
<i>c. The amount of your interaction with the instructor</i>	(32.6%)	(26.1%)	(30.4%)	(10.9%)	(0.0%)
<i>d. The quality of your interaction with the instructor</i>	(30.4%)	(26.1%)	(34.8%)	(8.7%)	(0.0%)

Additional comments on the above mentioned aspect:

Responses

1	The instructor is very easy to reach and always able to help with enquiries.
2	I like the use of technology just because it is our way of communicating on a daily basis. This makes it a lot easier.
3	None
4	Very satisfied
5	I don't have a problem with the blended courses. They are not much of a challenge to me.
6	I only used technology for receiving communication and other related course information, not for any interaction

Additional comments on statements concerning a blended course provided:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<i>I'm more likely to ask questions in a blended course</i>	(7.9%)	(47.4%)	(34.2%)	(10.5%)	(0.0%)
<i>There are more opportunities to collaborate with others in a blended course</i>	(15.8%)	(47.4%)	(23.7%)	(10.5%)	(2.6%)
<i>My blended course experience has increased my opportunity to access and use information</i>	(23.7%)	(60.5%)	(13.2%)	(2.6%)	(0.0%)
<i>I have more opportunities to reflect on what I've learned in blended courses</i>	(18.4%)	(50.0%)	(26.3%)	(2.6%)	(2.6%)
<i>Blended learning helps me better understand course material</i>	(18.4%)	(52.6%)	(23.7%)	(5.3%)	(0.0%)
<i>Generally, I understand course requirements better in an blended course</i>	(13.2%)	(34.2%)	(44.7%)	(7.9%)	(0.0%)
<i>Because of blended courses, I am more likely to get a degree</i>	(7.9%)	(23.7%)	(42.1%)	(21.1%)	(5.3%)
<i>Generally, I am more engaged in my blended courses</i>	(13.5%)	(43.2%)	(32.4%)	(10.8%)	(0.0%)
<i>My personal devices (e.g. cell phone, tablet, I-pad etc.) help with my learning</i>	(44.7%)	(36.8%)	(18.4%)	(0.0%)	(0.0%)
<i>Social networking applications (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) help me with learning</i>	(26.3%)	(26.3%)	(18.4%)	(15.8%)	(13.2%)
<i>I am a multi-tasker</i>	(39.5%)	(34.2%)	(7.9%)	(18.4%)	(0.0%)
<i>I have strong time management skills</i>	(21.1%)	(39.5%)	(18.4%)	(18.4%)	(2.6%)
<i>I am motivated to succeed</i>	(50.0%)	(47.4%)	(2.6%)	(0.0%)	(0.0%)
<i>My university provides the resources necessary for students to succeed in blended courses</i>	(42.1%)	(44.7%)	(10.5%)	(2.6%)	(0.0%)

5.4 Preference to class modality

Response	Chart	Percentage
Entirely face-to-face		5%
Minimal use of the Web, mostly classes held in face-to-face format		26%
An equal mix of face-to-face and web content		66%
Extensive use of the Web, but still some face-to-face class time		3%
Entirely online with no face-to-face time		0%

Student seemed to prefer an equal mix of face-to-face and web content (66%).

5.5 Most significant outcomes of a blended course

	1	2	3
<i>I like the flexibility of accessing the class content anytime online</i>	(72.2%)	(19.4%)	(8.3%)
<i>I prefer the use of technology in classes more than just face to face interaction</i>	(10.7%)	(60.7%)	(28.6%)
<i>Blended courses "fit" in my schedule</i>	(25.0%)	(46.9%)	(28.1%)
<i>I have no choice because some are only blended courses</i>	(15.8%)	(31.6%)	(52.6%)
<i>I like the convenience of not coming to campus as much</i>	(13.8%)	(37.9%)	(48.3%)

The scale ranged from 1 – most significant; 2 - 2nd most significant and 3 – 3rd most significant outcome. From the results it seemed that students indicated the flexibility of accessing the class content anytime online as the most significant outcome of a blended course.

Additional comments pertaining to the significant outcomes of a blended course:

Responses

1	It's very practical to access your "class" anytime and anywhere
2	Having access to the internet can be very distracting
3	I like watching the videos and powerful images in class
4	The field has a lot of components that require a computer and computer literacy
5	I like going to class and staying busy outside my room
6	When you don't have a lot of classes for the day, blended course makes it convenient
7	Creativity makes you remember work for a longer time period

5.6 What do you like most about a blended course?

#	Responses
1	I am forced to work on my own during the semester
2	Afwisseling tussen media en aangesig- tot- aangesig klas
3	The interaction with others and use of media that I also use at home. It is easy to understand and access as well.
4	Anytime access
5	Convenience
6	Free time
7	Academic content is accessible from anywhere. I travel a lot so it is easy to study anywhere I go
8	It is in touch with reality and helps me to expand my expertise with digital technology.
9	You always know exactly what is expected of you
10	Technological convenience usage
11	Being able to access course information at any time or place.
12	Time flexibility- when there is less class, there is more time for self-study
13	Dit laat dinge vinniger gebeur en ek het heelyd toegang tot inligting
14	I learn about different types of technology and how to use them well
15	Broadening my perspective on many levels of marketing communication
16	Access to the information 24/7.
17	The online resources are organized very well and easy to access.
18	The fact that you can compare theory to practice and vice versa. Also to gain more knowledge than what is just said in class by the lecturer
19	Toegang enige tyd van die dag.
20	I like the fact that if one part of the course is not clear enough, then chances that you would understand the other part is better.
21	The fact that I have a better understanding of what's going on
22	I can sometimes understand the material or work better and I like the fact that it isn't as boring. I remember the blended courses or material better-not as bored or distracted in class.
23	The interesting sites and photographs that makes studying communications more interesting. The blended courses are also convenient.
24	It provided me with the opportunity to apply the course work in a more practical context.
25	I like having a second resource
26	The combination of advantages both sides provide
27	It's flexible and relevant to me and my generation
28	Networking and that its very convenient for study groups

5.7 What do you like least about a blended course?

#	Responses
1	I do not always understand everything that well
2	Gee soms net een perspektief/persepsie
3	The interaction with others can sometimes lead to conflict or not the right use of time management.
4	Internet struggles
5	I like the traditional methods of learning. Someone taking the time to explain something and giving me the opportunity to ask questions. With online blended courses that opportunity is limited.
6	Not having access to the web all the time
7	It is harder to resolve a misconception or misunderstanding of the work when lecturers are only reachable via e-mail some of the time.
8	Information overload.
9	It is not as personal
10	None
11	In some way, face-to-face contact with a lecturer and information seems more trustworthy than something on the web or on screen.
12	Technology can't always be trusted, eg. problems with internet connectivity
13	Ek hou daarvan
14	I have no dislikes of the course
15	You need access to the internet and it's not always possible.
16	If you don't prepare beforehand, you are likely to fall behind or get confused in class.
17	That it might replace face-to-face teaching and also make students lazy.
18	Wanneer ons punte op eFundi geplaas word kan enige iemand dit sien en ek voel dis veronderstel om privaat gehou te word.
19	There is not much. It works for me.
20	Too much distractions
21	Less face-to-face interaction, can't ask questions as much-less interaction between lecturer and class in terms of talking.
22	It can be distracting and waste time. One link leads to the other.
23	It is easier to ask questions when you see your lecturer in person.
24	It's a hassle to get information
25	I like reading off of paper - hard copy.
26	Face to Face interaction is becoming less important

5.8 Advise to other students in a blended course?

#	Responses
1	Get a time manager
2	Gebruik dit, dit kan jou rerig help.
3	Be open for brand new ways of learning and just do the tasks without complaining. You might not like it at first, but you learn a lot about working together with other people.
4	Don't skip class
5	To take the time to work out a schedule for the upcoming month in order to keep up with what should be done each month
6	Get smart with new technology
7	To not skip classes entirely if a lot of content is shared on the web. Face to face communication is still essential to the learning process. Do not rely solidly on the use of web learning.
8	Maintain a good balance when exposed to blended learning and attempt to prioritize the information according to its relevance.
9	Be tech-savvy
10	They have to be up to date with their work
11	Make use of what you are given, you can only benefit from it when you use it, otherwise it's just there.
12	Self-study is important, ask questions when needed
13	Bestuur jou tyd goed, dis nie te sê jy hoef nie meer so baie klas te loop, jy het nie vrye tyd nie
14	Embrace it, you learn a lot from it
15	Brace yourself for a lot of preparation
16	Stay up to date and look for new information added because you don't always get notifications. You need to have good time management to ensure that you don't fall behind on your studies because it is easy to overlook something in blended courses.
17	PREPARE before class
18	Do your own homework on the Internet about the topic before going to class. NB!-Planning and prioritizing
19	Kry goeie internet!
20	I would advise them to always pay attention in both parts of the blended course; face-to-face and the technological part, as it intertwined with one another. One has to keep up with the work.
21	Enjoy every moment
22	Remember to also listen in between and all the time- you get easily distracted!
23	Learn what you can from them. Knowledge is power. Those without knowledge perish.
24	They should use the face-to-face classes wisely by paying attention so that they can apply it when they have to complete work away from class.

6. What's the way forward from here?

I am now in the process of redesigning my KCOM328 E-fundi platform based on the research as well as numerous insights from our Academic Support Services at the NWU. From the research process it seems that students in the KCOM328 still prefer a blend

between face-to-face interaction and a typical online environment. I plan to determine the students' expectations of the online platform during the 1st two weeks of the new semester in order to determine what they expect. At the end of the semester I will reassess their perceptions in order to determine whether their expectations have changed; whether their expectations were met and to gain their insights into their perceptions and experiences of the blended environment. By regularly assessing the students' satisfaction it could provide the additional benefit of monitoring trends for those cohorts and also for varying demographic groups. This is especially important due to the fact that the demographic profile of the NWU-campus is currently undergoing changes. Constant monitoring could also provide insights in the measuring student and other faculty attitudes.

7. Special recognitions

I would like to thank the following partners for the ongoing support and inputs:

- TAU-fellowship
- Academic Support Services at the Potchefstroom Campus of the NWU;
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- The Faculty of Arts – Ethics Committee
- Director, School of Communication Studies, NWU-Potch campus
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