

# HyFlex Teaching in Higher Education during the Covid-19 Pandemic

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# Background

- In March 2020, U.S higher-ed institutions were blindsided by a sudden need to shift course delivery formats due to Covid-19.
- Many institutions initially shifted completely online.
- As the pandemic was better understood and mitigated, some in-person delivery resumed with health protocols in place (e.g. masks/social distancing).
- Combining online and in-person course delivery, the Hybrid-Flexible (HyFlex) teaching modality has come to the forefront in the face of the challenges posed by the pandemic.

# Hybrid-Flexible (HyFlex)

- HyFlex allows students to decide between an online or in-classroom learning experience. Faculty must provide both online and in-classroom experiences (Beatty, 2019, sec. 2.1).
- HyFlex is a bi-modal approach that focuses on students' freedom to participate based on what is important to them (Beatty, 2019, sec. 2.1).
- HyFlex requires the instructor to primarily remain face-to-face (F2F) for teaching, but offers the flexibility of either F2F or online to students.

# HyFlex in Higher Education

- Approximately 22% of national four-year higher-ed institutions adopted HyFlex class delivery in Fall 2020, and this percentage remained close to 20% in Spring 2021 (Marsicano & Petty, 2020).
- Beginning in Fall 2021, numerous institutions pushed for a “return to normal” (F2F classes with no social distancing), despite threats from new Covid-19 variants (Gluckman & Diep, 2021).
- The environment is still unpredictable, and HyFlex can continue to play a central role in many higher-ed institutions due to its adaptability and learner-centered educational strategy (Huang et al., 2020, p.2).

# Our Experience

- After teaching fully online for the second half of Spring 2020, teaching shifted to HyFlex in Fall 2020.
- It was required to divide regular-size classes into smaller subsections to maintain social distancing.
- Sub-sectioned students took F2F classes in turn.
- Synchronous participation via Zoom was available to students not able to attend F2F.
- Classes were recorded for students to access for catch-up or review.

# Our Experience

- Student feedback showed they felt well-supported by HyFlex.
- Despite the recent push for F2F instruction, it is still necessary to accommodate students' varying learning needs, and HyFlex is a viable option for this purpose.
- Benefits of HyFlex:
  - Many classrooms are already equipped with technology for synchronous/asynchronous online and F2F instruction, which is convenient for instructors to establish a HyFlex environment.
  - The most important advantage is that HyFlex is learner-centered, personalized, and can maximize student learning opportunities.

# Our Experience

- Benefits of HyFlex (continued):
  - The pandemic has given instructors and students ample practice and development time to become familiar with HyFlex techniques and make flexible transitions among its associated teaching and learning modes.
- Drawbacks of Hyflex:
  - Requires extra effort from the instructor in class management.

# Our Experience

- Drawbacks of HyFlex (continued):
  - HyFlex favors those instructors with extra institutional support (e.g., teaching assistants), which can be unfair to those instructors who lack such support.
  - Asynchronous online instruction could add more work for instructors in engaging with students via collaborative tools (Maloney & Kim, 2020).
  - Course structure and materials require additional effort to be revised (e.g. modification of lecture notes and class activities).



# Future Directions

- HyFlex should be considered as an ongoing trend in teaching and learning.
- Still useful in various academic settings, even outside of the pandemic.
- In adopting HyFlex, institutions should ensure that instructional support is implemented well for students and instructors.
- K-12 settings should use HyFlex carefully with consideration to children's unique developmental needs.
- Conferences and scholarly events can also benefit from HyFlex collaborations.
- HyFlex should constantly evolve to fit diverse needs.

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