

Chapter 11

Hybrid Courses with Flexible Participation: The HyFlex Course Design

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ABSTRACT

Students in higher education have more demands placed on their time and need a college education for more careers than ever before. Flexible class participation options are needed that provide students with opportunities to manage their hectic lives with more individualized control. At the same time, most institutions of higher education are under pressure to serve more students and serve existing students more effectively. Online courses are often considered part of a systematic solution to these issues, but many schools and their faculty do not want to jettison their effective classroom approaches in order to shift to online delivery, nor should they. HyFlex courses may support both online and classroom-based courses and programs without deploying separate classes in each mode. HyFlex courses allow students to participate in the classroom or online and to make that choice on a continuous basis. The HyFlex design is used at many institutions to provide these benefits. This chapter describes the HyFlex design and development process, explains two common course types, and provides summary evaluation data on effectiveness of the approach.

INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS THE HYFLEX COURSE DESIGN?

This opening section introduces and defines the HyFlex course design. A brief history of the approach is included.

- **Hybrid:** Combines both online and face-to-face teaching and learning activities.

- **Flexible:** Students may choose whether or not to attend face-to-face sessions with no “learning deficit.”

The HyFlex course design was developed through a formative research process (Reigeluth & Frick, 1999) for graduate courses in the Instructional Technologies (ITEC) Master’s degree program at San Francisco State University

(SF State). (Beatty, 2007a, 2007b). In brief, a HyFlex course design enables a flexible participation policy for students whereby students may choose to attend face-to-face synchronous class sessions or complete course learning activities online without physically attending class. Hybrid courses typically include a blend of instructional activities that include prescribed classroom and online components for all students. (Graham, 2006) HyFlex courses allow students to create their own “blend” of online and classroom learning experiences, within the design constraints established by the instructor.

In a HyFlex course, the instructor provides instructional structure, content, and activities to meet the needs of students participating both in-class and online. These are not necessarily completely separated sets of activities, and are typically not the same activities for both types of student participation. The learning environment must be designed to support effective student learning in either participation mode. No matter which participation format is chosen, teaching and learning activities should:

- Be presented effectively and professionally.
- Engage learners with generative learning activities.
- Use authentic assessment to evaluate student learning.

The HyFlex course design principles are explained more fully below, after a description of institutional factors driving this effort. Two examples of typical HyFlex courses are then explained, followed by a discussion of some of the important outcomes that have resulted from this approach.

BACKGROUND: WHAT IS THE NEED FOR HYFLEX?

Development of the HyFlex course design has been driven by several important institutional factors; 1) the need for variable flexibility in student schedules for graduate and undergraduate students at SF State, 2) the ITEC program’s desire to attract online students without building a separate online program, and the 3) desire of other SF State faculty and programs to expand their reach outside of the local geographic region and beyond the physical limitations of the classroom and the daily class schedule.

At SF State, essentially all graduate students commute to classes, and a large majority of graduate students work full time. Many undergraduate students commute to class as well, traveling up to 60 miles or more to attend class in person. Most graduate courses meet face to face once a week for approximately three hours, while most undergraduate courses meet multiple times in a week. In the ITEC program, courses are offered in the late afternoon and evenings to accommodate students’ work schedules. While some ITEC graduate students live within several miles of campus, many students travel for one to two hours (each way) from every part of the San Francisco Bay Area. Since SF State is located in San Francisco and connected to the rest of the region by three major bridges spanning San Francisco Bay, student (and faculty) commutes often include the additional time and cost of transiting heavily traveled bridges at rush hour. To attend class in person each week, students may spend three or more hours *per class* in “bottlenecked” commute traffic. For many students, this is a major burden; is it necessary?

The Birth of HyFlex

The ITEC program at SF State draws students from across the SF Bay Area in part due to its comprehensive approach to the Instructional

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