**What is HyFlex?**

The topic of this month's Teaching Tip is the HyFlex course delivery model. Teaching Tips are designed to provide ideas, share educational resources, and promote faculty discussion across campus. Although HyFlex has been around since 2005, the model has evolved with institutions adopting different approaches, blending participation modes, and creating their own brand names (Beatty, 2019a). Because the pandemic forced faculty into remote learning, some for the first time, many faculty and administrators are using the term HyFlex, but without an accurate understanding. In this Tip, I'll define the model, describe how it works, identify design principles, and outline some benefits as well as challenges.

**Definition.** HyFlex is derived from the terms hybrid and flexible. Per Brian Beatty's definition, the HyFlex label should only be applied to courses that are "purposefully designed to 1) combine at least two complete learning paths classroom and at least one online, and 2) support ongoing student choice (flexibility) among these learning paths" (2019a, p.9). In a HyFlex course, students choose how they want to participate in any class session by attending in a traditional face-to-face (F2F) environment or online. The online participation can be available in a synchronous or asynchronous mode or sometimes both (Beatty, 2019c).

HyFlex is different from a hybrid or blended course. Per NMU's definition, a hybrid course consists of online/web-based activities (either synchronous or asynchronous) mixed with F2F classroom meetings, replacing a significant percentage, but <u>not</u> all required F2F instructional activities. In a hybrid course, students often do <u>not</u> have a choice for a given class, week, or instructional mode of how they will participate. This lack of student flexibility is one of the key differences between a hybrid and HyFlex course.

Last academic year, when teaching in socially distanced classrooms, many faculty were forced to combine F2F instruction with synchronous Zoom. However, live streaming F2F classes to remote students also does not meet the definition of HyFlex because it fails to provide learner choice for an asynchronous online option (Milner et al., 2020). Currently, NMU does not have a standard HyFlex course definition or offer HyFlex courses, but we may consider this delivery model in the future.

**How does HyFlex work?** The development of a single HyFlex course or an entire program offering requires an educational paradigm shift to create the culture needed for effective implementation (Lu & Rodriguez, 2019). To be successful, HyFlex delivery involves a needs analysis, deliberate course design, continuous assessments, and faculty support (Rider & Moore, 2021). Faculty will have to reconstruct their course to create multiple ways for students

to interact with the content, each other, and the instructor (Milman et al., 2019). The key is the alignment of content with the technology regardless of delivery mode to ensure equivalent learning is occurring. To evaluate learning, faculty should use the same assignments and assessment methods for all students. Faculty also need to be creative and flexible as student participation will vary. For example, to engage <u>all</u> students, faculty might allow F2F learners in-class time to participate in online discussion forums with their remote peers or cancel one F2F class to enable students to work collaboratively on group projects outside of scheduled class time (B. Beatty, personal communication, November 11, 2021).

**Course Design**. A HyFlex course must be designed to allow for students to self-select the learning experiences which best meet their individual preferences, needs, or immediate circumstances (Beatty, 2019c; Rider & Moore, 2021). Four fundamental values, each with a guiding or universal principle, are crucial to course design. These principles are meant to guide faculty and instructional designers to create effective learning opportunities for all pathways through a course (Beatty, 2019c). The values with the corresponding principles are:

1. **Learner Choice:** *Provide meaningful alternative participation modes and enable students to choose between participation modes daily, weekly, or topically*.
2. **Equivalency:** *Provide learning activities in all participation modes which lead to equivalent learning outcomes.*
3. **Reusability:** *Utilize artifacts from learning activities in each participation mode as "learning objects" for all students.*
4. **Accessibility:** *Equip students with technology skills and equitable access to all participation modes* (Beatty, 2020c, p. 2).

Prior to launching a HyFlex course, faculty and administrators need to complete a cost-benefit analysis (Beatty, 2019b). Is there a true need for HyFlex? What problems or issues will multi-modal delivery address? Is the implementation of a HyFlex course worth the costs? Some of the benefits and challenges (i.e. costs) outlined below may be useful to generate essential discussions (Beatty, 2019b; Milman et al., 2020; Rider & Moore, 2021).

**Benefits.** Because of flexible choices, many students report being highly satisfied with HyFlex courses. Some benefits include:

- **Students:** Increased flexibility, improved accessibility especially for distant and nontraditional students, and better attendance
- **Faculty:** Ability to teach using multi-modal methods, less course cancellations due to low enrollments, alternate course plan in place if university operations are disrupted
- **Institution:** Improved recruitment and ability to meet the needs of distant and underserved populations, less chance of operation disruptions due to climate change, natural disasters, and health crises (e.g. poor air quality, cold/heat waves, forest fires, hurricanes, blizzards, and pandemics).

**Challenges.** Although HyFlex delivery offers several benefits, implementing a course with multiple and simultaneous participation pathways presents challenges for faculty, students, and institutions (Beatty, 2019b; Milman et al., 2020; Rider & Moore, 2021). These challenges are best addressed long before implementation and require input from stakeholders. Some challenges to consider include:

- **Faculty factors:**
  - **Course development**: Significant time commitment to develop content, assignments, and assessments

- o **Alignment:** Integration of the curriculum with technology while using multiple delivery modes
- o **Synchronous delivery:** Training related to the use of teleconferencing software and management of F2F and remote learners.
- o **Asynchronous delivery**: Professional development related to online course design and use of instructional technology, assistance to ensure content is accessible
- o **Technical support**: Assistance for hardware issues and instructional tools
- o **Workload and workflow**: Tracking attendance and participation in multiple modes, management of F2F, synchronous remote, and online learners, learning assessments (grading formative and summative assignments)
- **Student factors:**
  - o **Connectivity**: sufficient and reliable internet access
  - o **Technical support**: adequate hardware (computers) with required software
  - o **Preparedness**: orientation to multi-modal options, time management skills, self-motivation, and ability to learn in online platforms
  - o **Engagement**: understanding of attendance policies and participation expectations, self-management to meet course requirements
  - o **Privacy concerns:** related to posting videos and use of online proctors/software
- **Institutional factors:**
  - o **Technology**: support for students and faculty
  - o **Learning space/classrooms**:
    - ▪ Equipment: multiple screens, tracking cameras, and microphones
    - ▪ AV support: real time availability
  - o **Policies**: classroom seat space, course enrollment limits, and privacy issues
  - o **Registration system**: delivery descriptions, online fees and concurrent enrollment blocks
    (Beatty, 2019b; Milman et al., 2020; Rider & Moore, 2021)

In conclusion, the development of a HyFlex course requires a thorough needs analysis, deliberate course design, continuous assessment, and ongoing faculty, student, and institutional support (Beatty, 2019b; Milman et al., 2020; Rider & Moore, 2021). If you wish to experience HyFlex from the learner's perspective, the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) invites you to attend all or part of our Multi-media Academy December 15-16th which will be offered synchronous F2F or via Zoom with asynchronous online options also available. The Academy will include hands-on sessions demonstrating tools and methods for creating instruction and assessment activities. To register for the Multi-media Academy [visit our website](#).

As you prepare for winter courses, please know the CTL staff and I are available to assist with all of your course design and instructional technology needs. To schedule an appointment, go to [CTL appointments](#) or email [ctl@nmu.edu](#). Please share ideas for future Teaching Tips or faculty workshops with me via email: lflood@nmu.edu.

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