



# Curriculum Delivery Models in Health Professions Education

June 2025 | Rehab Essentials

## Clarifying Terms and Optimizing Learning

Understanding the clear distinctions between curriculum, curriculum delivery, and pedagogy/andragogy is essential in an effort to optimize student outcomes and support institutional alignment. This white paper defines these terms, explores major curriculum delivery models, and discusses their applications, implications, and evolving trends. It also addresses the common misconception that face-to-face instruction is inherently superior and highlights the pedagogical principles underpinning different delivery models.

## Defining Curriculum, Curriculum Delivery, and Pedagogy/Andragogy

**These elements are distinct but interdependent:** curriculum defines what is taught, pedagogy/andragogy informs why and how it is taught, and delivery defines where and when it occurs.



### Curriculum

The structured content, experiences, and intended outcomes of an educational program. It includes what is taught (topics, skills, and knowledge), in what sequence, and to what depth.



### Curriculum Delivery

How the curriculum is implemented in practice: the timing, method, and location of instruction. It includes the technology, instructional setting (e.g., online vs. residential), and degree of synchronicity.



### Pedagogy/Andragogy

The philosophical and theoretical approach to teaching and learning. Pedagogy typically addresses strategies for teaching children or novice learners, while andragogy focuses on adult learning principles, emphasizing self-direction, relevancy, and experience-based learning.

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## Core Curriculum Delivery Models

Adapted from Allen, Seaman, and Garrett (2007), curriculum delivery methods are commonly categorized based on the proportion of content delivered online:



### **Residential (Traditional Face-to-Face)**

- All instruction and content delivered in person
- 0% of content delivered online
- Suited for high-touch psychomotor skills and interpersonal engagement
- Most residential programs are “web-enhanced” which means that there are online components such as syllabi, readings, and supplemental information. The online content supplements rather than transforms in-person instruction



### **Hybrid/Blended**

- 60-80% of content delivered online, 20-40% in person (residential)
- Combines online modules with scheduled in-person sessions
- Intentional design fuses the strengths of both environments



### **Fully Online**

- 81% or more of content delivered online
- May be synchronous, asynchronous, or both
- Requires robust instructional design and student support systems



### **Flipped Classroom**

- Distinct model that restructures use of classroom time
- Students engage with lectures and materials before class (often online), while class time is used for active learning, problem-solving, and discussion
- Can be implemented within residential or hybrid frameworks

## Evidence-Informed Considerations

Numerous studies challenge the belief that traditional instruction is the gold standard:

- Blended models show equivalent or superior outcomes compared to face-to-face instruction (Muller & Mildenerger, 2021).
- Flipped classrooms, when paired with active learning, improve engagement and academic performance, particularly in health professions education (Strelan, Osborn, & Palmer, 2020).

Effectiveness is less about location and more about the instructional design and learning strategies used.

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## The Role of Flexibility and Access

Curriculum delivery models should align with learner needs:

- Flexible delivery increases access for non-traditional students balancing geographic, work, or family responsibilities (Thibault, 2020).
- Learning management systems and asynchronous tools support students' autonomy and self-pacing, enhancing adult learning.

Programs must ask:

- Who are our learners?
- What delivery model best meets their needs?
- How can we ensure equity and inclusion through delivery design?

## Linking Delivery to Pedagogy and Student Outcomes

Through this model, faculty:

- Shift from content curators to expert learning facilitators
- Gain confidence in hybrid and flipped delivery
- Engage more meaningfully with students
- Experience higher cohesion as teams

Programs benefit through:

- Improved learning outcomes
- Enhanced student engagement
- Stronger alignment with accreditation standards

## Conclusion

Curriculum delivery is not synonymous with curriculum or pedagogy but is a critical mechanism through which both are realized. As health professions education evolves, institutions must intentionally align delivery models with pedagogical principles and learner needs. Blended, flipped, and online models are not inferior alternatives—they are opportunities to extend access, support active learning, and future-proof healthcare education.

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