HyFlex in Northern Ontario

Cambrian College

Melanie Lefebvre

I joined Cambrian College as a full-time faculty during an exciting time: the launch of HyFlex delivery. As a new faculty, this was terrifying. I was lucky to find Dr. Brian Beatty online and I hit the jackpot when he agreed to provide me with virtual mentorship in preparation. Today, I have the privilege of sharing my story for his collection of case studies surrounding HyFlex delivery. I will be writing from the perspective of a new full-time faculty (having previously taught face-to-face courses the year prior on a part-time basis). Not only is my perspective novel, but so is the implementation of HyFlex learning at Cambrian College.

I'll share my personal journey of preparing for this endeavour, which I hope may serve as a form of guidance and support for others venturing into HyFlex delivery for the first time. I will begin by highlighting the value of flexible delivery and examining the goals that were important to me as a faculty as well as the subsequent execution of these goals from both a technological lens and a pedagogical lens.

To further set the stage, it's worth noting that not only was I embarking on a new journey as a full-time faculty, but I was also the coordinator for a brand new post-graduate certificate program in Community and Health Services Navigation, a helping profession, and its inaugural cohort. I navigated the development of a new program while also delving into HyFlex delivery and emerged unscathed 10 months later. I suspect I still have an abundance of learning ahead of me as I continue to finetune my methods, but for now, I invite you to explore this delivery method from my preliminary lens and perhaps offer you a form of mentorship in the process.

Why HyFlex?

Cambrian College is located in Northern Ontario, also known as the city of lakes, making it a beautiful destination for students. With HyFlex delivery it's now a destination that does not require students to move to Sudbury (even if this means missing out on our 300 plus lakes). Currently, HyFlex is available in Cambrian post-graduate certificate programs. Some faculty outside of the post-graduate certificate programs teach using a hybrid model of delivery while other courses are offered entirely online.

I'm especially grateful for global institutions as I'm pursuing my Masters of Education through Memorial University in Newfoundland. It's likely not a surprise that I managed to incorporate the topic of HyFlex into one of my research papers. Speaking of which, research shows adult learners appreciate the autonomy to tailor their studies to their unique learning style (Elder, 2018). With HyFlex learning, there is the flexibility to choose preferred modes of delivery week-to-week, based on the unique circumstances occurring in one's life at the time (e.g. difficulty obtaining child care) (Elder, 2018). In an Australian action-research driven HyFlex project, 88% of students had consensus

that the ability to "study at a time of day that suits [them]" was an important factor in the navigation of their independence (Taylor & Newton, 2013). Everything I was learning in my studies as a graduate student was being echoed at Cambrian: they had clearly done their research as not only had they consulted with students, but the learner-centered decision was implemented in their 2015-2019 Strategic Plan (Future Cambrian, n.d.).

It was important for me to understand the rationale behind the new model but I didn't need much convincing. As a student myself, I can attest that having options is a luxury. As a faculty, my main goal was to ensure that regardless of a student's chosen method of delivery, they would successfully and confidently acquire the desired learning outcomes. This would inevitably require some flexibility on my part, especially for a helping-related program in which direct observation of the skill development of students is an important component. It is important to note, however, that HyFlex delivery does not imply that the learning experience of online students must be identical to face-to-face, as this is clearly not realistic, but rather, the outcome of the experience must yield an equitable opportunity to achieve the learning outcomes and therefore requires careful and thoughtful consideration by the instructor (Taylor et al., 2013).

My professional goal aligned with Cambrian's strategic goal: putting the student first. From a pedagogical perspective, it was important for me to balance this luxury with the requirements of the program so that regardless of the chosen method of delivery, students are equipped with the skills to support others as a navigator.

Housing HyFlex

Before working towards achieving my goals for the inaugural cohort of students, I needed to understand the logistics of how HyFlex delivery could occur. Cambrian had virtual classrooms prepared to videostream classes in real-time, which would then be uploaded afterwards. Cambrian had a couple of technological options to make this a reality, with Zoom being the platform I opted to utilize. The selling points for me were the various features such as having the autonomy to upload my lecture independently at my discretion, which allowed for customization as needed. This also helped with the anxiety of being recorded, which, for me, felt awkward initially. The ability to customize what I uploaded also aligned with my goal for students to confidently demonstrate the learning outcomes of the course. If an activity did not translate for asynchronous learners, I sometimes chose to make a mini video specifically for them, but that could also be viewed by all students to reinforce concepts. The ability to pause the recording in real time proved especially useful during what can sometimes be long pauses of silence before a student responds to a posed question. Finally, the "break-out room" feature allows virtual learners to still participate in small group activities. This was important to me because I didn't want virtual students to feel alienated.

In Dr. Beatty's approach to HyFlex learning, he encourages participation across all modes of delivery. While not required, he creates opportunities for face-to-face students to interact with asynchronous online students and combines participation for both online delivery methods (B. Beatty, personal communication, July 3, 2018). It was my intention to emulate this immersive experience as much as possible.

Cambrian also has the luxury of a Teaching and Learning Innovation Hub (AKA The Hub) which was instrumental in saving me the grief of trying to figure out the tech myself. Their level of expertise was both reassuring and supportive. To provide further context, Cambrian courses are housed in Moodle,

a learning management system. The Hub added a Zoom plugin that allowed both students and faculty to access the virtual classroom, so to speak. Everyone can benefit from The Hub's resources by checking out their website [here](#)

What eventually became second nature would not have happened so seamlessly without practicing with the technology to increase my comfort level. I did test runs with willing participants to ensure both sound and video were in working quality. I also introduced myself to the Audio and Video Support Staff, conveniently located in the hallway as the majority of the HyFlex delivery classrooms. Finally, I created tutorials for students using a screen recording platform so I could capture the exact process of how to access live lectures as well as where to find recordings afterwards.

Support

Without The Hub, I don't know where I would have started (well, perhaps I would have found Dr. Beatty earlier). Not only was technical support readily available, but so was a tutorial created by The Hub team for those venturing into the world of HyFlex delivery. But it wasn't just me teaching within my program. As the coordinator for a brand new program, it was important for me to stay connected with the part-time faculty who would also be teaching in the program. My own experience of feeling initial terror of HyFlex, coupled with my experience of working full-time as a mental health worker while teaching part-time helped me empathize with the jitters they too, were likely experiencing. I created a shared folder online with additional resources should faculty choose to learn more, because, well, technology can be intimidating, with one of the resources containing helpful responses from Dr. Brian Beatty via our email correspondence:

> *You might find more ideas about the online role-playing activities at https://edtechbooks.org/-AAo The challenge is in the timing of the interaction for asynchronous students. If you rely on a discussion board tool for the role-playing, then there's likely to be a lot of time lag in-between role taking. You could require the asynchronous students (or suggest) that they coordinate to do a live online role play using Zoom or some other tool that they can record and post for you (or other students) to review. Another useful resource for building interactivity into the course for online learners is this free e-book from Curt Bonk (Indiana U: http://tec-variety.com) I've also sometimes simplified things by building interactive assignments (activities) only online and requiring all students (whether attending online or on-ground) to complete them online. That approach also brings the different types of students together to help form a learning community. Most on-ground students today have no problem in completing online activities as part of a traditional class.*

I also summarized a telephone conversation with Dr. Brian Beatty to share with faculty, which you can check out in Appendix A.

To ease my worries about whether I'd set up the technology properly, I created a step-by-step guide along with troubleshooting resources that was housed in the classroom where faculty taught (which was also a comfort for me) and met with them for a live demonstration. To encourage communication and continual learning along the way, The Hub created a community of practice so faculty could voluntarily meet on a monthly basis as an informal support system. Check out the guidance they offer for HyFlex learning at the link found [here](#)

Equitable Learning Opportunities

Some of the activities I was teaching required practical application of skills. HyFlex learning is not meant as a universal solution. Some courses require in-person interaction in order to allow for practical applications to occur seamlessly as specific skill sets are acquired (Elder, 2018). Because HyFlex learning is designed with the learner in mind, I had to balance said flexibility with the objectives required to be a successful navigator. I did this in a couple of ways. In one assignment students were required to chair a coordinated care conference with their peers. I connected with the fully asynchronous students at the beginning of the course to inquire about their availability for attending one of the sessions synchronously, thereby providing them with ample notice to make any needed arrangements. For another assignment, which was a simulated on-campus experience with staff acting as healthcare professionals throughout the college, I provided three months notice so that asynchronous students would be able to attend. However, as one of my students was fully asynchronous residing outside of Sudbury, I created an online version of the simulation for her.

Cultural considerations are important to keep in mind since, depending on the cultural background of the learner, their exposure to innovative technologies may be limited (Elder, 2018). Regardless of culture, however, a learner's ability to navigate technology can be taken for granted and issues may arise when it is assumed that all learners are familiar with the chosen technologies. This barrier can be especially demoralizing to the student, with one student who experienced this phenomena identifying as feeling "alienated" (Taylor & Newton, 2013). Ensuring students have equitable learning opportunities regardless of which format they choose is an ethical duty. Failure to consider this could pose a monumental barrier if not addressed (Taylor et al., 2013). This adds a layer of pressure to the faculty, and while sometimes additional work is necessary (e.g. one-on-one sessions with asynchronous students outside of classroom time to assess their progress), it is reassuring that it can be done. There may even be more efficient ways that I have yet to discover.

The Outcome

While I may not have official data to present, I do have anecdotal evidence of success. Firstly, of the 21 students of the inaugural cohort, all 21 graduated. My goal was to ensure I put the students first regardless of their chosen delivery format. Putting the student first was important because I wanted future career opportunities to be realistic for all students, regardless of their chosen delivery method. It was my intention that regardless of whether students were in class, joining synchronously or viewing the class afterwards, they would have the appropriate skills to help future clients navigate complex systems. I'm excited to share that many students across modalities of delivery have obtained meaningful employment, which I'm defining as employment in a helping-related profession. Some students were hired at the same agency where they completed their field placement. Some students chose to continue their studies in a similar helping-related profession (e.g. Social Services), while others chose an unrelated educational path.

It was a rewarding challenge as some students came into the program without any prior experience in a helping profession. Some of the students who got hired in a helping-related profession after the program came from a science background (e.g. Microbiology). It was thrilling to see evidence (via being hired!) that I had helped to equip the students with relevant skills that the workplace deemed valuable. I think this speaks to the potential of the program as not only an introduction to the helping profession but as a way for helping professionals to finesse their skills.

Conclusion

Thank you Dr. Brian Beatty for inviting me to contribute to such an innovative community and showcase the work of Cambrian College. I hope to expand my networks, both locally at Cambrian and globally, with other trailblazers. I look forward to future mentorship opportunities as well as the opportunity to mentor, all while continuing to put students first.

References

Elder, S. J. (2018). Multi-Options: An Innovative Course Delivery Methodology. *Nursing*

Education Perspectives, 39(2), 110-112. doi: https://edtechbooks.org/-xiB

Future Cambrian. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://futurecambrian.ca/

Taylor, J.A. & Newton, D. (2013). Beyond Blended Learning: A Case Study of Institutional

Change at an Australian Regional University. *The Internet and Higher Education, 18*, 54-60. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2012.10.003

Teaching & Learning Innovation Hub. (2019). Retrieved from https://teaching.cambriancollege.ca

Appendix A: Summary of Key Points from Personal Conversation with Dr. Brian Beatty, July 3, 2018

Participation

- Make participation a requirement. Also, make it professionally valuable to them so they want to do it
- Need interaction with students who are synchronous online - even as simple as a chat - to help them feel like they are there
- Layer in asynchronous discussions to online course

Small Numbers

- Small number of students = more interaction from professor with each student

Layer 3 Delivery Methods

- Don't keep face-to-face separate from online
- Review what online students did in class
- Emphasize that all students are more than welcome to participate online but not required to do so
- Connect students with one another. Example: personal reflection post in which everyone had their own thread and every week they would write a paragraph or two of what their learning process has been like. It was optional as to whether students read the threads of others. Dr. Brian Beatty read them all but let students know he wouldn't be replying. He encouraged students to interact if they chose to, and noticed that some did.

Assignment Ideas

- Work on a project for the For him, every week Dr. Brian Beatty added another component to the project with components due throughout the semester

Face-to-Face Class Time Recommendations

- Group tasks are good
- Brian Beatty did regular live peer reviews in class of the project components
- He also created small reading groups

Asynchronous Students

- For asynchronous students, make sure the following are very clear: What I have to do? What to do next?
- Asynchronous students: tasks may be to review archive discussion or something created and uploaded separately

Tech Tips

- Be mindful of bandwidth considerations when it comes to uploading material for asychn students
- May want to start small with amount of tech used. Don't want to have too many tech at first. Can build upon tech in future years.

New Program Tips

- Acknowledge with students this is new - they could help with the process. Frame it as we are in this together.

Feedback

- Get unofficial feedback - both mid and end term - from them in addition to what the college does - lets them know you value their input.
- If midterm feedback, this is also a chance for them to influence the second half of the course.
- Let them know they have am opportunity to influence the program for future students
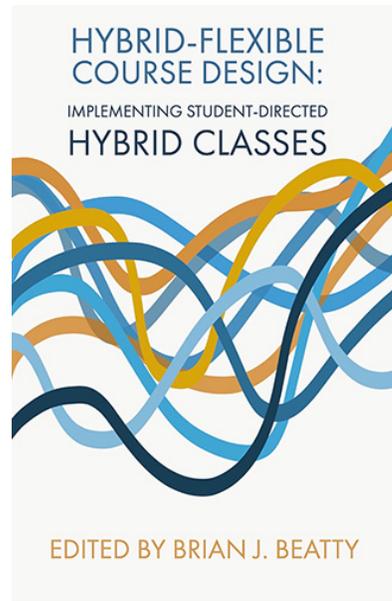
Lefebvre, M. (2019). HyFlex in Northern Ontario: Cambrian College. In B. J. Beatty (Ed.), *Hybrid-Flexible Course Design*. EdTech Books. https://edtechbooks.org/hyflex/northernontario