This session will offer an introduction to blended learning, a new way of merging classroom instruction with online learning activities, primarily large- and small-group discussion using text-based asynchronous discussion boards. Blended Learning is expanding, in part because more and more educational institutions are using a course management system (all include an online discussion feature), and in part because these discussion boards overcome many kinds of communication barriers and foster more widespread and even student participation.

RIT's Online Learning Department has supported and researched more than 150 blended course offerings since Fall 2003. While hearing students were positive about blended learning, research findings indicated that deaf and hard-of-hearing students reported that both the quality and quantity of their interactions with their instructor and other students was greatly improved by the inclusion of an online discussion component. Communication access is enhanced in blended courses, it is proposed, because asynchronous online discussion boards allow deaf and hard-of-hearing students to interact directly with everyone in written English - both inside and outside of class - without messages going through a third party.

The session will conclude with examples of effective practices and recommendations for designing, teaching, and assessing blended courses at every educational level.