Making HyFlex Teaching Work on Your Campus
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<td>HyFlex has gained widespread popularity as colleges sought and continue to seek solutions to pandemic circumstances. It seemingly offers something for everyone: classes delivered in-person and online, with the capacity to switch quickly to completely remote learning if necessary. But implementing it requires significant preparation and support.</td>
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An innovative teaching model, called HyFlex, has been eagerly adopted by many in higher education as colleges have sought to deal with the constraints on classroom learning imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. A precise term that describes an approach to learning that began at San Francisco State University in 2006, HyFlex was developed by Brian Beatty, an associate professor of instructional technologies at San Francisco State University, to accommodate working adult students in an education-technology graduate program. The “flex” stands for the flexibility given to students, who, rather than the instructor, may choose how to attend class on any given day — synchronously in-person or online, or asynchronously online. What Beatty calls the “four pillars” of HyFlex courses — learner choice, equivalence between participation modes, reusability of course materials across modes, and accessibility — promise to deliver an equitable, meaningful learning experience in any of the modalities. While the HyFlex model caught on this past year as a way to continue to educate students while limiting health risks and
expanding accessibility, there’s a catch: It’s far from easy to do. Implementing HyFlex takes faculty training and rethinking traditional teaching techniques; often requires upgraded classroom technologies; and it needs instructional designers and support staff who understand its capabilities and drawbacks. Some students have also found this hybrid model of learning difficult to navigate.

To better understand the challenges, especially how to lead and manage a transition to this new teaching modality, *The Chronicle* organized a panel of higher-ed experts with diverse perspectives from a variety of institutions, including a small private college, a large state university, a public HBCU, a private research university, and a community college.

This report offers key points from their roundtable discussion to help college leaders understand the new model, why it has become a high priority, what the challenges are, and how the faculty is dealing with it. It also looks beyond the pandemic to a future where a new generation of students demands the flexibility of hybrid learning — and how colleges can be prepared. The following excerpts have been edited for length and clarity.
Brian Beatty is an associate professor of instructional technologies in the department of equity, leadership studies, and instructional technologies at San Francisco State University. His primary areas of interest and research include social interaction in online learning, flipped-classroom implementation, and developing instructional-design theory for Hybrid-Flexible learning environments. At SFSU, he pioneered the development and evaluation of the HyFlex course design model for blended learning environments, implementing a “student-directed-hybrid” approach to better support student learning.

Jeanne Samuel is dean of distance learning and instructional technology at Delgado Community College. Her interests are in technology adoption and motivational strategies to promote student learning and completion. As an advocate of game theory for learning, testing for learning, and brain theory for learning, she seeks opportunities to apply these areas of study. She first implemented HyFlex at Delgado during the 2015-16 academic year and uses HyFlex design as the core framework for teaching instructional design.

Kevin Gannon is a professor of history and director of the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at Grand View University. He is the author of Radical Hope: A Teaching Manifesto. His teaching, research, and public work (including writing) centers on critical and inclusive pedagogy; race, history, and justice; and technology and teaching.
Genyne Boston is the associate provost for faculty and academic affairs, as well as the chief of staff for the provost. She provides oversight for the teaching and learning center, faculty development, the office of instructional technology, the registrar’s office, and the quality enhancement program. She is also a professor of English. In her role as associate provost, she strives to ensure that there is continuous programming that targets faculty interests, pedagogical best practice, and technology infusion designed to enhance student performance. She has also taught at Valencia State College, Tallahassee Community College, and Florida State University.

Tom Sheahan is vice provost for curriculum and programs at Northeastern University. He oversees undergraduate and graduate program development and governance, curriculum innovation, institutional assessment, inter-institutional partnerships, and educational and research safety. A faculty member in civil and environmental engineering at Northeastern University since 1991, he is the author of numerous publications and has received the national Tau Beta Pi (Engineering Honor Society) McDonald Mentor award for his work as a faculty adviser, mentor to junior faculty, and adviser of student groups.

Beth McMurtrie is a senior writer for The Chronicle of Higher Education, where she covers the future of learning and technology’s influence on teaching. In addition to her reported stories, she helps write the weekly Teaching newsletter about what works in and around the classroom. She has been with The Chronicle since 1999 and is the author of the 2018 Chronicle report, “The Future of Learning: How Colleges Can Transform the Educational Experience.”
To paraphrase what Kevin Gannon, one of our panelists, wrote in *The Chronicle* in October, for a large swath of higher education, this was not just a Covid semester, it was a HyFlex semester, too.

As the chaos of the spring turned into the frantic preparation of the summer, colleges turned to this teaching model because it promised solutions to many of the challenges they faced: faculty members could teach asynchronously, as well as synchronously in person to students who wanted to be on campus, and online to those learning at home or in quarantine. And given all of the uncertainty and trepidation about the fall semester’s return to campus, a crucial part of its appeal was that it allowed for the possibility of seamlessly returning to a completely online format if necessary.

Our panelists talked about why HyFlex became an appealing option for their particular campuses, the factors that went into their institution’s decision to use it, and the kind of preparation needed to make HyFlex work. Many faculty members had concerns around teaching in this mode and required in-depth training. Courses needed to be designed and/or redesigned and instructional support was critical. And classrooms in many cases needed added technology.

**Beth McMurtrie:** The pandemic hits and suddenly, everybody is talking about HyFlex — it’s the answer to a lot of our problems. So let’s talk about institutions that decided to bring it to the campus on a massive scale. Why did HyFlex become an appealing option on your campus?

**Kevin Gannon:** (Grand View launched HyFlex in the fall of 2020.) We’re a small liberal-arts college, and we serve a lot of students who come from under-resourced socioeconomic backgrounds and first-generation students. One of our selling points...
is the small class size, the relational aspects of what we do, the hands-on resources that we’re able to bring. Our question was, if we’re all remote and online, then what does that look like? Does that undercut our mission and what we say makes us distinctive?

There are two reasons we settled on it. One, we needed to make a decision to help our faculty prepare. As an institution, we offer online programs and classes, but it’s a small percentage of our full-time faculty. If we were going to scale that out, we knew we needed a lot of professional development time and resources over the summer to get ready. Two, we knew we would have students who wanted to be in person as much as possible, because we’re primarily residential. But we also knew, given health circumstances for both students as well as faculty and staff members, not everybody was going to be able to be on campus.

So it was the flexible part of the HyFlex model that was ultimately what sold us on it.

Tom Sheahan: Starting in the fall, we went to a HyFlex model. The reason why we wanted to do this was to ensure we had continuity of our instruction. We wanted to make sure students could continue to learn, but we wanted to provide maximum flexibility to both our faculty and our students, and also to our institution in case we had to retreat back from being on campus. We didn’t want to go through what we had in March where we really had to lurch into that emergency mode.

HyFlex gave us the flexibility to switch back and forth to fully remote or partially remote. This was dependent on faculty’s comfort level being on campus. So we had faculty teaching remotely. We had students who were living at home with their families, but we also had students in the dorms. We also created a platform that allowed students to choose on a week-by-week basis whether they wanted to be in class, and then we would allow a certain number to be in the particular classroom depending on the constraints of that classroom capacity.

We ended up going fully HyFlex with 3,500 sections of classes. It was a big operation. We were able to accommodate student needs as well as faculty teaching remotely.

Genyne Boston: (Florida A&M plans to launch HyFlex in the spring of 2021.) Accessibility was critical. We have about 9,700 students, and our main campus is in Tallahassee, but we have four other campuses across the state. The other priority for us was the quality of the instruction — to Tom’s point, making sure there was a certain level of continuity, when we talked about all of these other faculty members, all these other students, across the state.

We did a great deal of faculty development over the course of the summer trying to get our faculty prepared to teach in this modality. We had a lot of faculty that had some reservations, maybe even anxiety, about trying to navigate it.

So we attempted to usher in informal discussions about HyFlex by having a series of happy hours over the course of the fall. Did intensive training in December right as the semester ended, and we’re doing intensive training this week just to make sure faculty has a certain level of comfort.

We also spent a great deal of the summer and the fall as we were researching HyFlex looking at what it was going to mean in the way of the reconfiguration of a number of our classrooms. We had to make a number of quick upgrades to some of the classrooms, labs, and equipment that faculty would need.

We attempted to do this gradually, taking baby steps, and we really won’t see what the end will look like until closer to April and March. So far, it has been a relatively smooth but very intense transition into this new mode of instruction.

McMurtrie: How many of your courses are being offered in HyFlex? At Northeastern and Grand View virtually all of them are. Is that the same for Florida A&M?

Boston: It’s a smaller cohort. Roughly 600 sections, and from 275 to 300 faculty members teaching the HyFlex sections.

McMurtrie: Delgado Community College is a little bit different in that there’s no sort of institutional mandate or requirement to offer all of your courses in HyFlex, but your faculty and some departments have been experimenting with HyFlex over the years?
Jeanne Samuel: We started in 2015 with a pilot. We received a grant from our Louisiana Board of Regents, and we started in our business program because they had outgrown their spaces. They were already doing this Tuesday/Thursday splitting of the class, teaching two different classes on those days. So HyFlex was a great solution. We used that not just as a pilot to learn HyFlex, but also to be able to get around the physical constraints we had.

It was really meant well, but it was so much work for the faculty. It was new for everyone. We had three faculty members in the pilot and four courses. I was hoping we would get huge growth from having the grass-roots like that, but we kind of lost traction there when a faculty member departed. Unfortunately, they really don’t understand no matter how much training we have, what HyFlex is. In-person with same-time synchronous online is a real workload for them.

Now with Covid, there’s been a renewed interest. HyFlex is a great solution — there will be work upfront, but less work over time. Our biology professor who was part of the pilot and instructional designers embraced it. She’s having great success with her lecture classes. It will be another semester or so before she can put it in the labs — if even then.

McMurtrie: Brian, because you pioneered HyFlex, you’ve been doing tons of workshops and having lots of conversations with colleges around the country. Is there anything you’d like to add from that perspective?

Brian Beatty: I found that when I talk to schools, they usually are interested enough
to invest in some faculty development time. The challenges I see are a couple. One is that we don’t know how long the public-health requirements are going to be in place that are going to restrict us from going back to life as normal. To invest significantly in something like HyFlex takes time, money, and a lot of energy. So if this is just another two-month or three-month solution, there’s less likelihood of having the kind of investment it takes to really do this well. And I don’t think you want to do this if you’re not willing to do it well, because it can be chaotic. It doesn’t mean it has to be done perfectly. But you have to have this intention when you’re doing the online, you’re going to do it in an engaging manner. You’re not creating an asynchronous course and the faculty never shows up during the week and so students are left out there. That is not the model that I want to associate with Hyflex.

On the faculty side, we’re still hitting this headwind of control. “What do you mean I’m going to give students control over being in class or being online? How am I going to plan around that? What happens if two people show up or nobody shows up, or I have three people online in the asynchronous part of my course? How am I going to manage that?”

So we have to be able to deal with that unknown aspect of students’ taking that control. There are some good solutions out there, especially in the short-term, like having students indicate their intention for the following week, or actually reserving a seat in class. So you can still give students flexibility and manage at least knowing what’s going to be happening.

And then of course, when you’ve got systems like my own system, we have at our institution 30,000 students and 1,500 faculty. Preparing faculty en masse for teaching in a HyFlex format takes a significant investment.

**McMurtrie:** Walk us through the professional training that you did, the technology that you had to put into the classrooms, the in-course support that instructors needed, what students needed.

**Gannon:** At a smaller college, there’s maybe not a lot of resources. A lot of us are wearing different hats. We have a faculty committee on blended and online learning that helps with the curriculum and development support. So that was a body that kind of came around me and the provost counsel in terms of figuring out how we were going to get people trained.

I took about three weeks and built a course on our LMS, with modules, modeling out what a HyFlex course looks like; here’s the online interface. I walked my colleagues through that, from the perspective that their students would first encounter their course. We did a bunch of synchronous workshops via videoconference over the summer. We did have some stipend money, but really not a lot. My colleagues really stepped up and did amazing work, over and above what anybody expected.

We’re fortunate that most of our classrooms are very small — mostly 30-student capacity more or less. So we have been able over the years to work them up with technology. Almost all of our classrooms have an instructor workstation or projector, an interactive smart board already built in. Some of them already had drop mics from the ceiling or integrated webcams. We were fortunate that we’ve been investing in that already.

We had to get an institutional Zoom account, we had to up our LMS storage. We had to find some development money to get folks stipends and course-development stipends. We acquired a couple of licenses for digital tools. We bought webcams to go to every class and hook up to the instructor station computer. We rigged them up on tripods so you can swivel it around. What we found out though was microphones on that weren’t going to work. So we did have to invest in portable conference mics as well, which is one more thing to plug in.

But in terms of capital outlays, most of our infrastructure was in place. It was more of a matter of expanding tools we were already using and storage space, or acquiring software licenses for smaller, more discrete tools.
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—Brian Beatty
And with the professional development side, we were constantly getting feedback from folks going through the training. What does it look like as you're trying to build these courses? Do you want to get into a room and practice conducting both in person and online? We were trying to get what this would look like for someone who is not necessarily experienced in classroom technology. What are the things we can help with to lessen the time and lessen the bandwidth that it takes?

**Sheahan:** The two main areas were infrastructure and faculty training and support. We were already in the process of converting our LMS. We decided over the summer we needed to do infrastructure upgrades. We did 200 classroom upgrades for faculty to go into the rooms and turn on the systems and be able to teach both in class and to remote students, or for remote faculty members to teach both of those populations if necessary.

Our faculty also really wanted a demo classroom. That's something we worked really hard to make sure we had, an upgraded classroom available for them to go into and feel what it was like or at least what we thought it would feel like. In the end, we were not able to factor in the cognitive load to process all that. So that's something we didn't count on in our training.

We hired a number of instructional designers. The other thing we did is double-dip. We wanted to help support Ph.D. students and trained them for four weeks on academic technology and online-teaching techniques. Then we assigned them out to do one-on-one appointments with every faculty member across campus. That was their job for the summer. The faculty really felt they had someone who they could sit with virtually and guide them.

We also hired 300 students to be ready to go out into each classroom every time a class met. They could be there in three minutes or less. And we developed a software system where a faculty member would email for help. They didn't even need to write anything. They just had to send it to an address, and an instructional assistant would be there within three minutes to help them if they had trouble connecting. We just wanted to strategically give resources to faculty to make this as easy as possible from the technology side. Because we knew they had their hands full getting used to just being able to teach in this mode. I think we had a faculty who in the end was fairly comfortable.

**Boston:** We have given a great deal of attention to the equipment needs, not just for faculty, but for our students. We had students going back home where there was no internet, so we sent a number of students home with hotspots. We purchased laptops or tablets for students who did not have the means, to ensure that they could stay connected to their courses.

We also were going through an LMS conversion, and we had some staffing limitations. We had to be creative. We have some faculty who have backgrounds in instructional design, who ultimately served as faculty experts. We have 12 colleges and schools with varying design, and we were able to utilize these faculty experts along with the instructional designers from our office of instructional technology to assist with the professional development that was needed for roughly 500-plus faculty over the course of the summer.

We also had to do some creative re-imagining of infrastructure. And as we were working to identify funds for infrastructure, we were also making sure that faculty were being trained. We offered incentives both for our full-time and part-time faculty. So both full-time and part-time faculty received honorary stipends over the summer to make sure they participated in all the training, did them fully, and implemented some of the things they took away from the training.

We, too, will be utilizing students. The training for learning assistants is going to start next week. And they can help faculty to troubleshoot either virtually or going physically into the classroom.
Lessons Learned

To use the HyFlex approach well requires a lot of things to fall into place, including faculty buy-in, student engagement, course design, instructional support, and technology investments, to name a few. Given the extraordinarily challenging circumstances of the past year, it is not surprising that implementation was a heavy lift and that colleges encountered bumps in the road.

Our panelists discussed what worked and what didn’t on their campuses, surprises that came up, changes they had to make midstream, as well as technology and equity challenges. HyFlex may work better for some types of courses than others, and students did not always make wise choices about which modality would work best for them.

Beth McMurtrie: How did the fall semester go with HyFlex?

Tom Sheahan: The mechanics of the system worked. We were able to have this operational continuity that we, as a baseline, were certainly hoping for. Our faculty gradually started to learn that they had to form more of a sense of community than they normally have to work on when they have students in the classroom. That should have been obvious to us, but I don’t think we knew how to train faculty to create that.

We had faculty say they were exhausted at the end of the day from processing somebody in class raising their hand, or remote learners who were chatting or trying to raise their hands online. The ability to process all of this and keep the technology up and running was a lot for faculty to get used to. It sucked a lot of the oxygen away from other things that faculty normally do.

Our students proved to be remarkably resilient in adapting to this. They found that there were advantages to being remote learners. We found students were actually more comfortable asking questions when they could do it through a chat or other mechanisms than they would have been if they raised their hand in a large, in-person class. That was an interesting finding.

But we also know our students wanted to be back in person with one another. As
we talk in terms of lessons learned, we also found as time went on, we did see declines in student in-person attendance. We’re unclear whether faculty may have also decided, if only a couple of people are here, maybe I’m just going to go remote and teach remotely at this point, because students were starting to say, Why should I have to come to class and sit six to eight feet away from people? My peers who I normally hang out with aren’t here with me, because they didn’t get scheduled to be in class that day.

Kevin Gannon: We observed similar things as well. I’m still going through a lot of the data we have. I taught fully online and in the HyFlex new student seminar course myself, and worked with faculty and colleagues through the teaching center. Having a full macro- and micro-level was an interesting experience.

For the most part, it worked pretty well. With all that uncertainty and rising numbers throughout the semester, we were able to be flexible and meet student needs as students were going in and out of different modes. That had been one of the big things for us going in. So in that sense, HyFlex was extraordinarily successful.

We knew intellectually it would take a lot of our bandwidth to teach in this fashion, not having taught that way before. But knowing that and experiencing it are two separate things. We did see a similar reduction in in-person synchronous attendance. We actually scheduled a lot of our first-year classes in bigger spaces and repurposed some of them so that every student could come in person every class session and still be socially distant and safe. The administration’s thinking was, students were saying they want to be in person. They wanted to be in person, but not when in-person was weird: I’m in a big lecture hall that seats 120, or a seminar class that seats 18, and we’re all masked up, and there’s couple of people on Zoom, and it’s just weird’ — they start going synchronous or asynchronous.

What we ended up having happen — our first-year students in particular — chose

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“Students were saying they want to be in-person. They wanted to be in-person, but not when in person was weird: ‘I’m in a big lecture hall that seats 120, or a seminar class that seats 18, and we’re all masked up, and there’s couple of people on Zoom, and it’s just weird’ — they start going synchronous or asynchronous.”

— Kevin Gannon
stopped. My first-year students were like, We didn’t do anything since March. So one of the things we counted on was students would have experience from spring of their senior year. Well, very few of them did. If we had known that beforehand, we would have made some different choices in terms of how we were preparing students, what we were putting in front of students, and also working with faculty with those seminar-style classes — thinking about how to make them work better.

**Genyne Boston:** We don’t have a lot of online courses, or a lot of faculty teaching online courses. So we probably could have done some type of assessment to determine what is really going to be needed in the way of professional development and tailoring that to certain faculty who may not be as proficient. To underscore what Kevin said, we also didn’t really do a lot of assessing the needs of our students. We believed students are so resilient and so adaptable, and they’re just going to come and roll right into whatever we put before them. But we had students also who were struggling with trying to keep up in an asynchronous online course. There were students who might have reached out and gotten some academic support, but that student engagement begins to fall off. And then students start to just kind of slowly slip away. We saw that with a number of our students.

We’re going to need to look at how we interface with our part-time faculty. Because I think that’s another group that we need to give more attention to in making sure that their needs are being met.

**Jeanne Samuel:** As I’m listening to the solutions that everybody has come up with, in many ways, we were ready to go. We had our infrastructure in place, and we’ve been building since 2005 — our main campus has had webcams, we’ve had the software, and doing the training and gearing up for it. Certainly, a mandate would push it further.

But what I feel really optimistic about, and what I’ve learned from this and listening to others is how to prepare for the future. A realistic timeline for widespread adoption could be 2022 or 2023 if we wanted to do it quickly. We’ve done a lot of training, and we’ve changed our training with Covid.

We brought in digital-literacy assessments. We started teaching mobile, and to do microlessons, so that they can learn things on their phones, because that’s really what they had. We provided computers. Bandwidth was a huge issue. It’s really altered how we believed we needed to design these courses. At the end of the day, we really have to rethink how we offer courses, especially as we design for HyFlex. Because we want to make sure that they are learning what they need to learn, and that they have the flexibility to learn it when they need it and how they need it. Those were really important lessons for us, because we had a lot of assumptions based on years of being online.

**McMurtrie:** Brian, how does all of this match with what you hear nationally and your experience teaching in the HyFlex form?

**Brian Beatty:** For us, audio was problematic for probably a dozen years or so. But there’s lots of different solutions. The video is not always as important — it’s nice to have — although there are some classes where the video is just as important. So the audio-visual challenges are real.

What I tend to do now, we have a lot of well-equipped rooms and also rooms with just a projector. So I have my technology toolkit I take with me, which is a portable webcam and conference microphone and my phone, which I can plug in, so that I’m not reliant on the classroom technology. I do know a lot of institutions invested heavily in this baseline technology and that’s really going to support them.

When we look at engagement, we actually see these trends in lower engagement in all our classes and in different modes. The question I think about as a faculty member is, Do I design to kind of build engagement back in? Or do I acknowledge that general tendency among students and design the course so that it’s okay if they’re less engaged, later on, because they’re doing more independent work or something like that?
Post-Pandemic Possibilities

The coronavirus vaccine rollout promises glimmers of hope that some semblance of normalcy may be on the horizon for colleges. For colleges looking ahead, questions about HyFlex remain: Will they continue to use it? Adapt it in some way? Is it worth it?

The preparation and investment required by HyFlex, faculty concerns and stresses with bandwidth, and the impact on students in terms of equity and engagement are significant issues. And yet it is also clear that allowing students to choose — and switch back and forth among — different participation modes has great appeal not only during this particular time, but going forward.

Beth McMurtrie: What advice would you give to others? Could you see continual use of HyFlex on your campus after the pandemic is over? What do you see broadly down the road?

Jeanne Samuel: The future of HyFlex at Delgado is strong. We’ve been building towards it. We’re almost to the cliff and ready to jump. But jumping during the pandemic just wasn’t going to work for us.

We’ve invested heavily in the infrastructure. I’ve done a lot of training on it. We’ve done continuous training not just at our institution and our system, but I think for us, it’s getting the teachers to do it one part at a time. You don’t have to develop the whole course at once. At this point, pick something in your course you’re comfortable with and put it in phases. So over the next year, no matter what happens with Covid, I think that’s where our push should be. I do have a target date, and I do think we can be adopting it as a modality. One of our limitations is how do you code it? Historically, it’s been coded as a hybrid course, and it’s very confusing for the students. Even though we adopt a definition within the institution and within the division, I still don’t think it’s clear to faculty and students. And until we can get that clarity of what HyFlex is
“You don’t have to develop the whole course at once. At this point, pick something in your course you’re comfortable with and put it in phases.”

—Jeanne Samuel

and what it isn’t, it’s also difficult to adopt it properly. We need our systems and administration to get in sync also.

**Genyne Boston:** Its future is very bright at Florida A&M University. We’ve invested a lot. And HyFlex has forced us to raise the bar. I don’t see us going back to what we did before, pandemic or not. If I had to offer advice to a school that is thinking about HyFlex, I would suggest that they read Brian’s e-book and do the research, and do some intentional assessment all across the board — of students, faculty, staff, administration — campuswide to make determinations about how or what element of HyFlex they’re going to introduce, because I don’t think it’s a cookie-cutter model where one size fits all. I think we are going to benefit from it because we’ve been able to take elements of the HyFlex model and tailor it to what we need to best serve our students and our faculty.

**Kevin Gannon:** Most of our students work part-time or full-time off campus. We have struggled a lot with schedules, travel, work, and family, and we have a lot of students who are “nontraditional.” So HyFlex answers a lot of the questions that we’ve been asking for several years.

I think there will be HyFlex courses within our broader offering of courses. I wouldn’t see it universal like it is now during the pandemic. But I have colleagues who already say we want to keep doing this. So going forward, we will probably have sections of high-demand courses, core courses, intro courses, that will be offered traditional face-to-face, fully online, or HyFlex.
We’ve changed the way we do faculty technology now. Instead of a regular rotation where you get a new computer in your office, we’re all doing surface tablets — it’s portable and flexible. So we’re looking at this long-term. Because HyFlex really resonates with a lot of the things that we had been sort of contemplating and kind of half embracing, this sort of gave us the catalyst to go all-in in some of the things we were talking about. For us, it’s a great development.

But for the type of institution we are and the students we serve, HyFlex is a mode of not just teaching and learning, but thinking about the way we learn. That really resonates for us. It will definitely be a significant tool in our toolbox going forward.

Tom Sheahan: Like everyone else, this acceleration that was caused by the pandemic ran smack into big strategic comparatives that we already had. We now have six campuses across North America and in London, and one of the things we wanted to explore is, how do we have other students experience a course online on entrepreneurship from our Silicon Valley campus?

It also brings closer to reality meeting our co-op students where they are. They may be on other experiences away from campus. Maybe they’re on a research expedition or off doing something elsewhere, they can’t be there but still want to take a course, and want to do it synchronously. This will allow them to do that.

And working adults — the Boston campus and for some of our other campuses in big metropolitan areas — people don’t want to commute all the way into the classroom. For many institutions, this will allow us to deliver in a more robust way. Or let instructors who don’t want to come into campus teach remotely as an option, which we have done a little bit of.

Brian Beatty: What I’m starting to look at more now with several different research groups is at equity issues and how HyFlex holds promise for potentially giving us more equitable access to high-quality education across the board. We know not all of our students have access to our classroom environments. Even those that do are not always the best served in a classroom environment. We know not all of our students have access to high-quality synchronous environments. Right? We probably thought it was better than it was before. Now we all know how much there is really a gap there around the technology application and the bandwidth. So synchronous online is not a perfect option. And the asynchronous option, it’s more accessible to students, but yet even in that access, sometimes it’s a weaker access. It’s less natively engaging.

So if we’re combining these different options, and students are making good choices, then we’re able to serve more students that are more effective to support their own learning. So if we can do that, then perhaps we actually can solve some of our equity issues. And we get better and better as we add the different options. And that’s my great hope.


“Hybrid, HyFlex, Online, and Everything in Between: Course Models at a Glance,” blog post by Jenae Cohn, June 9, 2020.

