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## **RESEARCHING LAUREATE'S EUROPEAN HYBRIDITY INITIATIVE**

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### **Introduction**

Hybrid or Blended Teaching and Learning is the combination of learning and instruction originating in two separate models of teaching and learning: traditional F2F learning approaches and distributed learning approaches. Hybrid and Blended also assigns a central role to computer-based technologies (Graham, 2006). Finally, Hybrid teaching and learning relates to the way whole programs are taught.

Drawing on these distinctions, this preliminary paper looks into the launch of an innovative project in higher education which involves the utilization of new forms of education in a number of tertiary institutions belonging to the Laureate International Universities Network in Europe. The focus is on the challenges of launching such an innovation in social settings which are characterized by distinctive educational features and profiles.

For this purpose, Laureate has defined its own taxonomy to identify what face to face, blended, hybrid and online teaching means at program and at the course level at involved institutions which are asked to comply with the same prescribed set of principles and policies in transforming their conventional programs to achieve a delivery of 25% of instructional hours in an online modality. The rationale for introducing this innovation is discussed by looking into the comparative advantages that are expected to accrue for the participating institutions but more importantly for the students who will be exposed to these new forms of learning.

### **Background**

Laureate is the world's leading for-profit education provider with a network of close to 90 institutions around the globe, representing over 1,000,000 students. Laureate runs Walden, its flagship fully online university with over 50,000 students and partners with several renowned educational institutions (e.g. University of Miami, University of Liverpool and University of Roehampton, London) in the provision of their online programs.

In 2015, Laureate embarked on a network wide initiative to achieve 25% hybridity across its network by 2019. This goal entails the delivery of 25% of total teaching hours in an online format at each institution. The goal, which represents a significant transformative mandate for all Laureate institutions, originates in the broader recognition that education is rapidly

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changing, driven by new learner requirements and the evolution of learning technologies which are entering the classroom. Importantly, these trends imply the need for a significant rethinking of classroom pedagogy.

In Europe the majority of Laureate's 24 institutions exemplify a traditional teaching and learning profile. Hence the organization's hybridity goal represents a major transformational challenge. At the same time from a research perspective, Laureate's hybridity goals represents a unique opportunity to study the methods, impact, challenges and successes of online teaching and learning as these evolve across autonomous institutions, joined by a broader organizational imperative.

### **The educational advantages of this innovation**

About a decade ago using the means of educational technology available at the time there was recognition of the positive effects of Blended education in Medical Education (Bernardoa, et al 2004). Today the staggering breakthroughs in ICTs and other educational means available to offer on-line and distance education programs, these advantages are even more evident. Previous experiences across Laureate have proven that, while the learning results through online instruction might in some cases be better than campus based ones, the introduction of contact between students and professors further improves participation and engagement (Redondo & Benito, 2012). There are of course other important educational advantages when turning traditional instructional methods into blended, taking advantage of the realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Most importantly, learning in this new form becomes more active and dynamic. This is achieved because:

- blended learning activities promote increased engagement with course material,
- blended learning promotes continuous interaction with peers and faculty, and contextualized discussion based on learning activities,
- online interactive learning activities allow students greater flexibility to organize their weekly schedules (Lotrecchiano et al., 2013)

In sum, a blended learning strategy places the student at the centre of the pedagogy and stimulates the combination of different pedagogical elements to deliver this experience in the best possible manner.

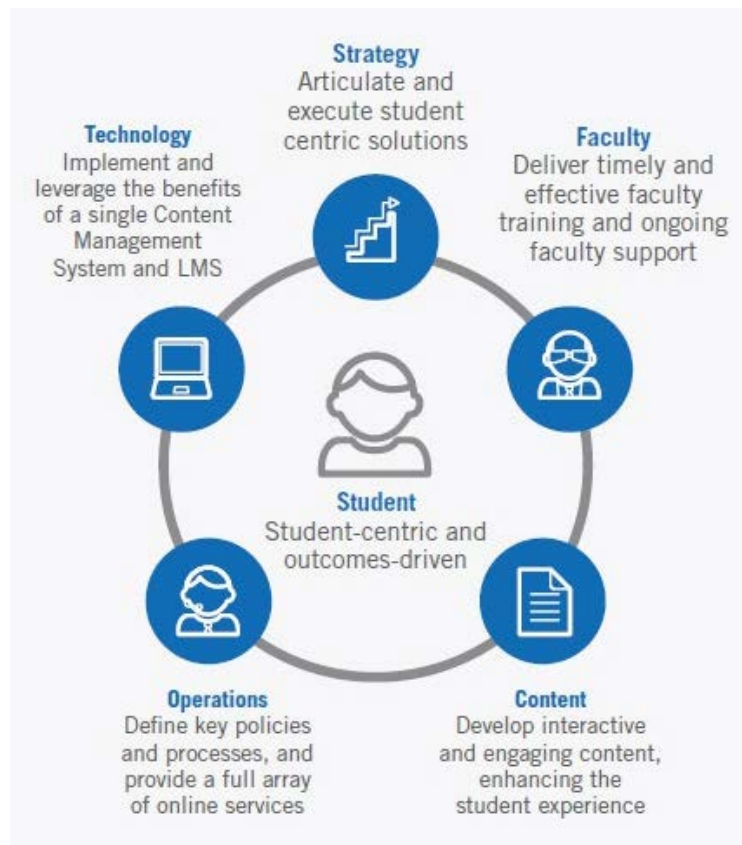


Figure 1. Source: Laureate Network Office, Achieving Laureate Hybridity Goal, [www@lno.laureate.net](mailto:www@lno.laureate.net)

## Research setup

In order to achieve the 25% hybridity mandate Laureate has created the Laureate Network Office, which is tasked with helping its institutions achieve their 25% by transferring knowledge, skills, best practices etc. between Laureate and its institutions. Each institution moreover has organized resources internally to help advance their own hybridity goal. Individuals associated with this initiative are collectively responsible to help their organizations transform and perform.

Transforming and performing entails an education, implementation and assessment track which will run between 2016 and 2019 during which each institution is expected to:

- Re-assess their pedagogy in light of the demands and rational of online and blended teaching and learning.
- Redesign 25% of their courses to be delivered online or in a blended format.
- Train their faculty to be have the needed skills for online and blended delivery formats.
- Adopt and train the necessary staff in the use of a common LMS (Blackboard).
- Create and administer online and blended learning quality assessment procedures and metrics.
- Track faculty and student performance and satisfaction with online and blended formats.

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The coordinated nature of this endeavour (across geographies and within a specific timeframe) is unique and lends itself to a series of comparative longevity studies.

Initial research topics and questions identified include:

- A comparative study (qualitative) of how key European Laureate institutions reframed their organizations toward hybridity; a comparative study analyzing the process and learnings.
- A comparative study (quantitative) of faculty and / or student perceptions, responses to and satisfaction with hybridity.
- A comparative study (qualitative) of regulatory frameworks supporting and / or inhibiting hybridity across the European continent.
- A comparative study (qualitative) of the type of blended learning models to emerge at different institutions and their effectiveness.
- A comparative study of student learning outcomes (quantitative) via hybridity vs. traditional learning modalities.
- A comparative study (quantitative) of hybridity adoption rates across participating institutions.
- A comparative study (qualitative) of the effectiveness and / or success in scaling hybridity up to 25% at each institution.
- Conclusions around (quantitative) operational and business assumptions (cost saving proposition through space saving) tested against actual expenses based on hybridity implementation.

The contemplated research topics cut across a spectrum of EDEN-identified themes and key words. Broadly addressing the transition from one learning environment to another (from F2F to online and blended), the data gathered will inform more specifically questions around the generic effectiveness (pedagogically) of the digital environment and how such effectiveness might vary across social and cultural boundaries (i.e. different Laureate institutions across the European continent) and be impacted by different pedagogical approaches (i.e. pedagogical *brands* of participating institutions). Finally, institutional success in achieving hybridity at scale will be an important research interest.

## Research output

Selected studies will be grounded in systematic data gathering and analysis between 2016 – 2019. Yearly interim progress publications (internal and external) and a final publication (2019) are intended. Final determination of research scope depends on the resources (financial and human) the research team is able to secure by end of Q1 2016.

While the group of researchers involved in this project will be kept small for effective collaboration purposes, in order to broaden the scope of research, additional Laureate institutions will be invited to contribute research data toward predetermined research questions. The invited institutions are the following:

- Istanbul Bilgi University, Istanbul, Turkey – <http://www.laureate.net/OurNetwork/Europe/Turkey/IstanbulBilgiUniversity>;
- École Centrale d'Electronique, Paris, France – <http://www.laureate.net/OurNetwork/Europe/France/EcoleCentraledElectroniqueECE> ;
- École Supérieure du Commerce Extérieur, Paris, France – <http://www.laureate.net/OurNetwork/Europe/France/EcoleSuperieureduCommerceExterieurESCE>;
- European Business School Paris, Paris, France – <http://www.laureate.net/OurNetwork/Europe/France/EuropeanBusinessSchoolParisEBS>;
- Les Roches Marbella, Marbella, Spain – <http://www.laureate.net/OurNetwork/Europe/Spain/LesRochesMarbella>;
- Real Madrid Graduate School, Madrid, Spain – <http://www.laureate.net/OurNetwork/Europe/Spain/Real-Madrid-Graduate-School>;
- Universidad Europea de Canarias, Canary Islands, Spain – <http://www.laureate.net/OurNetwork/Europe/Spain/UniversidadEuropeadeCanariasUEC>;
- Universidad Europea de Valencia, Valencia, Spain – <http://www.laureate.net/OurNetwork/Europe/Spain/UniversidadEuropeadeValenciaUEV>;
- IEDE Business School, Madrid, Spain – <http://www.laureate.net/OurNetwork/Europe/Spain/InstituteforExecutiveDevelopmentIEDE>;
- IADE – Creative University, Porto, Portugal – <http://www.laureate.net/OurNetwork/Europe/Portugal/Instituto-de-Arte-Design-e-Empresa-IADE>;
- Instituto Português de Admistração de Marketing, Lisbon, Portugal – <http://www.laureate.net/OurNetwork/Europe/Portugal/Instituto-Portugus-de-Admistrao-de-Marketing-IPAM>;
- Universidade Europeia, Lisbon, Portugal – <http://www.laureate.net/OurNetwork/Europe/Portugal/UniversidadeEuropeia>.

## Challenges ahead

As suggested, teaching online requires more than the development of technical skills; it requires new pedagogical approaches, new working partnerships, new methods of instructor and student motivation, new staffing roles and structures and new models of student support (Phelps et al, 2000).

This implies that the teaching and learning innovation contemplated across the Laureate network signifies primarily a cultural change for those institutions which have established traditional practices in the delivery of University Education. There are a number of challenges of performing such a cultural shift. These mostly relate to addressing possible resistance

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within institutions and externally, found for example in conservative accreditation institutions and student mentalities whose expectations are firmly rooted in what is familiar and known. Other challenges relate to:

- uniformity in setting up the LMS;
- predictability when it comes to format of courses;
- retaining student's engagement and motivation;
- enhancing Student performance;
- retaining Faculty satisfaction;
- QA review procedures.

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