

## **From emergency remote teaching to hybrid NUflex: a collaborative approach to developing faculty into learning designers**

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### ***The challenge***

In the Spring of 2020, nearly all universities faced the unprecedented challenge of moving to emergency remote teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic. Northeastern University introduced Hybrid NUflex as their approach to ensuring academic continuity for students while attempting to welcome as many students as possible back to campus for a typical residential university learning experience in Autumn 2020. This approach required a shift in thinking from

emergency remote teaching to a more intentionally planned design that would provide an equitable learning experience for both on-ground and remote learners. In addition to thinking about content delivery, faculty members also needed to familiarise themselves with the technologies they would be using in the physical space to connect all learners during class time.

Therefore, our main challenge was to support faculty members in adapting their course design and delivery to reach all learners regardless of teaching modality. We viewed this challenge as a triad consisting of general pedagogical challenges, the integration of various technologies for course design and delivery (e.g., Canvas, Zoom, and other platforms), and the challenge of learning how to use the hardware in the physical classrooms (e.g., camera and microphone systems). Layered on top was the learning and development challenge of turning faculty, many of whom had only taught in traditional face-to-face courses prior to Autumn 2020, into learning designers, when the disruption of the pandemic diminished their available energy and attention.

### ***The response***

In response to this triad of challenges, the Center for Advancing Teaching and Learning Through Research (CATLR) Academic Technologies (AT), and Digital University Solutions (DigiU) worked together to develop a survey for students and faculty about their experiences in the Autumn 2020 term, analyse the results, and deliver a series of Back in the Classroom Bootcamp workshops that targeted areas of concern. We delivered 16 sessions in December 2020 and January 2021 with a total of 239 participants. The first two hours of the three-hour Bootcamp consisted of a workshop on active learning, an overview of the platforms needed for a successful class using AT, and a demonstration from DigiU on the features of the classroom technology. These components align with the need for both support on design and support on delivery, the defining characteristic of the Hyflex teaching modality (Beatty, 2019; Smith, Maiden and Abinader, 2019). During the last hour of the Bootcamp, faculty were assigned to work in pairs along with an Instructional Assistant in the specific NUflex design room that they would be teaching in during the semester to experiment and try out what they learned with a peer.

## ***Recommendations***

Our recommendations are divided into two categories – recommendations that are focused on supporting course (re)design that is resilient across modalities and recommendations for cross-unit collaborations on faculty support initiatives.

### **Recommendations for supporting resilient course design**

Hybrid Flexible (Hyflex) learning design evolved from traditional online learning (mainly asynchronous interactions) and blended approaches (synchronous activities in addition to asynchronous content). The Hyflex design, built on the principles of Learner Choice, Equivalency, Reusability, and Accessibility, allows students to choose whether to attend classes face-to-face or online, synchronously, or asynchronously (Beatty, 2019). While this flexibility is often cited as one of the main benefits for students (Talbert, 2020; Kohnke and Moorhouse, 2021), it also requires a shift in how the faculty member approaches course design and delivery. This shift can be considered similar to the flipped classroom approach, which represents a change in how we think about the use of time for teaching and learning. Knowledge transfer, which traditionally takes place during a face-to-face lecture, now occurs asynchronously prior to a synchronous class session where time is used for activities requiring higher level thinking skills including consensus-building, question-and-answer sessions, peer review, collaborative project work, and presentations (Hutchings and Quinney, 2015; Farmer, 2018; Boettcher and Conrad, 2021).

For our approach to course design recommendations, itemised below, we combined what has been shared about Hyflex delivery with survey data from students about what was and was not working for them during the autumn semester.

1. Propose solutions that will permit a seamless pivot between modalities as often as needed. The Hyflex principle of Equivalency tells us that learning objectives should be the same regardless of modality, while instructional objectives may shift based on

participation mode or delivery modality (Beatty, 2019). This aligns with Talbert's (2020) recommendation that we can no longer focus on one modality (face-to-face or online) when supporting faculty course design.

2. Use the learning management system as a consistent platform for course materials, resources, and communication for learners. The LMS is a great 'home base' for courses in any modality and a consistent structure and presence will help to facilitate any pivots during the semester. We recommended that faculty consider recording their courses and including the recordings along with any files or resources covered in the class session. All assessments were also integrated into the Canvas course, with the week's work aggregated into a module with due dates included. This helps students stay on track without in-classroom cues.
3. Encourage faculty members to identify ways to build a sense of community and belonging for learners. As faculty members are designing their courses, it is increasingly important for them to consider using synchronous polling, chat, and breakout room group activities to help students remain connected regardless of modality or an unanticipated pivot. Garrison (2009) tells us that in addition to teaching presence and cognitive presence, social presence is an essential part of any educational experience.

In addition to our recommendations on meeting the pedagogical challenges faced by faculty members, we considered feedback from faculty on the Bootcamp support model to improve future support initiatives. This feedback indicated that their levels of confidence for teaching in the NUflex modality grew after attending the session. The participants most valued the balance of application of active learning strategies to the NUflex context as well as the hands-on experience in real classroom settings.

Based on these findings and our experiences as facilitators, when developing and managing cross-unit collaborations, we recommend that learning designers and support teams identify the related challenges and provide one integrated solution to address them. To encourage faculty to adopt new practices, focus on the impact these changes might have on student learning, providing evidence to support the practices. Finally, because universities may

struggle with standardising technology across their many classrooms, we recommend that instructors are offered practise with the specific type of room in which they would be teaching.

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