Learning in a Hybrid-Flexible Course

The Student Experience in HyFlex Courses

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Hybrid-Flexible course implementations are started because there are important reasons that an institution, college, department, program, or even faculty member wants or needs to teach both online and face to face students in the same class. In many cases, these reasons include providing a better learning experience for students. "Better" could mean many things, including more convenient, more adaptable to schedule needs, richer with more resources and interaction opportunities, requiring more student ownership of participation mode choices, or other aspects valued by a stakeholder: students, faculty, or adminstrators.

This chapter reviews several important aspects of the general student experience in Hybrid-Flexible courses; a more detailed description of specific student experience can be found in Chapter 2.5. Evaluating the Impact of Hybrid-Flexible Course and Programs and in the case report chapters found in Unit III.

Student Responsibility for Learning

Who is responsible for student learning? Is it the teacher? Institution? Is it the student? His or her parents? Other sponsors or campus stakeholders?

We all know the responsibility is shared by all of these parties, to varying degrees and depends greatly on the specific situation for each student. Although this responsibility for learning is shared among all the stakeholders, it's fair to say that in higher education, three stakeholders are most responsible: student (learning control), teacher/instructor (instructional control), and school/program (curriculum control).

One way many instructors fulfill their responsibility is by directing (dictating?) student behavior in ways that they believe should bring about effective learning. They often command students to "read this", "write that", "do this or that activity", etc. The common response by many students at younger ages is to just do what the instructor tells them to do. In basic schooling, this is expected and may be largely appropriate—even necessary—due to the innate naiveté of most young learners. But in higher education, and especially in graduate school, this high level of instructor-control (and the assumption of an instructor holding the majority of responsibility for student learning) may be misguided. Students at this level should be more self-directed and more aware of specific learning strategies that work well for themselves. (Students may find guides such as Barrett, Poe & Spagnola-Doyle (2009) helpful to better understand how best to learn online.) Instructors who value learner-centered rather than the traditional teacher-centered approach to instruction should be more resource-oriented, directing students as much as needed, but no moreso than needed … acting more as coaches than directors. (Reigeluth, Myers, & Lee, 2017)

HyFlex supports this "less-centered" role for the instructor by providing multiple ways of student participation in course learning activities. The HyFlex course design proscribes nothing about the way multiple perspectives are represented or supported in the specific content and/or activities used in a course, but does encourage a variety of ways that students can access content and complete course activities. When a variety of technologies and approaches are used to participate in learning experiences, it is very likely that alternative presentations of course content and interactions that support learning are used. Variety may be increased because of the nature of delivery. For example, a face to face class discussion is a different experience than a synchronous online discussion, which is a different experience than an asynchronous threaded online discussion.

When alternative learning paths are presented to students, and the students are given control over selecting their alternative, student control of learning is increased. And with increased control goes increased responsibility. HyFlex delivery leads to increased student responsibility for learning.

Are your students ready for that?

Connecting Students through Common Activities and Shared Experience

We know that communities are formed when people with a shared goal are connected to each other as they complete common activities and share meaningful experiences. Learning communities are formed among people trying to learn in order to know and/or to do something they can't do right now. (Praloff & Pratt, 1999; Smith, MacGregor, Matthews, & Gabelnick, 2004) We (faculty) like to think of our classes as learning communities, whether or not any "true" community forms.

In the HyFlex course design I've used, activities connect online and classroom students in meaningful ways, in an effort to support and encourage the development of meaningful learning community. I believe that a strong sense of community enhances the learning experience on several dimensions—cognitively as more ideas are shared and peers collaborate in developing each others' understanding of content (social construction of knowledge), and socially as students participating in both modes feel more connected to each other, to the course, to the degree program, and (to a lesser extent) to the university. I think this may be especially important to design into a HyFlex course because there could be a significant imbalance in the numbers of students participating in each mode. In an interactive graduate seminar, there may be very few online learners from week to week, and in an undergraduate lecture-driven course there may be few classroom learners from week to week. (See Chapter 2.5. Evaluating the Impact of Hybrid-Flexible Course and Programs and the case reports in Unit III for detailed participation data.)

Shared required reflection discussion posts (in an asynchronous forum) are an important and low maintenance activity that draws students together frequently and regularly in a common experience. Students in a class are essentially a class-bound cohort, and are usually required to move through content, assignments, and other activities together with week to week synchronicity. If online students were allowed to complete course assignments and activities with true "anytime" freedom, this synchronicity might not be present, and that could lessen the development of learning community.

Other important shared experiences include peer-reviews of substantial class assignments and the use of common archives of classroom and online discussions. Peer reviews of ongoing work and the social connections from sharing in a discussion experience (even when reviewing an archive) can both strengthen the learning community. Regular peer reviews of assignments (often written papers) encourage students to give, solicit and receive feedback from peers who may be online or may be meeting together in the classroom. When assignments are posted to an online space shared by all students, peer reviews that cross participation modes are afforded and may even be encouraged. In a HyFlex course, both online and classroom discussions may be archived for later review. If ongoing online discussions are referenced in live classroom discussions, the natural conceptual and social linkages between the two discussions are strengthened. When classroom student voices are included in recorded discussion archives, students who are working

online may recognize their own voice or those of other online peers (if they were part of that particular classroom discussion) and form an additional social connection.

A potential advantage of the HyFlex course design over a purely bi-modal course (where students are either fully online or fully classroom-based all the time) or a typical hybrid course (where the instructor dictates the participation mode for all students) is that students have the freedom (and capability, perhaps) to switch back and forth, so that they can be members of both learning community subgroups and can form close attachments with members of both subgroups if desired.

Discussions Drive Connections among Students

In a HyFlex course, online discussions are a primary means of connecting students who complete class activities online and in-person in the classroom. Though a natural connection point among all students is course content, in general, content itself is not interactive. Students can just as easily read a text, watch a video, or listen to a podcast on their own time in preparation for class, whether they plan to come to a class meeting or participate in online asynchronous activities in any given week. Content resources don't generally *drive* interaction. Well-designed interaction works with content to generate knowledge in the minds of learners and within the learning community itself.

What *does* drive (enable, facilitate, require) interaction? In the HyFlex courses I teach, the driver is usually an interactive discussion requirement. Students use discussions in at least two ways; as a place for open reflective discourse about their learning process and products, and as a social environment that provides an opportunity to test out ideas, receive feedback, and generally share their developing understanding about course content (asking and answering topical questions).

[Note: Some course designs also use substantial group projects that include students from multiple particpation modes in the same group. This method can work well, but it also may be complicated for students who are not prepared to work alongside both local and remote students.]

Reflection Discussions: A Shared Experience to Connect Students

One assignment commonly used in HyFlex courses both at the graduate and undergraduate level is a weekly contribution to a reflection forum. Here is a sample assignment description for the reflection post, an excerpt from an Introduction to Instructional Design course syllabus:

"Weekly you will post your thoughts about the class, your project and the instructional design field in an ongoing discussion thread. These posts are intended to help you consider questions important to you, and capture your thoughts at selected instances in time. Posts will be viewable by others, though there is no requirement for others to read or reply to anyone else's posts." (ITEC 801 Instructional Design Course Syllabus)

The rationale for this reflection assignment is two-fold. First, the instructor wants each student to reflect on and reveal something about their learning process throughout the semester on a regular basis. The reflective post, with the topic open to whatever each student wants to talk about as long as it is somehow connected to their course experience, provides evidence of their reflection for the instructor to see. A weekly assignment keeps students reflecting on a regular basis. Second, the instructor wants students to be able to read the reflections of their peers without the additional requirement to read and interact (reply) with others. In this way, students are provided their own "soapbox" in a public forum without adding to the already significant interaction work load for the course. The instructor also wants to provide students with the option of replying to others' reflections if they desire to do so. Interestingly, in classes that have used this activity, it seems that about 5% of the reflection posts elicit replies from other students. And while it is impossible to tell how many reflection posts are read by peers, any modern learning management system (LMS) can generate a daily email summary of all discussion activity (including reflections) and send it to each student and the instructor. LMS logs commonly reveal that many students read the reflection posts of their peers prior to posting their own refection in a given week.

Because all students complete weekly reflection posts and because the assignment is relatively easy to complete quickly (typical posts are 100-200 words—slightly longer than this paragraph), we have found this to be effective in connecting online and classroom students with each other. The weekly reflection activity is itself a common experience shared by all students, and students often discover other shared learning experiences in the anecdotes, questions, and insights shared by their peers in their reflections.

Reflection Posts in Practice – Do They Work?

What do higher education students write about when asked to reflect upon their learning in a course of study? Does the style or substance of their reflections change over time, or when is it made public to others in their course? When we completed an initial study of the reflections posts assigned to students in one of San Francisco State's graduate programs, we applied qualitative and quantitative analysis measures to student-generated data to understand the significance of using online reflection posts to encourage student reflective practice in a HyFlex course. (Beatty, 2007) The study we completed looked at 300 posts completed by 24 students in one semester. We wanted to know what kind of posts they were writing (social, content-focused, metacognitive, or application oriented), how much they posted, and whether or not their patterns changed over the course of a semester. (Detailed results of this study can be found in Chapter 2.5. Evaluating the Impact of Hybrid-Flexible Course and Programs.)

The context: Students are required to post a reflection (essentially a journal entry) each week to an online forum. Weekly participation accounts for 10% of their course grade. The assignment complements additional topical and application discussion posting requirements for online students and content-focused discussion participation for in-class students. Reflection posts are viewable to course peers; the LMS sends out daily email digest (all posts that day). When asked, most students report reading these email digests. Students have the option of replying to other students' reflection, but are not required to read or reply to others.

Here is a sample student reflection comment about their course experience that references this assignment:

"This term has been a valuable one for me, and this class played no small part in my success. I would have to go out on a limb and say that what I lost in social interaction by attending online was more than made up for by the process of reflection, essays, and blog posts. It is surprising to me the power of being able to record my thoughts for posterity. The intentionality of posting a thought or request is surprisingly effective in directing one's actions and goals. Perhaps it is just as important that these posts were tempered with the knowledge that they were in a public forum and I would be accountable for my statements. Thank you all for the wonderful semester."

In any semester, we've found that about 90% of students complete most or all of these assigned posts. Some students clearly do not see the value in completing them and choose to sacrifice part of their grade instead of complying (and sacrificing the potential value to their own learning). But most find value in reflecting publicly on their learning.

Topical Discussions: Generative Learning Activities Focused on Course Content

In many higher education courses, especially seminar courses, the instructor facilitates the exploration of a defined body of content and requires students to read a lot of information and make some sense of it, building their knowledge as they go. (Sound familiar?) Many classes require students to complete comprehensive projects throughout the course of study, so at the end of the term, students have learned quite a bit and show what they learned in their project artifacts, various reports assigned by the instructor, and final exams.

After new information has been presented to students, they usually need an intermediate opportunity to develop understanding before they can focus on applying new knowledge to their complex project settings. This is what interactive discussions are for … testing out new ideas and beginning to think about how new information is relevant, similar or different to what is already known, how it fits or doesn't fit within existing mental schema, how it contributes to or detracts from a sense of confidence and satisfaction in learning the content, and so on. Interactive discussions

provide a vehicle for generative learning activity, which is critical to learning complex intellectual and cognitive skills. (Lee, Lim, & Grabowski, 2008)

In an interactive HyFlex class, classroom students participate in weekly discussions about the current course topic. These are often recorded and archived for later review by all students—both online and classroom. Recordings capture more than just content; they also capture information about how students are learning—who is talking (or not)?, what is being said (or not)?, and how are understandings changing?

Online discussions typically take place in an asynchronous forum. Students working online respond to a prepared discussion prompt that asks them to "talk about" course information in a meaningful way—often challenging them to begin to apply new concepts to their project context. Students are required to post their own response, reply to several others, and then to "reply to replies" before the discussion closes after a week. And after a discussion is "closed' students can continue to read and interact in the forum even though the grading period has ended.

Besides generating learning activity, both online and classroom interactive discussions also generate additional course content. In most discussions, students bring up applications of concepts to situations they've experienced or to their current application project(s). Whether online or in the classroom, the resource set of archived discussions from all modes of a HyFlex class represents a substantial amount of learning opportunity for students (and faculty!) that would not be present, or at least not as robust as that in a single mode class.

Effective Practices: Overlapping Discussions

One method of combining classroom and online students that I have found effective is to overlap the two sets of students in a topical discussion. Often, I will use small discussion groups in class to focus on various aspects of a concept or principle we are studying. Those groups will usually create some form of summary to report back to the larger group in a facilitated debriefing discussion. Since we have access to our LMS in class, the student groups are expected to post their summaries (text, PPT, web links, etc.) to a threaded discussion forum in preparation for the whole class discussion.

When online students are part of our synchronous class, they join in the live small group discussions, either together with other synchronous online students (using our current web conferencing tool) or with one or more classroom students using a local computer workstation (typically a student laptop) to connect. Online students who complete their class activities later that week are required to join in the topical discussion that was started in class. I've found that many classroom students are drawn back into the discussion forum later in the week, in response to the participation of their online colleagues, even though they aren't required to extend their participation beyond the formal class session. Daily LMS summaries of new online discussion posts help bring about this additional participation.

This method provides a richer online discussion environment for asynchronous online students, since they can join in discussions already started, and their classroom colleagues may be more likely to respond to posts connecting to their previous work completed in class. More interaction in the discussion forum throughout the week helps all students stay more closely connected to the class (content and people), because they "see" interaction happening through the regular system messages they receive. Another benefit to the classroom students is that their discussions in class create meaningful artifacts that summarize their thinking and provide an opportunity for ongoing reflection about course content as the discussion extends beyond the end of the class session.

Overall, many instructors find this approach effective and easy to facilitate. The biggest challenge is often integrating live online students into the small group discussions taking place in the classroom, but even that usually becomes quick and efficient with a little practice and experience (both for the instructor and both sides of the student connection).

If you're an instructor planning to use HyFlex delivery, you may want to design for overlapping discussions.

The Student Voice on HyFlex

I asked one of a San Francisco State University graduate students to talk about her experience as a HyFlex student in several Instructional Technology MA program courses. Here is what she said:

"As an MA/Ed ITEC student who graduates this month, I'm feeling a sense of grateful surprise that the program wasn't exactly what I'd expected, but was in many ways much more valuable. When I began attending SFSU in August of 2009, I thought I was starting an online program with infrequent face-to-face classes. As an adult learner this suited me; I assumed I'd just power through the coursework. Once in the program, I realized this was not what I'd gotten into. I found myself being offered a full classroom experience, augmented by technology. After grousing for a few weeks about how poorly the technology worked in comparison to the fancy phone-based systems I was accustomed to in the corporate world, then realizing how limited the department's resources were and how willing everyone was to make it work, I settled into learning. I found great value in class time and meeting with peers, many of whom have extremely interesting backgrounds. Within the first semester, I had to confess that I would have missed a lot in an online-only program.

Hyflex, as it's implemented at SFSU, lets an instructor store their materials in a learning management system (LMS), then present in a typical classroom, but with an online window for students who can't come to class. Our LMS, which we call iLearn, is a custom online application created in Moodle. Think of it as a repository for files, an outliner that assembles those files to align with the course syllabus, and a suite of communication tools—forums and notifications for example—that let you receive assignments, delivery your work, and engage in discussions with your instructor and peers. An important part of the SFSU educational philosophy is personal reflection, and forums allow a natural way to reflect on what you've learned each week. Our classroom collaboration tool is the commercial product Elluminate (www.elluminate.com), a shared whiteboard with recording capabilities. Elluminate lets you attend class from home or another location, which we call synchronous use, or watch the video-taped class later, asynchronously. It's great if you have to travel for work, or drive a long distance to school and don't want to attend in person each week, or simply if you miss a class.

I took the entire ITEC 801 course online, in part just to see what it was like, and I found I could track well with the class and complete all my assignments without attending a single classroom day. Now, did I make the best use of the 801 offering? Perhaps not. But working online suited my independent needs, and I was grateful to have an opportunity to choose.

In retrospect, I have to say that I'm very happy to have chosen a 'hybrid' program rather than a purely distance course. Learners need flexibility, and to me, the Hyflex process provides this, and should be standard for any classroom work that can accommodate this approach. But you never want to underestimate what you can learn by being in a classroom with a good professor and others who share your interests. There's an alchemy there that may surprise you."

Catherine Mone – ITEC 2010

More Student Reflections on their HyFlex Experience

A number of years ago, we asked several students to provide us a summary of their perspectives of the HyFlex experience. Click each video to listen to what they said. Each video is approximately 4 minutes long.

Nate Kaufman: http://youtu.be/h60x7Miy9fk

[Watch on YouTube](#)

Gustavo Campos: http://youtu.be/0zddgiLVt5Y

[Watch on YouTube](#)

Jess Kaufmann: http://youtu.be/jVIzWRXBDyY

[Watch on YouTube](#)

Joel Compton: http://youtu.be/6ExBNhNuTPc

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From Students to Students: Tips for Succeeding in a HyFlex Class

We asked three of our students to provide guidance for other students just starting out in a HyFlex class, or considering enrolling in a HyFlex class. Here is what they said.

David Miles: 10 Do's and Don'ts of a Hybrid Course

Taking classes can be a fairly daunting task when faced with the demands of busy life schedules. Here's a solution, take your courses online. You've tried that but sometimes you just feel left out of the classroom's social loop. Well have you tried a hybrid solution yet? A hybrid course will allow you to attend your class face-to-face, online or both.

Here are some tips to help you succeed in your hybrid course:

1. Don't Treat It Like One or the Other

This is a hybrid course so use the benefits of each style of the course even if you'll be doing primarily one over the other. If you're going to be primarily a face-to-face student make sure to use the online notes and, course materials and if available the class recordings to accent your own in class notes. If you'll primarily

be taking the course as an online student don't forget there are real live people in this class to interact with and a live instructor to ask questions to.

2. Do Read the Syllabus

There's tons of information here. Everything from the instructor's office hours to course assignments can be found in the syllabus. It's a quick way to find standard information about the class. So give it a look on or before the first day

of class and give yourself an idea of what you're about to embark on.

3. Don't Sit Idly By

Participate, participate, participate. You have to get involved in the class, especially if you're online. When there's a class discussion or forum posts by your classmates have a voice and respond. When you're online if you don't speak up people can easily forget that you're even there. Not being seen by your classmates or instructor can have a negative impact on your grade.

4. Do Get to Know Your Classmates

Everyone who's asked to share notes in a face-to-face class knows that your classmates can be your best friends. The same applies to those students taking the course primarily online. Classmates can answer question that are unclear to you, catch you up on things you've missed and even be a sounding board for you to bounce your thoughts off. Social interaction will also alleviate the feeling of disconnect some students feel with a class solely online.

5. Don't Forget to Reflect

Many instructors ask students to write reflection papers for each class or week that has gone by for the class. Whatever the time frame of the reflections are, try and do them as they come up. Going back in the end an looking through your notes or revisiting the entire online library for the course to write your reflections can be exhausting and probably won't look that great to your instructor either.

6. Do Attend A Class (F2F)

Are things getting rough online? Is motivation to keep up with online work getting a little low? Well why not go in to the face-to-face portion of the class. Interaction with real living people in a "normal" classroom setting can be just the

jolt you need to get things going again. It will also give you chance to meet the people you've been interacting with in your virtual settings, talk with your instructor and get out of the house for a much needed breath of fresh air. See number seven.

7. Don't Get Stuck In Front of Your Computer

Take a break. Schoolwork can get tough if you're spending all your time sitting if front of a computer. Many people opting for more of an online education do so because of work schedules that don't permit for attending classes face-to-face. If you're working on a computer, studying on a computer and playing on a computer chances are you'll need to step away and clear your head and give your eyes a break from staring into the glow of a computer monitor. Hybrid

courses are about having the best of both educational worlds so if you've been spending too much time in front of the computer give face-to-face a try.

8. Do Talk With Your Instructor

One quick and simple way to get a feel for how things are going with any course is to talk with your instructor and hybrid courses are no exception. You'll have quite a number of options to do this. You can chat with them through

emails, in online forums/discussions, in person during regular office hours or in class during normal regular class hours. Instructors can help with any number of topics and should not be shied away from. Don't forget there to help you; instructors' goal is for you to succeed not to fail.

9. Don't Flake

It's easy to hide out in both face-to-face and online classes and not get a lot done. A major portion of a successful hybrid class is the interaction between all involved. If you're distancing yourself from the class it makes it that much harder for everyone else. Make sure when you a lot time to be a part of the course to actually show up and do your best to be a part of the class. Hybrid courses can have group assignments, discussions boards, forums, emails discussions and presentations all of which need every student to be involved to the most effective for everyone.

10. Do Have Fun

You're taking this class for a reason, whether it is a need for a specific degree program or personal interest; so enjoy the class you've chosen to take. Utilize all the available tools of the hybrid structure to make the most of the class. If you're a face-to-face student opt for a class or two online or pair up with another student that's primarily online and vice versa if you're planning on being primarily an online student. Classes you enjoy you're more likely to participate in, keep up with your assignments and overall do better in the class.

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Editor's Note: David Miles Rayner was a 2007-2008 graduate student in the ITEC MA program at SF State. David completed one HyFlex courses during his program of studies.

Brian Rayner: HyFlex Tips for Success

Do

1. *DO plan to attend class when you can.*
   a. *Peer interaction is invaluable. (They may know things you don't.)*

2. *DO turn in assignments ASAP regardless.*
   a. *More time for peer feedback.*
   b. *Time to revise, means a potentially better grade.*

3. DO make sure that you have all the necessary plug-ins for your computer to play the videos or audio files that are recorded during the live class.
4. DO take advantage of the HyFlex environment if you can't drive into the city for class. There is a lot to gain from the online learning opportunity.
    a. After all, this is instructional technology.
5. DO use the online assignments even if you do attend the live class.
6. DO use headphones if possible during online classes.
    a. It helps to minimize the echo.
7. DO try completing online materials during the normally scheduled time.
    a. If you already have the time blocked out, then you'll get it done and won't have to try to fit it into your busy schedule later.
8. DO plan ahead for online classes.
    a. Try to go through all the motions while in the classroom to see how it will work from home.

Don't

1. DON'T wait till the assignment is due to post it.
    1. You can't take advantage of peer feedback.
    2. You can't revise it to get a better grade.
2. DON'T keep your microphone on during online classes if you aren't speaking.
    1. It creates a lot of feedback and can disrupt the class.
3. DON'T wait to do online work for the night before a scheduled class.
    1. It's often more work than you think.
4. DON'T try to attend an online class if you aren't sure about how to use the technology.
    1. Get one of your peers to help you in class first.
    2. It takes away from the real learning opportunity because too much time is spent helping everyone get set up.
5. DON'T let the fact that you aren't attending the in-person instruction fool you into thinking that it's ok to procrastinate.
    1. It'll all pile up before you know it, and you'll be pulling all-nighters to finish your semester.
6. DON'T be the last to join an online learning session if there are limited seats. (You may find yourself left out.)

General Advice

When trying to determine if attending online is for you, consider how you feel about working on assignments on your own. If you tend to be a loner, then by all means, try an online class assignment day instead of driving to campus. If you are the type of person who likes meeting new people and sharing ideas with others, then definitely try to attend class in person more. There is a lot to gain from in-class interaction with your peers. Often they have ideas that you may not have heard before, or they can give you valuable feedback to make your project better than it otherwise would have been. (This was definitely the case with my projects.) Others can also potentially ask you questions about your work that helps you to develop it into a more complete work. They may ask questions that you might not have considered, or they can shed light on holes in your theories.

In a HyFlex environment, you get the opportunity to choose whether to attend in person or not. Often if I didn't have the necessary time to drive across town to get to class, I would just listen from home. Or just plan to listen to the

lecture after it is posted. Try the assignments and read the book as though you were attending in person every day. It's easy to forget that you have class when you aren't attending in-person.

When online instruction is given, where it's fully interactive, treat it as you would a corporate conference call.

- *Mute when you aren't speaking*
- *Stay on topic*
- *Gather your thoughts before you begin speaking*
- *Don't monopolize the session*
- *Do take advantage of the technology and share your desktop, or a website that others might really appreciate knowing about.*

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Editor's Note: Brian Rayner is a 2008 graduate of the ITEC MA program. Brian completed two HyFlex courses during his program of studies.

Kate Miffitt: Tips for Participating in Hybrid Classes

The HyFlex course format affords a lot of flexibility in how you manage your coursework and your schedule. You will find that classmates participate in different ways, with some mostly online, others mostly in-person, and a few who will participate in both formats evenly. Below are some tips geared towards the varying participation styles. Read through them, and think about what approach might work best for you.

Mostly/Only Online

When deciding if you will participate exclusively online, consider your personality in addition to your schedule. Students who work well independently, manage their time, and communicate effectively thrive in the online environment. If you like a lot of feedback and interaction or find the course material challenging, you should consider attending class in-person.

Set a schedule, and stick to it. Because you don't have a face-to-face meeting to prepare for every week, it is easy to procrastinate and put off assignments until the last minute. While you may be able to get by with this approach, ultimately you will find that you cheat yourself out of richer discussions and valuable feedback by not being involved in the class in a timely manner. Set a realistic schedule of about 8 - 10 hours a week, and then meet your deadlines.

One approach is to designate a day for reading/ working on assignments, a day for participating in discussions, and a day at the end of the week to reply to classmates and revise your posted assignment.

Think quality, not quantity. When participating in discussions, focus on writing quality posts, even if it means you will post fewer times. If you are posting to a discussion that is about a reading for the week, try to write something different than what others are writing, even if you don't necessarily agree with it. Another way to contribute original posts is to relate the reading to an experience you had in the workplace; just be sure to tie your example back to the reading. Playing devil's advocate or highlighting a different point from the reading will keep the discussion fresh and will ultimately benefit all participants. If you are giving feedback to classmates on posted assignments, take the time to really review one or two and give critical feedback. It is more valuable to help one classmate improve his/her

project by giving detailed feedback than it is to tell five classmates "good job", and you will learn more by applying the class concepts thoroughly to other projects.

Get familiar with classmates' projects. It is likely that as the semester progresses, more discussions will relate to giving classmates feedback on their project progress. One way to make it easier to interact with whoever is online

for the week is to have a basic idea of what most of your classmates' projects are about. Remember that early in the semester, everyone will post a brief project description, which is a good resource to go back to in order to be able to give feedback to different classmates.

Don't wait to ask questions, or ask for help. It is imperative that you be proactive and reach out to classmates or the instructor if you have questions or need help. If you are having trouble with a discussion topic, explain your confusion as clearly as possible so that others can respond. If you are stuck on an assignment, email the professor right away. It is likely that your confusion can be cleared up rather easily, even though it feels like it is just easier to just give up when you are alone.

Mix of Online and Face-to-Face

If you plan to participate face-to-face some weeks and online others, you will be getting the best of both mediums. However, it will require some work on your part to be able to change gears from online to in-class.

Get on a schedule that works for both. If you plan to go back and forth between meeting online and in-class, you will probably find that the deadlines for each are a little different. Because many online students participate on the weekend, they are often posting assignments and discussions after the face-to-face class has met. Therefore, you need to find a working schedule that allows you to be prepared on time for the weeks you attend in-person. That will likely mean posting ahead in the online forums so that you are also on schedule with the face-to-face class.

Be strategic in deciding in-class weeks. The hybrid approach is great in that it allows you to accommodate things that come up in your schedule (events, illness, etc.) while still participating in class. It is valuable, though, to be strategic in deciding the weeks you will be in-class in advance. If there will be a guest speaker, for example, or if the class will be going over a topic that is particularly challenging, those are good times to prioritize making it to the face-to-face session.

Mostly/Only Face-to-Face Class

Attending face-to-face classes enhances the social experience for many students. Because the class makes use of a robust LMS like iLearn, it is a good idea to think of yourself as an online student who participates in-person. You will still be expected to access course resources and post assignments online.

Check out the online discussions. It is a good idea to skim the online discussions, even if you are not going to participate in them. Keep in mind that classmates participating online have more time to craft responses to weekly topics. While the in-class discussion is likely to be more dynamic, the online discussion is more likely to be thought out and summarize key concepts. Use it as a resource and to potentially get a different perspective on topics.

Get familiar with the online format. Even if you plan to be in class every week, it is likely that you will participate online at least once. Don't wait until week 9 with a looming deadline to try to figure out how to post. Make sure you know how to use the various online tools and resources.

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Editor's Note: Kate Miffitt is a 2007 graduate of the ITEC MA program. Kate completed three HyFlex courses during her program of studies.

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