

# Providing Flexible Learning Models in Higher Education

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# Supporting Flexible Learning in Higher Education

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Living and learning through a pandemic has been a surreal experience for students, educators, and administrators alike. Over this past year, institutions have had to react and move quickly, sometimes shifting traditionally in-person courses online in only a matter of days, to give students continued access to teaching and learning.

Seeing and hearing firsthand the work of our clients and others in the industry, I am in awe. The efforts they undertook then—and continue to undertake—to deliver exceptional learning experiences to students has been nothing short of extraordinary.

Yet as we look hopefully to the end of this crisis and brighter days ahead, we need to ask ourselves, are there any lessons we want to hold on to? What from our experiences can we lean on to help us weather future challenges of the same magnitude as the COVID-19 pandemic? For me, the word that springs to mind more than any other is flexibility.

A flexible learning model can help institutions transform learning and be ready to adapt quickly in the face of disruption. It leverages technology-enabled teaching methods that help colleges and universities deliver flexible, varied, and enhanced education experiences to the broader student community.

But flexibility isn't realized overnight. It takes training, preparation, and support. Rather than simply replicating in-person learning to provide emergency remote learning, your aim is to leverage technology to intentionally design and build high-quality online learning programs.

It's about delivering a full learning experience to your students, whether they're watching the lecture at home or sitting right in the front row, that complements and enhances your existing in-person offerings.

At D2L, we're fortunate to bear witness daily to how flexible learning can benefit everyone—students, educators, and institutions.

Academic institutions can expand the reach and enhance the quality of their instruction, through disruption and beyond. Educators can be enabled to adopt new tools and approaches that push the pedagogical and technological envelope and drive learner success. Students can be empowered to take greater control over how, where, and when they learn.

Though we don't know exactly what the future has in store for us, the past year has shown us how remarkable, resilient, and resourceful people can be. We need to harness that flexibility and make it part of your institution's fabric—not just a temporary reaction to an unforeseen crisis.

Flexible education can be a key to unlocking a world of opportunity for learners, educators, and institutions. Now is the time to open the door.



**April Oman**  
Senior Vice President,  
Customer Experience  
D2L

# Introduction

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Hybrid, blended, online learning: before March 2020, those terms would have conjured meaning for a significant subsection of college students and instructors. But since the COVID-19 pandemic closed campuses and forced most postsecondary learning into remote settings nearly 18 months ago, the idea that colleges and universities need to offer instruction that is flexible as well as high-quality has become something close to sacrosanct.

Students were forced to juggle coursework alongside family responsibilities, work and the anxiety of a global health crisis and economic uncertainty. Professors got close-up views of the complexity of their students' lives, and gained newfound appreciation of the reality that for many learners -- even highly committed ones -- flexibility in when and how education "fits" in their lives is essential.

Exactly how an individual institution decides how to incorporate the lessons of the pandemic into whatever "normal" (or at least *more* normal) looks like going forward will vary depending on its mission and the students it serves. There will be many flavors.

This compilation of articles explores some of the ways that colleges, instructors and students are rethinking educational delivery to provide more flexibility without compromising on quality or learning. The articles and essays examine the introduction of new technologies, changes in faculty attitudes, and the importance of caring, no matter the delivery mode.

We hope this compilation provides useful to you as you do your important work, and encourage you to reach out to us with any questions, comments or ideas for future coverage.

**–The Editors**

[editor@insidehighered.com](mailto:editor@insidehighered.com)



# Your New Normal: Reimagined

Join Dr. Barry Schwartz, Author of Practical Wisdom and The Paradox of Choice, to discuss how institutions can—and should—respond. Through the lens of Practical Wisdom, you'll learn:



Practical ways to implement new modalities for learning



How to define success by thinking about first principals rather than the status quo



Ensuring that boundaries are established to guide students rather than leaving all options open

**> Learn more**

## Students Want Online Learning Options Post-Pandemic

The experience of learning remotely during the pandemic left students with a more positive attitude toward online and hybrid courses, a new survey suggests.

By [Lindsay McKenzie](#) // April 27, 2021

When colleges switched to emergency remote instruction last year, some online learning advocates feared the hasty transition would leave students with a negative impression of online learning. While more pre-pandemic online courses resulted from months of careful planning and significant financial investment, few instructors enjoyed these luxuries last spring.

Despite the challenges and shortcomings of this emergency transition to remote instruction, a majority of students want the option to keep studying online, according to new survey results.

The Digital Learning Pulse survey, [published today](#), is the fourth in a series of surveys published by Bay View Analytics in partnership with Cengage, the Online Learning Consortium, the WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies, the Canadian Digital Learning Research Association and the University Professional and Continuing Education Association.

The survey includes responses from 772 teaching faculty, 514 academic administrators and 1,413 students who were registered at a U.S. higher education institution for both the fall 2020 and spring 2021 semesters. The results will be



SVETIKD/GETTY IMAGES

discussed in a Cengage [webcast](#).

The majority of students, 73 percent, "somewhat" or "strongly" (46 percent) agreed that they would like to take some fully online courses in the future. A slightly smaller number of students, 68 percent, indicated they would be interested in taking courses offering a combination of in-person and online instruction.

For in-person courses, 68 percent of students strongly or somewhat agreed that they would like to see greater use of technology. The use of digital materials and digital resources was also popular, with 67 percent indicating they would like to see an increase in usage of these materials. For the fall 2020 and spring 2021 semesters, the survey also asked students,

faculty members and administrators to award a letter grade, from A to F, for how well courses at their institution were meeting educational needs. Students were not as critical of their experience as Jeff Seaman, director of Bay View Analytics, expected.

"There were a very small number of students who gave their courses failing grades," said Seaman. "But generally students were more positive about their courses than faculty or administrators."

Over all, students, faculty and administrators awarded a B for courses taught in the fall 2020 and spring 2021 semester. These grades reflect a mixture of teaching modalities, including fully online, hybrid and face-to-face instruction.

## Students Want Online Learning Options Post-Pandemic (cont.)

Students, professors and administrators all ranked the same top three challenges impeding student success in the last two semesters, said Seaman. Topping the list was "feelings of stress," then "level of motivation" and, thirdly, "having time to do homework."

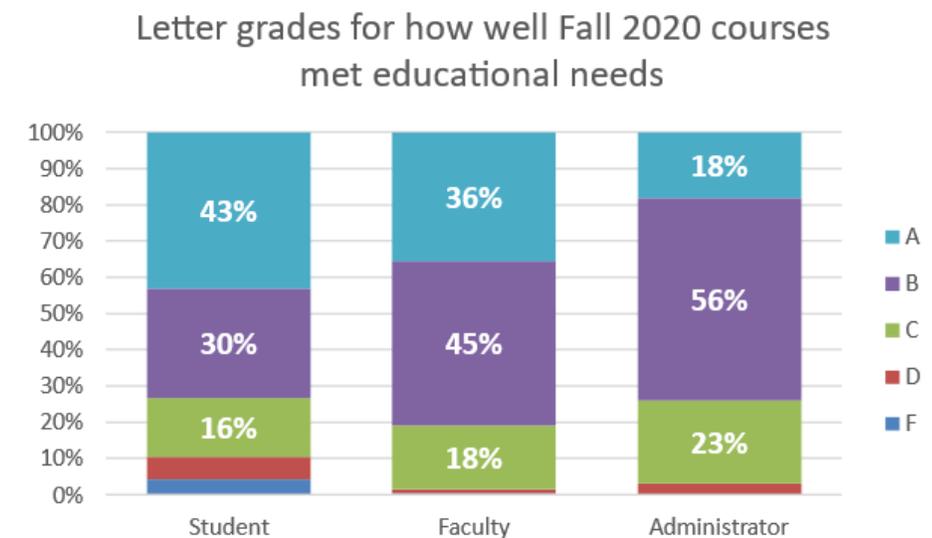
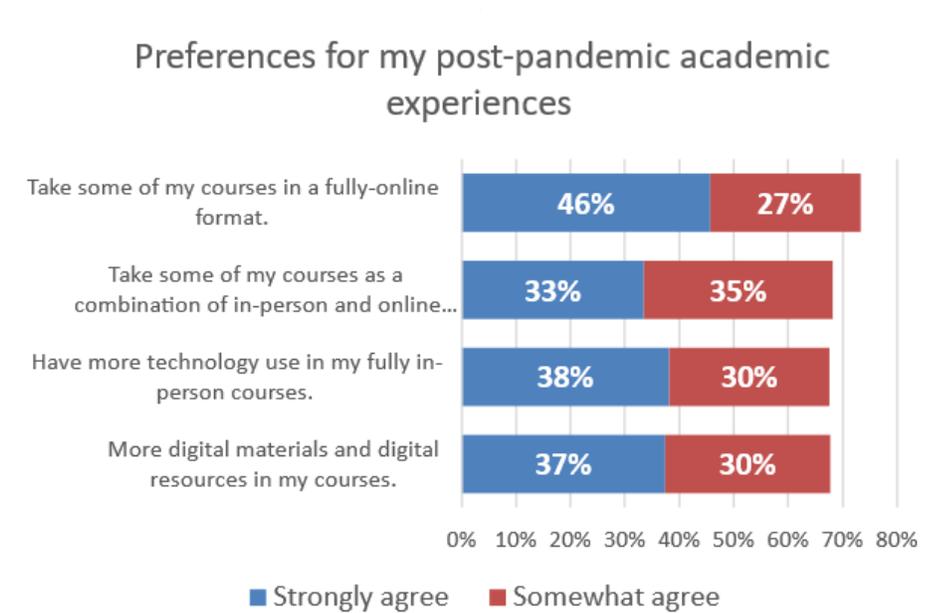
Students, faculty members and administrators are rarely so aligned in their responses, said Seaman. He thinks that faculty and administrators may feel more in tune with the struggles students are facing since this has become a bigger area of discussion during the pandemic.

Jessica Rowland Williams, director of Every Learner Everywhere, agreed. "The pandemic has given us the unique opportunity to pause and listen to each other, and we are beginning to discover all the ways our experiences overlap," she said.

Every Learner Everywhere offers free coaching to faculty and administrators around issues related to digital learning. In addition to the challenges facing students that were highlighted in the Bay View Analytics survey, faculty often ask questions about how to keep students engaged in virtual learning spaces, said Rowland Williams.

The challenge of keeping students engaged was echoed in Every Learner Everywhere's [Student Speaks report](#), which was based on interviews with 100 marginalized students across the U.S. about their experience of learning during the pandemic.

"As our campuses become more diverse, we must also acknowledge that the challenges our stu-



dents face will be diverse and may also be unique to student populations. The next step we need to take when evaluating challenges is to disaggregate data to explore how different populations may be disproportionately impacted by the stressors listed," said Rowland Williams. "I am hopeful that as we continue to uncover points of connection, they will serve to keep us grounded and curious as we also explore the ways our journeys and experiences are unique."

Students and faculty members both reported that their attitudes toward online learning had significantly improved in the past year. A majority of students, 57 percent, said they felt more positive about online learning now than before the pandemic. Close to half, 47 percent, said their attitude toward online exam proctoring -- a topic of some controversy due to privacy concerns -- had also improved.

A lot of the resistance to online

## Students Want Online Learning Options Post-Pandemic (cont.)

learning and teaching that was expressed before the pandemic was due to “unfamiliarity rather than distaste,” said Clay Shirky, vice provost for educational technologies at New York University.

“What COVID-19 and the shift to emergency remote instruction did was burn off the fog of unfamiliarity,” said Shirky.

At NYU, discussions are already underway about how to take the good parts of remote instruction and keep them going, said Shirky. Students want choice and flexibility, and so do faculty members, he said.

In some ways, transitioning out of the pandemic is harder for institutions in terms of organizing how classes should be delivered than it was going in, said Shirky. Some students and faculty may be in a position where they could return to in-person instruction, but not everyone has been vaccinated or can be vaccinated. Additionally, there are ongoing visa restrictions that may prevent international students from entering the country for some time.

That students indicated a desire to continue learning online in the future, despite less-than-ideal circumstances, is positive, said Shirky.

The tendency in online education is to think that by spending more money, you will end up with a good product, said Shirky. He believes that there are two types of online education -- good and bad. But these are not dependent on months of preparation or a healthy

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Faculty</b>	<b>Administrators</b>
<b>1</b>	Feelings of stress	Feelings of stress	Feelings of stress
<b>2</b>	Level of motivation	Level of motivation	Level of motivation
<b>3</b>	Having time to do course work	Having time to do course work	Having time to do course work
<b>4</b>	Support from my academic institution	Having a suitable workplace to do course work	Internet connectivity (e.g., Wi-Fi)
<b>5</b>	Internet connectivity (e.g., Wi-Fi)	Internet connectivity (e.g., Wi-Fi)	Having a suitable workplace to do course work
<b>6</b>	Having a suitable workplace to do course work	Support from my academic institution	Access to a learning device (laptop, home computer, tablet)
<b>7</b>	Access to a learning device (laptop, home computer, tablet)	Access to a learning device (laptop, home computer, tablet)	Support from my academic institution

## Students Want Online Learning Options Post-Pandemic (cont.)

budget for flashy videos.

"The most important thing is that faculty are engaged and care that their students learn something," he said.

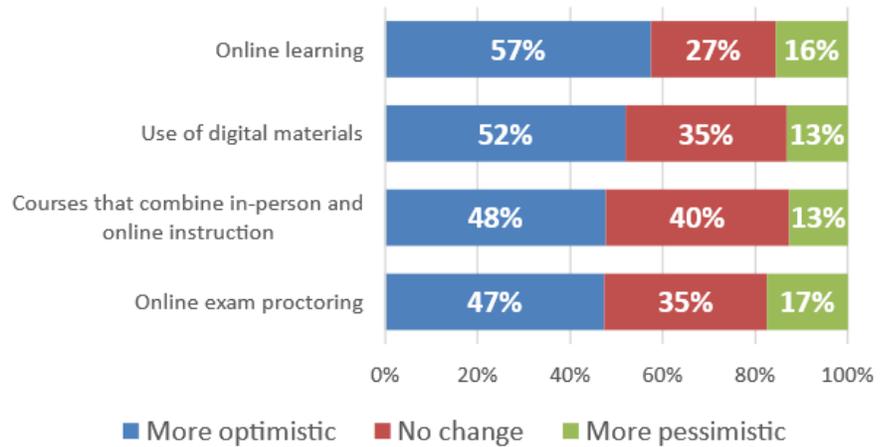
There is still concern that emergency remote learning practices do not exemplify quality online instruction methodologies, said Jill Buban, vice president of digital strategy and online education at Fairfield University. Many students continue not to know the difference between emergency remote instruction and online teaching, she said.

"My hope is that many faculty come out of this experience, after much-needed rest, with new skills that they can use when they return their traditional learning environment," said Buban.

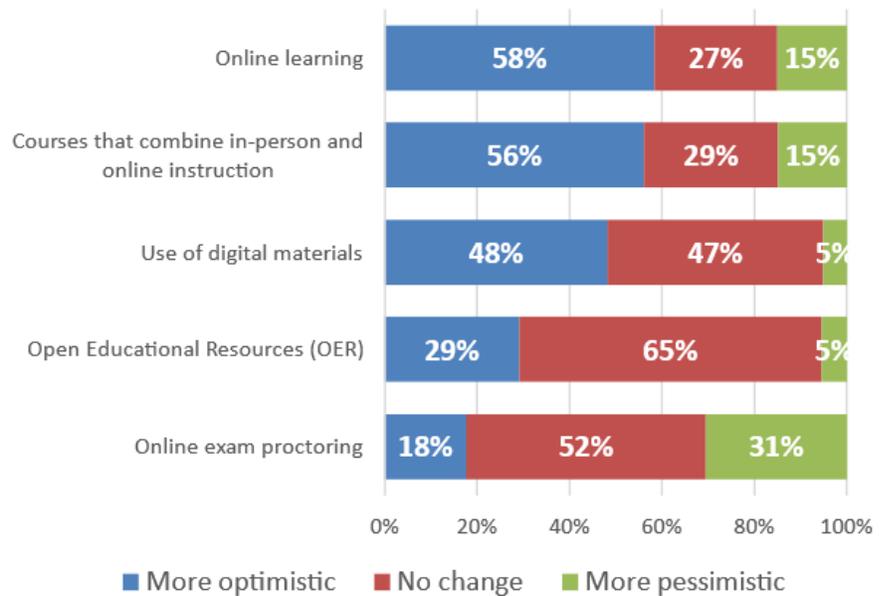
The changes could be as simple as bringing guest lectures into the classroom remotely, utilizing a learning management system or increasing use of digital textbooks and open educational resources in courses, said Buban.

"If the past year can open more eyes to effective online teaching and learning practices, it will be a net positive for the future of postsecondary teaching and learning environments and will allow universities to be more agile," Buban said. ■

### Student changes in attitudes since prior to the pandemic



### Faculty changes in attitudes since prior to the pandemic



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<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2021/04/27/survey-reveals-positive-outlook-online-instruction-post-pandemic>



## Empowering Instructors to Teach the Way They Want to Teach

The University of Arizona is leading the way in delivering online courses that are ranked amongst the top online programs in the US.

- Giving faculty the ability to solve problems as soon as they realized them—without waiting
- Cascading roles to simplify system access that provides instructors with access to all course templates, course offerings, groups and sections under their department
- D2L's team as an extension of their team to provide support at every turn, which “saved us months and months of time”

“The solution we built with the help of the Brightspace Developer Platform is addressing a real need across the industry. It removes the conversations about technology access and control and allows us to all concentrate on supporting great teaching and learning”

- Mark Felix, Director of Institutional Support, University of Arizona

**› See how they did it**

## Faculty Confidence in Online Learning Grows

Survey finds significant increases in professors' confidence in virtual learning and their sense of support from their colleges -- but continuing concerns about equity for underrepresented students.

By [Doug Lederman](#) // October 6, 2020



ISTOCK.COM/DAMIRCUDIC

For years, advocates for online learning have bemoaned the fact that even as more instructors teach in virtual settings, professors' confidence in the quality and value of online education [hasn't risen accordingly](#). *Inside Higher Ed* has documented this trend in its [annual surveys](#) of faculty attitudes on technology going back over most of the 2010s.

Some hoped that by thrusting just about every faculty member into remote teaching, the pandemic might change that equation and help instructors see how virtual

learning might give students more flexibility and diminish professors' doubts about its efficacy.

A [new survey](#) finds that COVID-19 has not produced any such miracles: fewer than half of professors surveyed in August agree that online learning is an "effective method of teaching," and many instructors worry that the shift to virtual learning has impaired their engagement with students in a way that could exacerbate existing equity gaps.

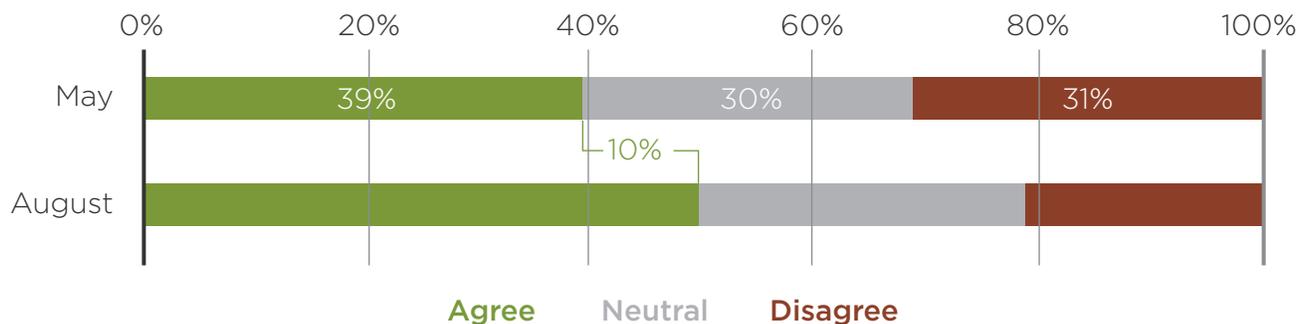
But the report on the survey, "[Time for Class COVID-19 Edition Part 2](#):"

[Planning for a Fall Like No Other](#)," from Every Learner Everywhere and Tyton Partners, also suggests that instructors' increased -- if forced -- experience with remote learning last spring has enhanced their view of how they can use technology to improve their own teaching and to enable student learning. The proportion of instructors who see online learning as effective may still be just under half -- 49 percent -- but that's up from 39 percent who said so in [a similar survey in May](#).

It also suggests that most professors feel much better prepared to

## Faculty Confidence in Online Learning Grows (cont.)

### "ONLINE LEARNING IS AN EFFECTIVE METHOD FOR TEACHING"



teach with technology this fall than they were last spring -- and they generally credit their institutions for helping to prepare them.

"It's not so much about whether they support online learning now than whether they're more comfortable with the adoption of practices and instructional methods in ways that are really powerful to support student learning in meaningful ways," says Kristen Fox, director at Tyton Partners and project lead on the survey and report.

#### Historical Attitudes

Faculty skepticism about online learning and other technological approaches to higher education is long-standing -- and arguably well earned. Too often campus administrators or technology advocates have heralded digital forms of higher education by focusing on cost savings or efficiency over quality, or set instructors up for bad outcomes by imposing solutions on them without seeking their input or giving them adequate training.

Even so, pre-COVID-19, more and more instructors had taught online or hybrid courses (the percentage was at 46 percent in [an Inside Higher Ed survey last fall](#)). Yet when

asked in that same survey whether "online courses can achieve student learning outcomes at least equivalent to in-person courses," fewer than a third agreed.

[Every Learner Everywhere](#), a network of college and technology groups focused on using digital learning to drive equitable access and success in higher education, and Tyton Partners, an investment, research and consulting firm that is part of the network, published the first "[Time for Class](#)" survey in July, focusing on how professors adapted (successfully and not) to the sudden shift to remote learning.

This follow-up survey focused on this "fall like no other" and on how instructors and their colleges and universities prepared for it.

The answer is "first and foremost about sentiment," says Tyton's Fox.

In May's first survey, 39 percent of instructors agreed with the statement "online learning is an effective method for teaching," and 31 percent disagreed. When the question was asked of the 3,569 respondents in August, 49 percent agreed and only 21 percent disagreed, with the neutral group remaining about the same size. (About 1,000 pro-

fessors were queried in both surveys, and 9 percent more of them answered positively in August than in May.)

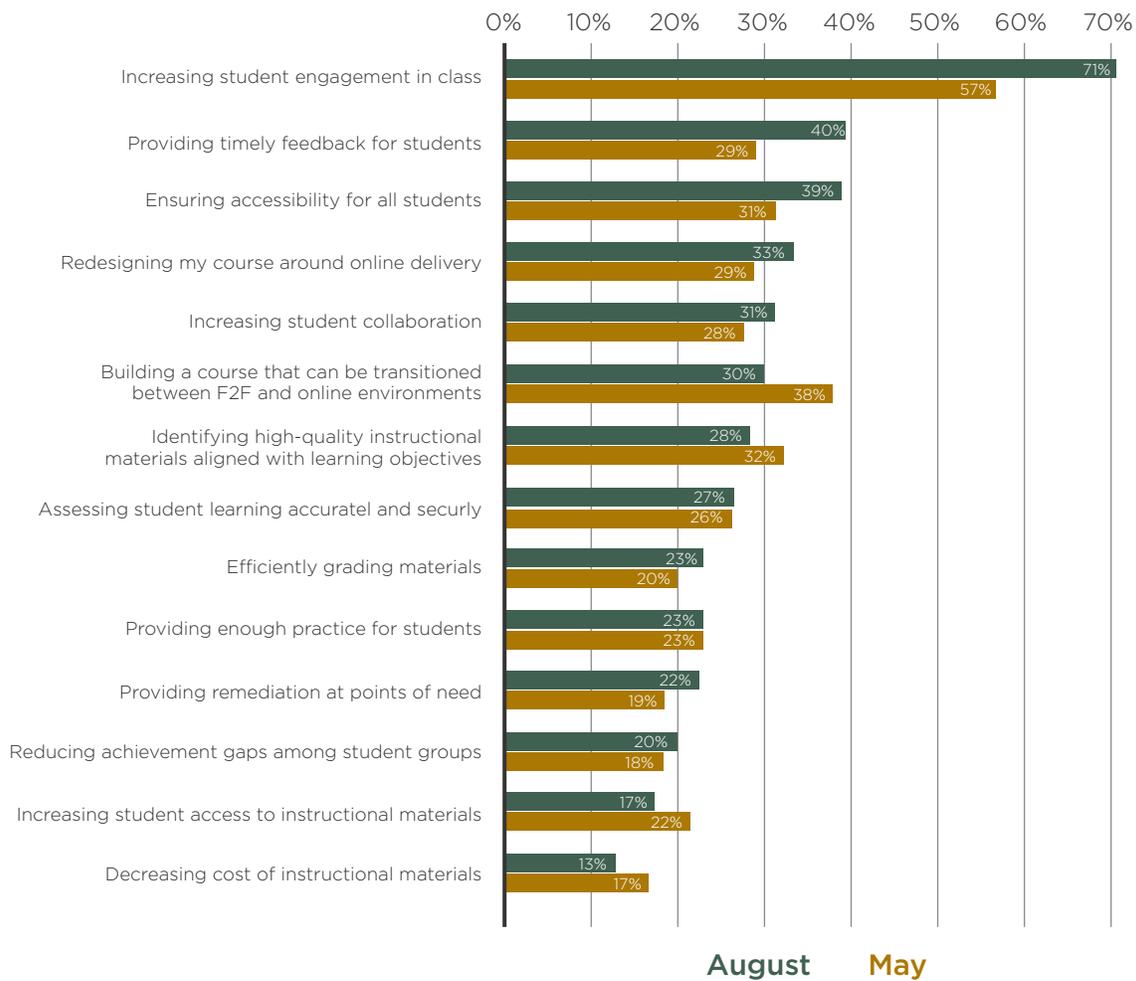
They cited a variety of reasons why: one community college teacher said that "every student engages (there are no 'quiet' students), there's a degree of flexibility for students, using online resources in place of purchased texts relieves student cost," while another instructor said that her "course content is the most up-to-date it has been in several years with the extra prep I have been doing for the transition online."

By far the biggest complaint from students and faculty members alike about the remote learning that most experienced last spring was the lack of engagement and interactivity between students and instructors and among students themselves.

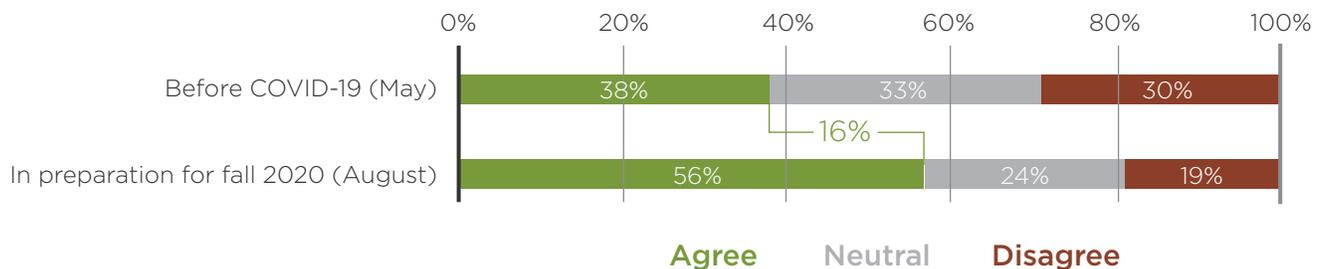
So it's probably not surprising that instructors' biggest objective this fall, by far, was to increase that engagement, they say. Among other changes they pursued was to provide more timely feedback and ensure accessibility for all students -- a recognition that students from

# Faculty Confidence in Online Learning Grows (cont.)

## TOP FACULTY PRIORITIES IN PLANNING FOR THE FALL TERM



## “MY INSTITUTION HAS PROVIDED SUFFICIENT TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHING ONLINE”



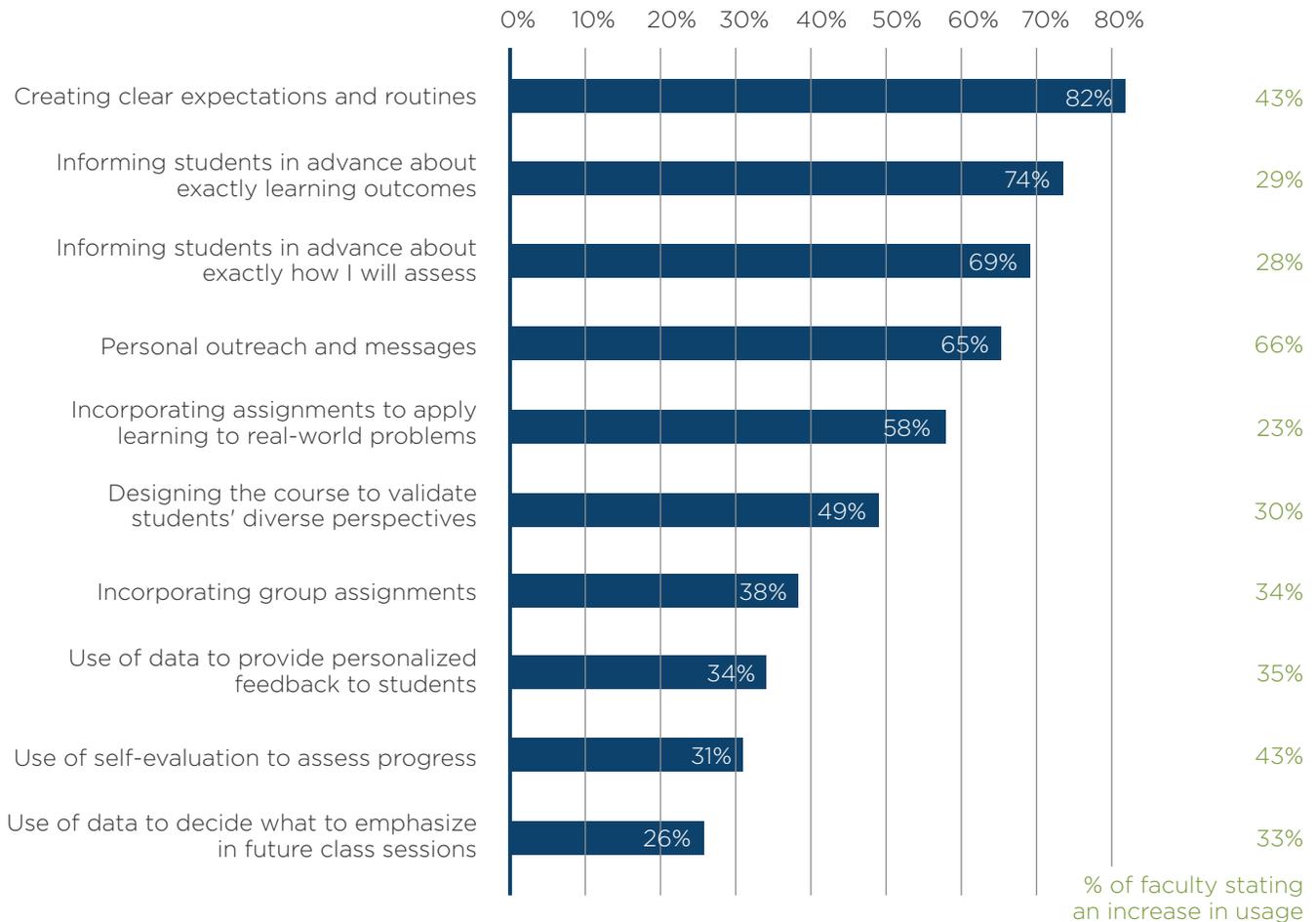
low-income backgrounds were likelier than peers to lack access to good technology, broadband internet access and quiet places to study, among other necessities for digital learning.

Four in five instructors said they had participated in professional development for digital learning to prepare for this fall, with community college professors (86 percent) more likely than their peers at four-

year colleges to say so. Two-year college instructors were also likelier to say that they were required to participate in instructional professional development, by 40 percent compared to the average of

## Faculty Confidence in Online Learning Grows (cont.)

### USE OF EVIDENCE-BASED TEACHING PRACTICES IN HIGHEST-ENROLLMENT COURSE



27 percent.

More than half of instructors credited their institutions with providing sufficient training for the fall, compared to fewer than two in five who felt that way pre-COVID.

Instructors said they turned to a mix of institutional resources and peer support for help -- more than three-quarters said they received aid from instructional technology staff members (78 percent) and peer-to-peer forums (76 percent), while about two-thirds cited teaching and learning centers and instructional designers.

Asked how, with that help, they

had redesigned their courses from spring to fall to achieve those goals, more than half of instructors said they had updated their learning objectives, assessments and activities (61 percent) and integrated the use of new digital tools (60 percent), while nearly half (46 percent) said they had embedded "more active learning elements (e.g., group discussion) to enhance student learning and engagement."

Much larger proportions of faculty members say they will use a set of what the report calls "evidence-based teaching practices" in their largest course this fall than was true the last time they taught

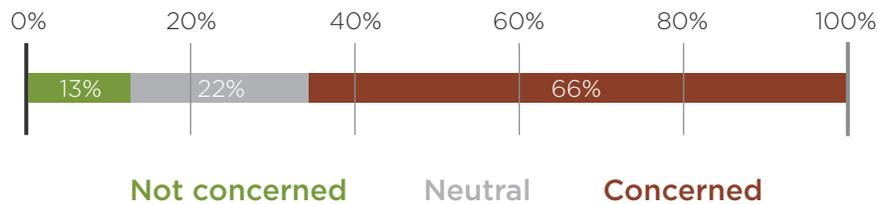
the course pre-COVID-19.

For instance, as seen in the chart below, roughly two-thirds of instructors (65 percent) said they would engage in personal outreach and messages to students; that 65 percent represents a 66 percent increase over the last time the courses were taught, the professors collectively said.

These figures suggest that the COVID-19-driven changes in how colleges operate are driving the sorts of pedagogical innovation that critics have long suggested (fairly or not) professors engage in too rarely.

## Faculty Confidence in Online Learning Grows (cont.)

### “I AM CONCERNED ABOUT EQUITY GAPS BETWEEN STUDENT GROUPS AT MY INSTITUTION”



Some of those practices -- like the personal outreach approach cited above -- take significant time and energy and add to many instructors' sense of being overwhelmed, says Fox of Tyton.

She sees some irony in the fact that one of the least-used of the evidence-based practices listed above -- using data to give personalized feedback to students -- could make it much easier for professors to do the outreach they so clearly want to do.

"We hear, 'I want to engage my students, give them more timely and personalized feedback, but it takes so much time to do it right and well,'" says Fox. "If I have 100 students, I'd ideally use the student learning data I have at hand" -- maybe the results of more frequent quizzes, data on who is showing up in class or logging in to use the content -- "to figure out how to triage and intervene in ways that aren't killing me as a faculty member."

Many faculty members know how to do that in the physical classroom, Fox says, relating a commonly heard faculty comment: "I know how to read the face of a confused and struggling student."

Doing so in a different format is

a "learnable, teachable skill that faculty are asking for" and that colleges could help with, she adds.

#### Hopeful for Fall

All of the changes that instructors have made, with all of the help their institutions have given them, had professors stepping into their classrooms -- virtual or otherwise -- pretty confident this fall. About three-quarters of those who were preparing to teach online (74 percent) and those who were preparing to teach fully in-person (73 percent) agreed with the statement "I am prepared to deliver a high-quality learning experience to my students this fall," while about 10 percent disagreed.

Those who were preparing to teach in hybrid or other "flexible" formats were slightly less confident, with about two-thirds saying so.

"This reflects the unique challenges of these delivery modes and the need to better support and share best practices for mixed-mode course delivery," the report states.

#### Worries Remain

Lest anyone think most instructors have gotten overly confident in their own abilities or the efficacy of their colleges and universities, however, many faculty members believe they

have a long way to go in delivering technology-enabled learning that meets their students' needs.

Professors' support for the statement "my institution is achieving an ideal digital learning environment" (How many faculty members would say *anything* at their institutions is ideal?) climbed noticeably from the spring, with a particularly sharp rise among two-year institutions. This is "an outcome of the herculean efforts that many across higher education have made," the report states.

The area of largest concern for many faculty members appears to revolve around equity. Professors' lists of the top challenges their students faced in the spring, and are likely to face in the fall, included things like fitting coursework in with home and family responsibilities, managing student mental health and wellness, ensuring reliable internet access, and managing financial stress in light of COVID-19.

Most of those challenges disproportionately affect students from low-income and other disadvantaged backgrounds, which is why two-thirds of surveyed instructors said they were concerned about equity gaps.

Fox and the report's other authors

## Faculty Confidence in Online Learning Grows (cont.)

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find an almost hopeful note in that concern about equity, which they suggest may be a silver lining to the hardships presented by COVID-19: "greater empathy for and understanding of the challenges faced by students."

"As soon as we made the decision to go fully online last March, there was a clear difference in success rates for the rest of the term because of access to technology, equipment, and internet," the report quotes one community college faculty member as saying. "It was frustrating and heartbreaking to see which students struggled to manage the class. This is *the* biggest hurdle we face. Making online classes is hard, but not as hard as making sure everyone has equal access." ■

“

We hear, 'I want to engage my students, give them more timely and personalized feedback, but it takes so much time to do it right and well.

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<https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/article/2020/10/06/covid-era-experience-strengthens-faculty-belief-value-online>



## 5 Ways Your Institution Can Support Flexible Learning Models

Learn how you can meet the diverse needs of your student population



**Communicate Course Expectations**



**Harness Different Mediums to Drive Engagement**



**Encourage Open Communication**



**Provide Opportunities for Interaction and Collaboration**



**Share Feedback with Students – And Ask for It in Return**

**> Read more**

## The HyFlex Option for Instruction

The mixed course model is getting buzz as one way colleges could educate students if their campuses are open but physical distancing remains. A panel of experts discusses the pros and cons.

By **Doug Lederman** // May 13, 2020

Around the country, and the world, college and university leadership teams are immersed in high-stakes discussions about whether and how to physically open their campuses to students this fall in a way that is both physically safe and educationally sound.

For some institutions, those decisions could be make or break, the difference between survival and closure. Many others still face significant pressures to open: from students (and their parents) who chose to spend their hard-earned dollars on a residential college experience and may take a pass if faced with a virtual one; politicians who want their states and prominent institutions to open up; alumni who are desperate for football Saturdays.

Yet the countervailing pressures are significant, too. To name a few: first and foremost the health and safety of students, faculty and staff members, and those in surrounding communities; the ethical and legal risks of opening prematurely; possible local, state and federal restrictions; and the logistical challenges of housing, feeding and educating hundreds or thousands of students.

This column is not about whether campuses should open; my *Inside Higher Ed* colleagues and our contributors are continuously exploring those questions elsewhere in these



Participants in a virtual *Inside Higher Ed* discussion about HyFlex.

pages. This "Transforming Teaching and Learning" space generally examines how colleges and universities ensure that their students get a high-quality education, so the focus here is on how campuses might undertake the central experience of student learning if they are partially or fully open to students in the fall.

Today we explore the pros and cons of one possible approach to doing so: a course model known as HyFlex in which each course is built to give students a choice to attend either in person or online. And I've solicited some help from three very thoughtful campus learning experts, one of whom has literally written the book on HyFlex, another who has experimented with it and a third who has lots of hard questions about it.

A thoughtful conversation about

how colleges and universities might continue to educate their students in the fall requires you to start with one of a few assumptions. Our bloggers Josh Kim and Eddie Maloney have [laid out 15 possible scenarios for campuses](#) this fall, including delays and such, but I'm going to focus on three:

The second scenario would create a significant set of challenges for colleges (some of which I explored in previous columns [like this one](#)), most prominently meeting what are almost certainly going to be heightened expectations from students and parents for a more engaging, richer and higher-quality virtual learning experience than most colleges almost amazingly got up and running in a matter of days this spring.

## The HyFlex Option for Instruction (cont.)

### Resources on HyFlex

- [Hybrid-Flexible Course Design](#), Brian Beatty, ebook, 2019
- "COVID-19 Planning for Fall 2020: A Closer Look at Hybrid-Flexible Course Design," Kevin Kelly, blog post on *Phil on Ed Tech*, May 2020
- "Considering Hybrid (Flexible) Models," *Mindwires* podcast, 2020
- "Hyflex Learning," Teaching in Higher Ed podcast, May 2020
- [Discussion About Hy-Flex](#), POD Network Listserv, 2020
- [7 Things You Should Know About HyFlex](#), primer from Ed-cause, 2010
- "Introducing a New(-ish) Learning Mode: Blendflex/Hyflex," *Inside Higher Ed* article, 2018

In some ways, though, it's the "in-between" scenarios -- neither fully in-person nor fully virtual -- that are most confounding to imagine and may be the most difficult for many colleges to pull off.

That, potentially, is where HyFlex comes in. I have to admit that after reading a bunch about it and listening to three very thoughtful people discuss it in the video conversation below, I remain a little unclear about both how, and whether, it might work for most campuses. But a lot of institutions seem to be considering some version of it, so here's my brief attempt to summarize the pros and cons and to point you to as many resources as possible to help you assess it for yourselves -- including the wonderful conversation below with these thoughtful experts.

- **Betsy Barre**, executive director of the Center for the Advancement of Teaching at Wake Forest University, in North Carolina
- **Brian Beatty**, associate professor of instructional technologies in the Department of Equity, Leadership Studies and Instructional Technologies at San Francisco State University and author of *Hybrid-Flexible Course Design*, a free ebook.
- **Bonni Stachowiak**, dean of teaching and learning at Vanguard University in California and producer and host of the *Teaching in Higher Ed* podcast.

### So What Is HyFlex?

Beatty and his colleagues at San Francisco State are widely credited with conceiving the Hybrid-Flexible format in the mid-2000s as they sought to make their existing residential instructional technologies master's degree program more accessible to students in their region, many of whom were working adults. The program's leaders did not have the expertise and internal support to build a fully online program, but they wanted to make it possible for students -- at their convenience and choice -- to participate either online or in person in ways that led to equivalent learning outcomes.

The model they developed, beginning in 2006 but adapted over time, aims to make sure that students aren't penalized from a learning standpoint if they move back and forth between in-person and online participation in the class, from week to week or even class ses-

sion to class session. Instructors essentially must build a fully online course and a face-to-face version, with the same learning outcomes in both.

Lots of professors have created "blended" or "hybrid" courses that either incorporate digital elements into face-to-face classes or allow a student to participate in an in-person class from a distance, says Beatty. Typically they decide which elements would be best delivered in person and which most effectively learned via technology, and break up the course that way.

With HyFlex, by contrast, professors "don't have that luxury," Beatty says. "You want to be able to create a fully online version and a fully face-to-face version and find ways to bring them together into a single course experience that has multiple participation paths ... And the student gets to control whether they're doing it online or in the classroom."

Creating an instructional model that allows students to toggle back and forth between educationally comparable in-person and virtual formats depending on the circumstances at the moment has a lot of resonance at a time like this. Not only is there enormous uncertainty about whether campuses will be able to open physically, says Stachowiak of Vanguard University, but the pandemic could interrupt the educations of many individual students if they or their family members get sick and are forced to quarantine.

Educational interruptions are likely to be an increasing factor of the

## The HyFlex Option for Instruction (cont.)

future, be they hurricanes or forest fires or, of course, pandemics.

"I never hear the response, 'just let them take some time off from their degrees,'" says Stachowiak, who has experimented with flexible, hybrid models in her own teaching. "I see a real emerging need for this kind of flexibility."

Barre, of Wake Forest, started a thought-provoking discussion on the POD Network Listserv about the pros and cons of the HyFlex approach. In that exchange and in our discussion below, she said she saw professors and institutions embracing hybrid-flexible models as if they could just put a camera in the classroom and let far-flung students listen in -- "kind of a 1990s distance learning," she said.

"It may be a convenient fix to ensure social distancing, but I'm worried it's popular because it allows schools to say they're offering face-to-face courses without having to change much to stay safe," she said on the Listserv discussion. She stressed the importance of differentiating between the sort of "blended synchronous" approach many professors used to conduct their classes via Zoom this spring,

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I never hear the response, 'just let them take some time off from their degrees.' I see a real emerging need for this kind of flexibility.

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versus the fully developed online and face-to-face pathways that Betty champions.

"Are we all talking about the same thing?" she asked.

Barre also raised an issue that has arisen in several discussions of models that differ significantly from what professors are used to, which is how concepts like this would play out at scale, when it becomes the "default" for faculty members who are not experts (and may have inadequate training and support from their institutions).

"What does it look like when everybody is forced to do it?" she asked.

"What can the average faculty

member be expected to do with a little bit of training, rather than Superman or Superwoman?"

As the conversation evolved, there was general consensus that it's impractical to expect that most professors can build fantastic blended courses that can be delivered both online and in person by fall, especially given workload issues.

"Can a whole campus get there? No, never, and I'm an optimist," said Stachowiak. "I'm aiming for a dimmer switch, where [a course] gets a little bit better all the time."

A transcript of the full discussion is [here](#). ■

Read Original Article ▶▶

<https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/article/2020/05/13/one-option-delivering-instruction-if-campuses-open-fall-hyflex>

## Online Leaders to Prioritize Flexibility Post-Pandemic

A report exploring the impact of the pandemic on the future of online learning suggests many campus leaders want to offer increased flexibility in teaching modality to students. How they will achieve this goal remains to be seen.

By **Lindsay McKenzie** // June 8, 2021

Chief online officers are already planning how to take advantage of the online learning expertise their institutions gained during the pandemic, according to a new report on the future of online learning post-pandemic.

The sixth Changing Landscape of Online Education (CHLOE) report, [published today](#) by Eduventures Research and Quality Matters, offers insight into how college and university administrators responded to the pandemic and what online learning leaders consider to be strategic priorities for online learning over the next three to five years.

Contrary to the fears of some online learning advocates, the hurried shift to remote instruction in 2020 appears to have boosted support for online learning, said Ron Legon, executive director emeritus at Quality Matters and senior editor of the report.

"In the early days of the pandemic, there was considerable concern that poorly done online courses might hurt the reputation of online learning," said Legon. That opinion has now shifted, and online learning has "grown in stature and acceptability," he said.

The CHLOE report, which includes partial and complete survey responses from 422 chief online learning officers, indicates there



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is now greater concern for quality standards and increased commitment to faculty professional development and preparing face-to-face students to study online. The survey was sent to a total of 3,452 colleges and universities in February 2021.

Preparing students for online learning with both optional and required orientation courses increased significantly in popularity in fall 2020, the survey found. Chief online learning officers ranked enhancing academic services as their top student-related priority over the next few years, followed by student support services and student orientation.

College and university investments in ed tech increased more than ever in 2020 and 2021 across all sectors of higher ed -- including institutions such as traditional liberal arts colleges that previously did very little online instruction, said Legon. The use of videoconferencing tools and virtual labs increased significantly between 2019 and 2021, according to the report.

Awareness of the digital divide between students who have access to the internet and technology and those who don't appeared to be mixed among chief online officers. A majority of these online learning leaders, 60 percent, said that less than 15 percent of their students

## Online Leaders to Prioritize Flexibility Post-Pandemic (cont.)

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had experienced internet connectivity or device access problems during the pivot to remote learning. Among the rest of the chief online officers, 23 percent estimated that more than 15 percent of the student body experienced hardware or internet access issues, and 17 percent said they did not know the full extent of the digital divide at their institution.

The majority of college online learning leaders said that the emergency pivot to remote instruction had a positive impact on online learning as a strategic priority at their institution. It is not clear, however, that this impact will result in more fully online degrees. When asked how likely it was that the online courses developed in response to the pandemic would become permanent new online programs, just 9 percent of survey respondents said it would be very likely for undergraduate programs. Another 59 percent said it would be likely for some programs but not others, and 24 percent said it was unlikely to occur. ■

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Contrary to the fears of some online learning advocates, the hurried shift to remote instruction in 2020 appears to have boosted support for online learning.

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<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2021/06/08/online-learning-leaders-want-prioritize-flexibility-post-pandemic>

## Reimagining Higher Education for the Age of Flexible Work

Colleges simply can't go back to the way things used to be, argue Sally Amoruso and Brian Elliott, as faculty and staff are demanding flexibility with when and where they work.

By [Sally Amoruso](#) and [Brian Elliott](#) // June 2, 2021

From classroom debates and lectures to student clubs and organizations to sports and other social gatherings, shared on-campus experiences form lasting memories, enrich lives and establish bonds between students and university staff that can last a lifetime. So it's understandable that as the vaccine rollout reaches critical mass and a broad reopening comes into view, many college and university leaders are eager to turn the page on the past year, to see it as a temporary disruption and to view the virtual college experience as little more than an aberration that was forced upon them.

However, there is no going back to the way things used to be. Colleges and universities must now prepare students for a world that has shifted significantly toward flexible work. Students have come to expect a flexible learning experience that takes full advantage of digital-first teaching methods. Moreover, faculty and staff are also demanding flexibility with when and where they work.

The challenge for institutional leaders is to find a balance between allowing greater flexibility for remote work while retaining the most vital face-to-face interactions that make campus life distinctively vibrant for all who work, live and study there.

Corporate America has already accepted the fact that the office-centric 9-to-5 norm of pre-pandemic life is gone for good. Leading-edge companies, such as Amazon, Dropbox and Salesforce, have announced that flexible, hybrid work will be their primary working model moving forward. [Data from Slack's Future Forum](#) show that these policies are essential to attracting and retaining talent. As many as 83 percent of employees do not want to return to working five days a week in a physical office. The majority -- 63 percent -- want the flexibility of a hybrid remote office model, while 20 percent want to work remotely full-time.

A recent [virtual gathering of college and university presidents](#) hosted by education company EAB showed promising signs that higher education is ready to embrace hybrid learning as an essential part of the student experience. A poll of more than 100 college and university presidents in attendance found that almost half, or 44 percent, planned to keep more than a quarter of classes online post-pandemic.

However, the poll also showed that most presidents aren't ready to embrace a significant shift to remote work or to a hybrid remote office model at their institutions. A majority, 56 percent, say less than



TATYANA PIVOVAROVA/  
ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES PLUS

25 percent of staff will be able to work from home two days or more per week, and only 11 percent say more than half of their staff will be permitted to work from home two days per week or more. Perhaps in solidarity with their direct reports, 75 percent of presidents say they expect to work from home less than 25 percent of the time, with only 7 percent saying they will work remotely more than half of the time.

This should raise a red flag. College and university presidents must resist the urge to return to the comfort of pre-pandemic norms and instead open themselves up to the potential benefits that remote work can offer their employees and their institutions. If they don't, they will face higher staff turnover and greater institutional instability.

The future campus will be neither

## Reimagining Higher Education for the Age of Flexible Work (cont.)

fully remote nor fully on-site. Here are four steps presidents can take to usher in a more flexible approach to remote work that fits this new reality.

- **Take a “best of each world” approach.** Presidents and their staffs need to rigorously evaluate which aspects of in-person work and student life are best experienced face-to-face and which are possible, and even preferable, in an online environment. For example, a lecture series may be delivered most efficiently through online modules. At the same time, many group discussions, debates and live presentations are more dynamic when participants are physically present, so classes, gatherings and experiences that feature this type of engagement should be held on campus whenever possible. Similarly, the campus experience isn't likely to suffer when employees who work in back-office roles with limited student interaction are allowed to work remotely. And many students have become accustomed to and expect the flexibility of online learning to continue.
- **Take advantage of an opportunity to rethink diversity, equity**

**and belonging.** Research shows that moving away from traditional office and campus-centric experiences has significant benefits for historically underrepresented and underserved student populations. For example, the Future Forum [found](#) that Black knowledge workers had a higher sense of belonging while working remotely than they did in the office. However, institutions must confront barriers that could exclude some employees from remote work or exacerbate diversity and health goals. They must take care to ensure all remote employees have equal access to the technology and other infrastructure required to work from home comfortably.

- **Double down on campus culture by reimagining it for a digital-first world.** Much as with leading companies, the best academic institutions have a distinct set of values, a sense of shared purpose and belief in a mission that transcends day-to-day work. Presidents have an opportunity to breathe new life into campus culture by embracing new, digital-first channels. Digital platforms now allow individuals, teams and organizations to maintain alignment regardless of where or when they are working. Building an operat-

ing model on digital channels, instead of relying solely on the physical campus, is the vital first step universities must take to move toward flexible work. In addition to connecting students and faculty, a digital-first approach offers an exceptional opportunity to connect the broader alumni network, elevating its presence in daily campus life.

- **Model new behavior from the top.** The single best way that presidents can reinvent their institutions is to lean into remote and flexible work, hire more remote-first staff, and celebrate staff and students who come up with new ways to keep campus culture alive in an online environment.

College and university presidents must avoid the temptation to reflexively revert to pre-pandemic norms and instead reimagine campus life as something new altogether, with student needs and desires at the center. Doing so is the only way to adequately prepare students for the new distributed, digital-first and flexible world of work that awaits them upon graduation. Remote work will not kill the campus experience. On the contrary, it is vital to its rebirth. ■

### Bio

Sally Amoruso is chief partner officer at EAB, and Brian Elliott is executive lead of Future Forum by Slack.

[Read Original Article](#) ▶▶

<https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2021/06/02/colleges-shouldnt-expect-their-employees-work-same-ways-they-did-pandemic-opinion>

## Learning Scenario #10: Modularity

| Josh Kim and Eddie Maloney on one brand of curricular innovation.

By **Edward J. Maloney** and **Joshua Kim** // May 6, 2020

Scenario No. 10 of 15 that we believe schools will be considering for the fall is Modularity. A modular course model shares some of the features and benefits of a [Block Plan](#), but with a greater degree of flexibility and variability.

In essence, a modular plan considers the semester-long course structure to be one of many possible ways to organize teaching a particular topic. Some topics might lend themselves to shorter engagements, while others might be organized in such a way as to acknowledge that different students may need different sequencing. Whereas a Block Plan generally forces a particular structure for each course and credit unit across the entire institution (e.g., three-week modules of one course per module), a modular approach allows for much greater variation across an institution. Within a modular course model, academic departments could create courses with shorter durations and flexible start dates, while keeping within the current semester structure. Unlike a Block Plan, which requires schools to engage in a full curricular and system redesign, shifting the course schedule from simultaneous semester-long classes to a shorter, perhaps highly integrated modular course structure could work within a traditional semester structure without too much modification.

The key to Modularity is flexibility -- flexible course lengths, flexible



sequences, flexible topics, flexible interdependence. In a modular approach, schools, programs, departments and even individual course sequences may all even be able to approach this flexibility differently. Some might be two 1.5-credit half-semester experiences. Others might be complex clusters of three-week courses that share a common, integrated week in the breaks between each cluster. Schools might define some commonly agreed-upon parameters, such as the need for modules to be taught more than once a semester to give students equal opportunity to take a module regardless of their schedule. Or they might see this as an opportunity to experiment.

Modularity is an approach to curriculum design and course scheduling that has some distinct advantages

as we move into the fall with many aspects of our lives up in the air. For students feeling disconnected from school and schoolwork because of the effects of social distancing, modular courses could help build stronger student social and learning communities. Students would be able to develop more relationships with peers across shorter, intersecting modules instead of longer classes run parallel with little intersection. Moving between highly curated modules might also help students maintain much of the initial interest and excitement that often accompanies the beginning of a new course. Anything colleges can do to help maintain connections with students is important. Additionally, modular courses that are created during and in response to COVID-19 might be designed to be as topical, relevant and imme-

## Learning Scenario #10: Modularity (cont.)

diate to students' lives as possible. Modular courses on education, wellness, public health, economic dislocations, public policy, virology and electoral politics are just a few examples of topics that may lend themselves to this particular moment.

And if they are online, short, topical and experiential modular courses may not only relieve some pressure on campus density, but they may do so in a way that is more attractive to students. Students might consider online modular experiences -- ones that both contribute credit toward graduation requirements and have a different sort of rhythm and tempo than semester-long classes -- as distinct from and possibly more attractive than online versions of the semester-long courses to which they are accustomed. For students in residence on campus, perhaps spread across nontraditional housing options such as hotels and university-arranged long-term Airbnb rentals, participating in online modular experiences might be a particularly appealing option. Attending a semester-long online course while living in a residence hall may feel odd, but engaging in shorter, intense, timely and integrated online learning experiences while living on or near campus may even feel like an upgrade.

Instructors may also find short, modular course experiences an appealing departure from the traditional rhythms of teaching. The shift to a curricular structure that enables Modularity could even open up the process that faculty must navigate to propose a new course, even if only temporarily. Professors

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The key to Modularity is flexibility -- flexible course lengths, flexible sequences, flexible topics, flexible interdependence.

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could be free to experiment with new course topics and approaches. Modular online courses could move in and out of interesting problems, unique approaches and complex curricular dynamics while also keeping students engaged in exploring wicked problems. Creative modular courses offer opportunities for differentiation. Faculty could create modular courses around their research specializations and use the flexible modular format to invite students into their areas of inquiry. Multiple, sequenced modular courses could be designed to serve as prerequisites to more advanced courses or for progressing through a major. Either way, faculty could be given greater license to be creative with course design and student activities.

Ultimately, the advantage of Modularity is its adaptability and flexibility. Modular courses could be designed to pivot rapidly, serving residential and remote students. Different learner expectations for

modular courses as compared to semester-long courses could reduce friction, and ideally student and parent consternation, around online delivery. A short online modular course need not be the online analog to a residential course -- it could and should be something different. As their own thing, modular courses are not burdened by history or expectations. They could be free to be new.

### Considerations

The advantages that we've articulated for building Modularity are exciting, but many of these assumptions have not been tested.

The hypothesis that students may prefer short, topical and less formal online modules to semester-length online courses is just that, a hypothesis. Signing up for many online modular experiences as opposed to a few semester-length online courses may in fact not prove appealing to (all) students. Part of the college experience that defines the value

## Learning Scenario #10: Modularity (cont.)

proposition of residential institutions is the chance to invest deeply in a topic. Students may feel that modular classes -- online or face-to-face -- no matter how creatively designed and relevant to their lives, are still poor substitutes for gathering around a seminar table for 15 weeks.

Additionally, it is not immediately clear that a supply of short modular courses would actually meet the demand for reducing classroom utilization or decreasing density on campus. Short modular courses might require more space, not less. A large number of face-to-face courses might need to be taken out of the system if adequate classroom space is to be freed up for smaller modular courses. Any plan that contemplates Modularity as the answer to the puzzle of lowering campus density should first confirm that there is enough classroom space to handle core courses under conditions of social distancing, even with most electives removed

from these spaces.

Modularity may also be particularly challenging for faculty, whose capacity is severely stretched right now. Faculty may be excited to offer a single new concise, topical and experiential online learning experience, but designing these modules is no easy feat. Similarly, while it may be possible to design modules that sequence together to meet course prerequisites or the requirements of a major, this would take a good deal of planning. Some majors are highly prescriptive, with students having to fill their course schedules with required courses and only infrequently enjoying the option of signing up for an elective. For professors teaching both full-term residential (or possibly online) courses and modular courses, it may be particularly difficult to design courses and modules on different schedules. Relatedly, how modular courses factor into faculty load becomes a complex problem in and

of itself. This may be solvable, but the solution may require complex internal institutional negotiations that might be more than any school could bear right now.

Whichever way a school chooses to introduce some elements of Modularity as a strategy for the fall, it is highly likely that the long-run results of this approach could prove generative in the evolution of the curriculum. The freedom for professors to create and teach short, topical and experiential courses would enrich and enliven the campus learning ecosystem long after the pandemic has passed. For students, modular courses that speak closely to their concerns and their challenges, and which are a break from the regular rhythms of the full semester (or quarter) may prove to be restorative and invigorating. A silver lining of COVID-19 could end up being an accelerated pace of curricular innovation, with Modularity a prime example of this sort of progress. ■

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<https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/blogs/learning-innovation/fall-scenario-10-modularity>

# Show Them You Care

Michel Estefan suggests four ways to help build supportive in-person or online classrooms that generate equity among students.

By **Michel Estefan** // February 3, 2021

If the pandemic has taught us anything about teaching, it's that effective pedagogy takes the form of a [caring relationship](#). Students do their best work when they feel empowered, supported and connected in the classroom. As the pandemic rages on and students continue to struggle with [isolation](#), [stress](#) and [uncertainty](#), the human dimension of instruction bears more significance than ever -- especially for [first-generation](#), [low-income](#) and [racially minoritized students](#) who often find themselves alienated, even in normal times, in institutions of higher education.

How can faculty members support their students in this moment of crisis when they are also [stretched thin](#) and facing [risks](#), [challenges](#) and [barriers](#) to their careers that parallel those confronting their students? This situation calls for creative approaches to pedagogy that afford faculty manageable ways of making large classrooms feel small and providing historically minoritized students with the support they deserve and need to succeed.

In this piece, I suggest four methods for achieving this: student design, structured flexibility, support pods and proactive mentoring. These methods can help build meaningful, supportive in-person or online classrooms that generate equity among students during these trying times.



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**Student design.** The syllabus, assignments and grading rubrics are the core artifacts that structure the learning process in a classroom. But for historically minoritized students, they can often feel more like gatekeepers to academic success than sources of information that promote fairness and transparency. One straightforward way to solve that problem is to involve students in creating those artifacts.

As a first assignment, ask students to annotate the syllabus collectively. Upload the syllabus as an open digital document and ask students to read it, note what they found useful, pose any questions about things that remain unclear and react to each other's comments. Then use their observations to revise the

syllabus and produce a final draft. [Instructors have found this to be](#) an effective way to build rapport with students and encourage collaborative learning among them.

You can apply the same approach to any [grading rubric](#) or assignment prompt. For example, have students read the rubric and comment on it collectively before they complete the corresponding assignment. This will provide you with valuable information about what's working well with the grading criteria and what you may need to revise. And the students will understand the rubric better and use it with a more discerning lens to complete the assignment.

By imprinting their views on the

## Show Them You Care (cont.)

core items that organize the learning process, students will relate to the course in an entirely different way. They will feel more committed to produce high-quality work and more invested in each other's success.

**Structured flexibility.** Over the course of teaching during the pandemic, we have [learned](#) that students appreciate and benefit from a thoughtful balance between flexibility and structure. [Students have been forthright](#) about how much they value flexibility through asynchronous course components and longer time frames to complete assignments, as well as their instructors' awareness that everyone's lives could be suddenly upended. But given that COVID-19 has disrupted many of the routines of in-person campus life, [students have also expressed](#) how much they value aspects of teaching that introduce regularity and consistency in their courses -- including synchronous components, a well-planned assignment schedule, clear deadlines and transparent grading guidelines.

One useful way to create student-centered structured flexibility is a variation on [contract grading](#) that offers multiple paths to achieve the course's learning objectives. You provide students with several assignment schedules to complete the course requirements and ask them to select one. Path A may involve two quizzes, two short papers and a final group project. Path B could consist of a quiz, class presentation, podcast and final paper. This method gives students more control over their coursework, al-

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This situation calls for creative approaches to pedagogy that afford faculty manageable ways of making large classrooms feel small and providing historically minoritized students with the support they deserve and need to succeed.

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lowing them to choose the assignment schedule that best suits their circumstances and interests while preserving a clear path to classroom success.

Students know their circumstances best, so giving them the freedom to decide how to achieve the course learning goals reduces the chances of having to continuously make unexpected, last-minute changes to assignments or grading policies while the pandemic persists.

**Support pods.** The value of community for student learning is [well documented](#) and so is its specific importance for [historically marginalized students](#). At its simplest, community rests on providing opportunities for students to support and help each other learn. Support pods are a useful way of connecting students that also allows you to scale mentoring for large classes. Place students in groups at the beginning of the term, have them share their contact information and ask them to check in with each other periodically to see how things

are going. Request that someone in each pod communicate with you to let you know how the pod members are doing. By having students support each other, you can focus your mentoring efforts on those that may need your help most.

**Proactive mentoring.** Studies have shown that [mentoring](#) is one of the most effective methods to help people in minoritized groups succeed -- and that mentoring online can be [just as effective](#) as doing it in person. But we do need to adjust our mind-set about mentoring.

In our interactions with students, we should strive to make sure they always feel safe, respected and empowered in our conversations, but we should also provide unsolicited support. [Anthony Jack's research](#) has shown that low-income students are often reluctant to ask their professors for help. As a result, a welcoming but passive disposition on our behalf isn't enough. For instance, instead of waiting for students to ask about research opportunities, share any

## Show Them You Care (cont.)

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information you have, express confidence in their ability to conduct research and offer to help if they think research is something they would like to try out.

As we continue to face the challenges posed by the pandemic, it is worth remembering that the relationships and interactions in the context of which learning takes place have a [direct impact on student motivation and academic performance](#). We all learn best when we are treated as distinct, complete individuals and feel involved in, empowered by and connected to the work we're doing. The methods I propose here are designed to achieve this by placing teaching as a caring relationship at the forefront of our pedagogy. ■

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Students know their circumstances best, so giving them the freedom to decide how to achieve the course learning goals reduces the chances of having to continuously make unexpected, last-minute changes to assignments or grading policies while the pandemic persists.

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### Bio

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<https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2021/02/03/four-ways-help-build-supportive-person-or-online-classrooms-generate-equity-among>

# Learning From Students

| Steven Mintz explains why it's important to listen to students.

By **Steven Mintz** // April 13, 2021

We need to do a better job of listening to our students' voices.

We certainly do when administrators' jobs are on the line: whenever students stage a protest, occupy a campus building or circulate a petition.

Otherwise, not so much.

Most colleges and universities do attempt to gauge student opinion, whether through course evaluations, focus groups, exit surveys or NSSE, the National Survey of Student Engagement.

But I've never seen an institution act on this information in a serious, sustained or systematic way.

And yet the information can be remarkably revealing. But only if you act on the findings.

For example, if you want to improve your teaching, you ought to listen to your students. Don't wait until the end-of-semester student teaching evaluation. Monitor their opinions now.

I count myself among the faculty members who regularly survey their students. Certainly, such surveys reveal the Heisenberg uncertainty principle in action: any attempt to measure a phenomenon inevitably distorts that phenomenon.

Still, more information is better than none.

The most valuable insights grow



out of questions about teaching and learning. Here are three questions I've asked, which I then follow with discussion.

### 1. I learn best ...

- a. when a professor lectures.
- b. when I study by myself.
- c. when I work on a project with classmates.
- d. when I work on a research project by myself.

### 2. A high-quality educational experience consists of ...

- a. a polished, knowledgeable, well-organized presentation by an instructor.
- b. a lecture accompanied by demonstrations and student questions.

c. class discussion or lab work.

d. inquiry, problem solving and other activities in class.

### 3. Which of the following statements about teaching strikes you as most accurate?

- a. Good teaching is one-fourth preparation and three-fourths theater.
- b. Telling isn't teaching; learning requires students to do something.
- c. The best education is not given to students; it is drawn out of them. It's more about posing questions than giving answers. It is the art of assisting discovery.
- d. The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires.

## Learning From Students (cont.)

The discussion sparked by these questions helps students understand that teaching is a construct that can take radically different forms -- and that lecturing is only one of many ways to learn. But the discussion is also valuable for me: about how students want to be treated with respect, their needs and arguments listened and responded to actively, and perspectives valued and taken seriously.

For faculty interested in educational innovation, polling can be eye-opening, but also sobering.

You are likely to discover that many students have no idea what good teaching looks like. You might also learn, to your dismay, that a significant subset of students prefers lectures, loathes team-based learning or regards class attendance as a waste of time.

At the same time, you will likely find that many want courses that address topics that they find relevant and that address real-world problems and assignments that offer flexibility in format.

Despite a careerist orientation, many crave courses that ponder serious intellectual and moral questions and that discuss theory -- which is not something they experienced in high school.

If the surveys are truly anonymous, you might be taken aback by how few students complete the class reading and how many collaborate with classmates on outside-of-class assignments.

You might also learn that many, perhaps most, feel that professors' standards of evaluation are unclear

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What we have since discovered is that most undergraduates have little desire to learn online all the time. Instead, they want recorded lectures for reference or greater flexibility when they must miss class.

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and that they very rarely receive feedback that they find constructive.

On the other hand, you might not be surprised to learn that many rely on study strategies known to be ineffective, like highlighting text, reading and rereading a text or notes, or studying a single subject or topic for a prolonged period of time, and how few use evidence-based study techniques, like self-quizzing, spaced practice, interleaving, paraphrasing and retrieval practice, or how a small a number understand the impact of mind-set on learning.

However much we might improve teaching and learning by listening to students, it is equally important to understand their experience of college as a whole.

Student surveys and focus groups can help a campus gauge the level of student satisfaction and their sense of belonging and connection. Surveys also offer opportunities to compare your students' attitudes with those at peer institutions. You can identify problematic areas,

such as students' sense of belonging or the frequency of interaction with faculty, or access to experiential learning opportunities.

**Here's some things that I've learned. Many students feel that:**

1. College involves jumping through a series of hoops.
2. College isn't really about learning. It's about meeting requirements and passing tests.
3. The relationship between professors and students is, in general, remote.

**Some findings were pretty predictable. Many students want:**

- a voice
- more flexibility
- more hands-on learning opportunities
- fewer requirements
- classes that are not narrowly focused

Many hunger for an academic experience that differs dramatically

## Learning From Students (cont.)

from high school (and by that, they don't mean large lectures!). STEM students want to be in the lab from day one. Engineering students want to make things.

At residential campuses, they're told by administrators -- with a wink and a nod -- that their real learning will take place outside the classroom. This conveys a very unfortunate message: don't be surprised if most of your classes will be boring and useless; if you want to undergo meaningful experiences, you'll find those in extracurriculars, sports, internships and incubators and maker spaces -- not in the classroom.

In fact, our campuses abound with data about student attitudes. Regrettably, there's no sense of what to do with it.

We often take it for granted that we know what students want. Pre-pandemic, ed-tech entrepreneurs

repeatedly claimed that our students, as digital natives, wanted to learn online.

What we have since discovered is that most undergraduates have little desire to learn online all the time. Instead, they want recorded lectures for reference or greater flexibility when they must miss class. Many want to be able to take less essential classes, including gen ed courses, online.

If we've learned anything from the shift to remote learning, it is that a quality undergraduate education is, first and foremost, a human-to-human experience. Even when it is digital, its essence lies in human interaction: what William Deresiewicz calls "brain sex."

Technology can enhance or detract from that interchange. At its best, it can make the learning experience

more immersive, collaborative, active and personalized.

Even if we could upload information directly into students' brains, that would not really be education, which requires skills to be practiced and information to be processed, explained, analyzed and interpreted.

Ask your students what they want, and what I think you'll hear, once you get passed the clichés about credentials, marketable skills, training, career preparation, is a genuine education: the ability to see, listen, read, think and understand in fresh ways; fluency with realms of culture, history, society and science that they've never encountered; and acquisition of a worldliness, sophistication and urbanity that they had previously lacked.

It's past time to give them what they want. ■

### Bio

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<https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/higher-ed-gamma/learning-students>

# Accessibility Gains Must Become Lasting Learning Practices

We must broaden our focus to create inclusive learning environments that recognize and remove barriers, creating a more equitable system for all, write Raghu Krishnaiah and Kelly Hermann.

By **Raghu Krishnaiah** and **Kelly Hermann** // July 7, 2021

For too long, colleges and universities have waited for students with disabilities to request accommodations before deciding to remove barriers to access and full participation that existed all along. Higher education's response to the COVID-19 pandemic shone a stark light on those practices, highlighting the shortcomings of this "wait and see" approach when it comes to digital accessibility and curricular access. In the new normal, post-pandemic education institution, we must broaden our focus to create inclusive learning environments that recognize and remove barriers, creating a more equitable system for all.

The pandemic revealed a number of biases in higher education as students proved that they *can* learn remotely, when necessary, and accommodations previously considered unreasonable became standard practice. Attendance policies are a prime example: before the pandemic, students with disabilities had requested to [attend class virtually](#) and receive recordings of class meetings for later playback. In many cases, those requests were denied. Now, colleges and universities use typical accommodations -- virtual class meetings, recorded playbacks, captions, text-to-voice -- because they encourage the physical distancing required by

the pandemic and act as tools that supplement learning. These accommodations benefit all students and lead to more flexible, responsive learning environments that are more equitable and inclusive.

The advantages of online learning for students with disabilities are evident, but many people misperceive that an online education is automatically accessible, regardless of a student's disability. In fact, while online education better meets the needs of students with disabilities in many cases, virtual learning can exacerbate certain challenges. Those challenges include the lack of accessibility of commonly used tools and resources, as well as their incompatibility with the assistive technology that students with disabilities use -- which many institutions didn't account for when they pivoted to virtual learning over a year ago.

In a survey by the [Association on Higher Education And Disability \(AHEAD\)](#), students with disabilities reported having more difficulty accessing the internet, obtaining technology support and training, and communicating with faculty members. Live Zoom sessions without playback options do not [accommodate students](#) who cannot watch in real time because of medical issues. Course materials, especially those in PDFs, are likely



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to have [accessibility issues](#) when not formatted correctly. Even moving the test-taking process online can make it difficult for people [using assistive technology](#).

Other challenges may come from the additional stress and anxiety of attending college with children at home, holding down a job or dealing with strenuous financial circumstances. Adult students, regardless of disability, are experiencing chronic stress and anxiety at levels that could merit the same accommodations as a disability. Notably, however, students with disabilities reported greater instances of [major depression and generalized anxiety](#) during the pandemic.

And as new challenges emerge in the post-pandemic classroom, including mental health conditions aggravated by the chronic stress of the past year, student success may

## Accessibility Gains Must Become Lasting Learning Practices (cont.)

be further inhibited. Understanding students' distinct circumstances must become the blueprint for developing strategies that institutions can use to mitigate the impact of any disability they may have on their coursework. Faculty members also need systems in place so they can ask questions and be informed about which accommodations provide the best access.

Higher education's commitment to giving students with disabilities an equal opportunity to show what they have learned is key to student success. At University of Phoenix, we have designated [disability service advisers](#), or DSAs, who work with students and academic counselors to provide accommodations, support and access to resources. For example, one student who is a medically retired veteran of the Marine Corps told us his DSA checked in on him regularly, ensuring he was always aware of the deadlines for requesting accommodations and extensions. He wrote, "It's hard to nudge myself to get work done when my day is filled with roller

coaster highs and lows of emotion and stress." DSAs can support students both in and outside the classroom.

But these changes must not start and stop at the campuses. Policy makers should examine federal financial aid opportunities and identify opportunities to restructure federal aid to improve access for students with disabilities. Existing Title IV regulations do not provide accommodations for students with disabilities and, as a result, many of those students can potentially lose out on federal or state financial assistance. Additionally, [credit-hour thresholds](#) require students to have a certain number of credit hours to receive funding. That can lead to less flexibility and a greater need for accommodations, particularly for students with disabilities who are balancing their education with the physical impacts of their diagnosis.

Such policies, be they from regulators or institutions themselves, that are not crafted with students' needs in mind can have negative consequences for those

living with disabilities and requiring accommodation. In contrast, as the pandemic taught us, updating antiquated policies that inhibit access or limit flexibility can greatly improve students' experiences and enable them to thrive. That is why we must continue to provide and strive for greater flexibility, access and support for students.

The challenges of the past year have revealed inequities in how we serve students with disabilities. While we cannot unwind the clock and go back in time, we can move forward with simple and meaningful changes to make higher education more accessible, equitable and inclusive. We have learned a lot from the pandemic and the shift to virtual learning. Students entering higher education in 2021 and beyond now know that more is possible. It is our responsibility to meet them where they are, provide them with options that fit their lives, support their career journeys for life and continue our evolution toward an accessible ecosystem that emphasizes inclusion and equity. ■

### Bio

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<https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2021/07/07/colleges-must-continue-work-create-inclusive-learning-environments-opinion>

# A Remote Work Continuum Framework

Thinking about work through the lens of The Low-Density University.

By Edward J. Maloney and Joshua Kim // July 1, 2021

Recently, UPCEA gathered a group of thought leaders together to talk about remote work at their institutions. An outgrowth of their “Conversations with Colleagues” webinar was the development of a tool to provide institutions with a common language to make strategic decisions about work after COVID.

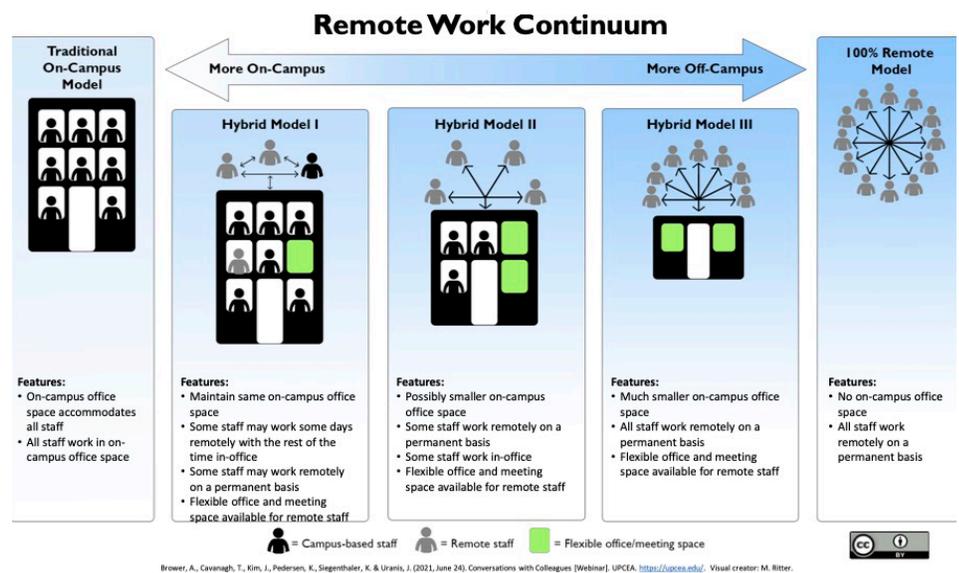
This Remote Work Continuum framework has been made available on CC license. The idea is that your institution might want to utilize it as well to guide campus discussions about post-pandemic work.

For us, the remote work continuum described in the framework is highly reminiscent of the continuum that we developed for our writing (and subsequent book) on The Low-Density University.

In that book, which began life as a series of Inside Higher Ed articles, we lay out a continuum of 15 scenarios for teaching and learning during and after the pandemic.

The continuum that describes the options for instructional methods (from fully residential to fully remote) is the analog to the continuum of how higher education teams (often those working with faculty on courses) can organize their work.

The low-density university is as much a lens to understand how work works in academia as it is to



understand the potential futures of teaching and learning.

Decisions among campus academic units to move to some version of remote and hybrid work serve as much to create the low-density university as the decision to shift residential courses to blended and online delivery methods.

The Remote Work Continuum framework helps to demonstrate that the decision about where academic staff work is not binary. Instead of thinking about the future of academic staff work as either on-campus or 100 percent remote, we should instead be thinking about the range of “more on-campus” and “more off-campus.”

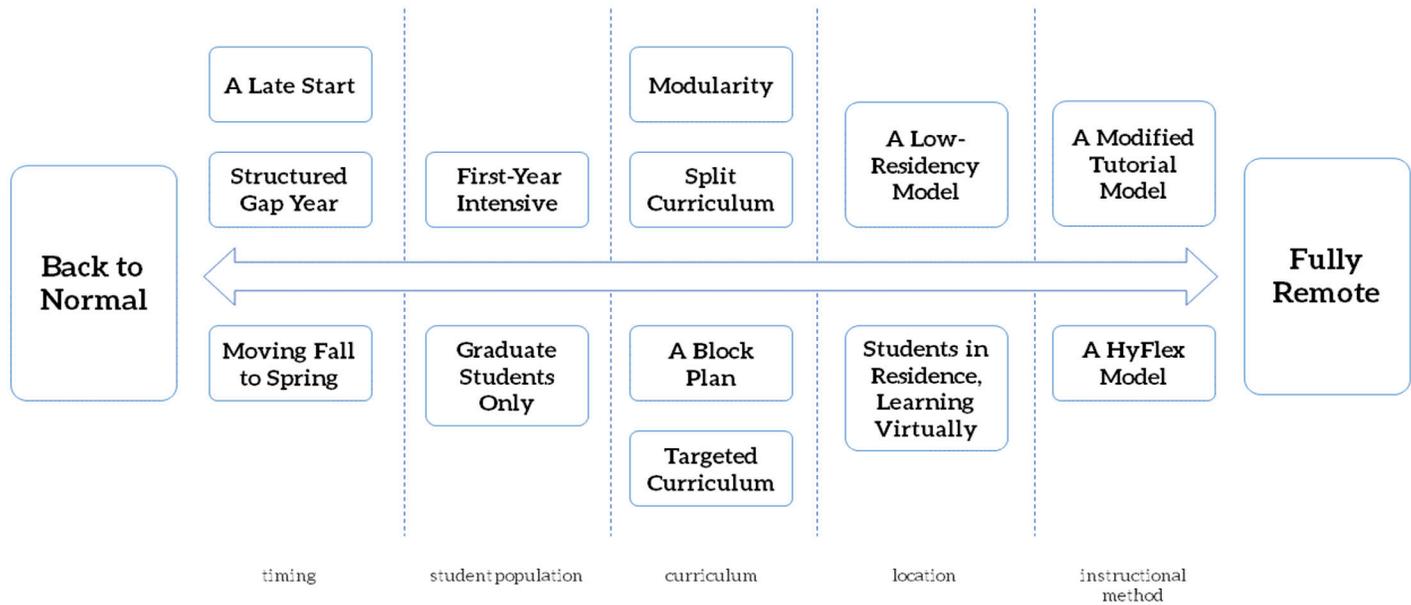
It is within and between the “more on” and “more off” where many in academia will, post-pandemic, like-

ly end up working, with the schools likely having to choose which hybrid models fit them best, both for the success of campus and for the individuals who make it up.

Going forward, the traditional on-campus model may end up being the exception, reserved for those ever-rarer cases where some form of hybrid work does not make sense. And the extent to which 100 percent remote work will grow remains an open question.

This shift mirrors and reinforces the evolution of teaching and learning into a normative hybrid model. When academic life begins to return to more or less normal in the fall of 2021, we expect that most courses at most schools will end up being (more or less) hybrid, blended and flipped.

## A Remote Work Continuum Framework (cont.)



Any course that relies solely on in-person lectures and high-stakes summative assessments may seem to its students anachronistic. Courses that choose not to supplement and surround the important face-to-face experience with recorded lectures, digital learning materials, online discussions and digitally formative assessments could seem like something from a different era.

In the same way, any employer (maybe especially higher ed employers) that does not offer hybrid working options may seem out of touch. The work of work and the future of learning is hybrid. How we get there and what that future ultimately looks like is still

to be determined.

As with all big changes, the newly arrived reality of hybrid learning and working brings with it pros and cons. Few really big changes are ever all positive or negative. There will be winners and losers.

For instance, what does the new hybrid reality of learning and working mean when viewed through the lens of inequality and privilege? How will schools support the complexities of hybrid learning to make the experiences as deep and rich as possible?

And how will schools provide support for staff whose positions cannot be easily made hybrid? The people in those positions were too often at the greatest disadvantage

this past year.

What are the trade-offs that hybrid work and learning bring on outcomes as diverse as productivity, community and happiness?

The coming post-pandemic months (and likely years) might best be thought of as a trip that all of us in higher ed have embarked on, but on which none of us know precisely where the destination will be.

Frameworks like the Remote Work Continuum can help us think through how we will all navigate the turbulence along the way.

Where will your campus and unit/center/office fall into the continuum come fall? ■

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<https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/learning-innovation/remote-work-continuum-framework>

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