HyFlex: One Faculty Member's Recommendations

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Abstract

HyFlex is a teaching modality that involves facilitating a class session simultaneously in-person and synchronously online. Ensuring a positive and productive learning environment for all students, regardless of how they choose to attend, requires faculty to incorporate best practices for both modes and to have a certain level of comfort with the technology required to ensure everyone's needs are met. Technology issues related to and recommended syllabus content and course design for the HyFlex modality are discussed.

Introduction

HyFlex as a teaching modality is designed to allow students the flexibility to choose how they wish to participate in a course from session to session. Their choices may include synchronously online through a video application such as Microsoft Teams, synchronously in-person, some combination of the two, or fully asynchronously online (Columbia Center for Teaching and Learning, 2020).   Here at Eastern Florida State College, the one option not available is fully asynchronously online, because fully online course sections are scheduled separately. For those faculty considering a HyFlex teaching modality, what follows are some suggestions based on my experience during Spring 2024, when I taught one section of STA 2023, Introductory Statistics, in a HyFlex mode, as well as a short list of online resources.

Technology Issues

With this modality, all class periods are facilitated simultaneously in-person and synchronously online through Microsoft Teams. Faculty are required to moderate the chat feature in Teams for questions from the students attending online while also facilitating the face-to-face session. Facilitators should expect that monitoring the chat will interrupt timing and train of thought. Responding to the

chats will likely require class time that was not accounted for during the original design of in-class activities. Therefore, review current lesson plans and try where possible to free five to ten minutes per class period for this.

Second, logging into the classroom computer console, the learning management system (LMS) course companion, and Microsoft Teams takes time. Arrive to class five to ten minutes early to verify the microphone is working, students in the Teams classroom are muted, and the chat feature is opened in a separate window. Also, consider testing this prior to the start of the term to verify everything is functioning properly.

When teaching in a HyFlex modality, faculty must ensure students accessing instruction remotely have the same exposure to and opportunity for learning as those participating in-person. "The modes, though not equal, [must] provide equivalent learning outcomes. All students are expected to reflect, contribute developing ideas, and interact with their peers in the process of learning" (Columbia Center for Teaching and Learning, 2020, section 3). To meet this requirement, verify the online students are able to access any files posted in the LMS course companion, as all students, regardless of how they are attending, must be provided with the same material. Because these files will be posted online, confirm current accessibility standards are met.

Additionally, in-class activities that can be run simultaneously online need to be identified. This will take careful consideration as some beloved in-class activities may need to be completely redesigned to work both in-person and synchronously online. For activities that require group work, use the breakout room feature on Teams to form groups for the online students. Consider integrating low or no-stakes assessments accessible by both in-person and remote students. These may be launched through a survey tool such as Microsoft Forms or the clicker applets embedded in the educational material publisher's LMS.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, do not assume students have any idea how to conduct themselves in a HyFlex course. In particular, they may have no experience logging onto Microsoft Teams, using the chat feature, "raising their hands" in Teams, or participating in a synchronous online course. Each of these should be discussed with or demonstrated for students during the first week of class.

Syllabus Requirements

Not all course content easily translates to a synchronous online mode. Therefore, before the start of term identify which in-class activities require physical attendance by the students and either include the associated class dates in the course syllabus or on the LMS course companion. Similarly, consider which of the course assessments require physical attendance and publish these dates. The College's description of HyFlex enables faculty to require students to attend synchronously in person. Include a statement regarding equipment requirements. The College policy allows faculty to require a microphone and webcam. While access to a computer is implied, it should be stated explicitly, along with a statement about phone usage. Include a description of applets or software access needed for students to complete activities or assessments when attending remotely.

Below is the policy I included on my syllabus when piloting this modality during the spring term, which worked well enough for a first attempt at HyFlex.

The course will be taught on campus and simultaneously streamed online via Teams. You are required to attend the first day of class on campus in the classroom. We have to set up the permissions on the computer station you will be using, which takes several minutes or days, depending on the issues that occur.

While you will have the flexibility to participate virtually, the lecture will not be recorded and will only be available to watch via streaming at the same time as if attending on campus. A webcam and microphone will be required for all students who use the virtual option for attending class. You will be required to turn on your camera and expected to participate when called upon during class.

You need to download Microsoft 365 on your computer if you do not have the Microsoft Office suite on your computer. We will be using WORD and EXCEL during class. Microsoft 365 is free to all students.

You will be required to take all quizzes and exams, including the final exam, on campus during the scheduled class time.

NOTE: Portions of this course may be run in a flipped format, which means homework will include completing lecture notes while watching videos, as well as exercises from the textbook. Watching the videos when assigned is vital as the lecture will not be given again during the next class day. The purpose of this is to enable us to apply the concepts to data during class.

Participation

Serious consideration should be given to classroom policies that encourage and perhaps incentivize participation by those attending synchronously online. I chose to include a participation category in my grading schedule, which was as follows:

- Four Exams, which included the final exam, were weighted at 85%.
- Quizzes, which included dropping the lowest two, were weighted at 12%.
- Participation was weighted at 3%.

The participation grade affected the overall course grade assignment for one of the 12 students enrolled in the course. The student's final course grade increased 0.5 points, which enabled the student to pass the course with a C.

Participation should be defined for the students, whether an honest attempt, completion, or correctness is required for the associated activities or low/no stakes assessments. I taught my course in a computer lab and used Microsoft Forms for students to complete activities and no-stakes assessments

either singly or in pairs with a set time limit. To keep grading easy, participation was defined as making an honest attempt and each activity or assessment was worth one point.

One Warning

A HyFlex course, while it has a synchronous online component, is not a live-online course. Per College policy, recording the in-class sessions and posting them to the LMS course companion is not allowed. Faculty members who wish to include videos that address in-class material will need to either produce them or link to videos available online through resources such as YouTube, Khan Academy, or the College Library.

Final Thoughts

With careful consideration to activity and assessment design, the extra time that is required during class to facilitate in two modes, and the technology issues that will inevitably happen, HyFlex can be successfully employed. Synchronous in-person teaching today already requires supplemental online instruction, activities, and assessments, which means we all have, to some extent, instructional tools that can easily be adapted for a HyFlex environment. If it seems overwhelming, remember that "[HyFlex] allow[s] students to choose the mode of engagement that works best for them" (Columbia Center for Teaching and Learning, 2020, section 3).

Reference

Columbia Center for Teaching and Learning (2020). Hybrid/HyFlex Teaching & Learning. Columbia
       University. Retrieved July 2, 2024 from https://ctl.columbia.edu/resources-and-
       technology/teaching-with-technology/teaching-online/hyflex/

Resources

https://topkit.org/developing/tools-techniques-strategies/student-engagement-in-synchronous-online-course-delivery/

Provides recommendations for synchronous online teaching and a list of resources. The host
       organization is Florida Virtual Campus.

https://www.gvsu.edu/elearn/help/tips-for-teaching-hyflex-and-dual-delivery-courses-137.htm

Provides a classroom setup punch list, 10 HyFlex teaching tips, and a list of resources. The host
       organization is Grand Valley State University.

https://www.nten.org/blog/9-best-practices-engagement-virtual-meetings

Provides nine tips for improving engagement in synchronous online meetings. The host organization is
the Nonprofit Technology Enterprise Network (NTEN).

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IK9xG6idBxc

One hour video titled "Building a HyFlex Course to Support Student Success." Facilitated by Dr. Wendy
Tietz, Professor of Accounting, Kent State University.