

## THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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# Teaching

Our teaching-and-learning experts give you insights on what works in the classroom. Delivered on Thursdays. Teaching is written by [Beth McMurtrie](#) and [Beckie Supiano](#). We love hearing from readers, so please don't hesitate to reach out to us directly. You can also read [more articles about teaching and learning](#).

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**From:** Beth McMurtrie

**Subject:** Teaching: How To Engage Students in a Hybrid Classroom

*You're reading the latest issue of Teaching, a weekly newsletter from a team of*



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This week:

- I share expert advice on how to make a HyFlex classroom work for you.
- I point you to resources on teaching in a hybrid mode.
- I share a story on how colleges can support students of color.

## Teaching in a Hybrid Classroom

I've been working on a story about the growing popularity of the HyFlex model for the fall, in which professors teach simultaneously to students in their classroom and others beaming in remotely. This form of hybrid teaching, advocates say, provides options for students who can't come to class for health or logistical reasons, and allows for socially distant classrooms by rotating students through on alternating days. Under one scenario, for example, one-third of students in a large lecture course might come to class on a given day, with the others tuning in via Zoom.

Many instructors are dubious, to say the least, about how well this will work. They want to know how they can engage students who are spread all over the place. They worry about being forced to teach in a lecture format, in which active learning seems impossible. They don't understand how they can keep track of questions and comments from all of their students without a teaching assistant to help. And, of course, they question how well the technology that underpins all of this will work.

I asked a few teaching-and-learning experts what ideas and advice they would give to these instructors. I wasn't able to get into a lot of those details in my story, so I want to share them here.

"Most faculty members I've talked to across the country are really disinterested in

the idea of HyFlex,” says Jenae Cohn, an academic-technology specialist for the program in writing and rhetoric at Stanford University. “It involves a fundamental rethinking of the instructor’s role in designing a learning experience. It’s not a bad thing to ask them to do that, but it’s a huge cognitive load right now.”

Cohn, who has designed hybrid and online composition courses, helps faculty members learn how to teach with technology. So she has a few thoughts on how instructors could make hybrid teaching a better experience.

Her advice: Design a fully online class and think of the in-person part of it as an enhancement to the core of your coursework. That may sound counterintuitive, but I’ve heard this from several teaching experts. The idea is that if you expect the bulk of teaching and learning to take place in your classroom, you’re asking it to carry too much weight.

Cohn suggests thinking of class time as a place to connect and regroup, as well as to review content. Organizing your course in this way minimizes the risk of having your remote students passively watch you engage with students in person. Allowing for more “nimble, spontaneous actions” during class time, she says, will also make that time more interesting for all students.

One exercise that faculty members could do in a hybrid classroom is to ask a student in class to pair up with a remote student through a Zoom chat room to work on a problem together.

Cohn says she’d also encourage students to find ways to connect with one another. That addresses one of the bigger challenges with remote learning: creating a sense of community. “Students are pretty great for creating their own tools and communities,” she says. So let them figure out how, whether through Facebook, GroupMe, Slack, Discord, or even a Twitch livestream.

Many professors being asked to teach in a hybrid classroom also wonder about two common challenges: active learning and classroom discussion. Not only do you have two distinct audiences, but the students in one of them are masked and have to stay six feet apart. And if the classroom isn't wired with microphones around the room, chances are the remote students aren't going to be able to hear conversations very well.

Derek Bruff, director of the Center for Teaching at Vanderbilt University, addressed this challenge in a recent post: [Active Learning in Hybrid and Physically Distanced Classrooms](#). His answer is to lean into technology. Instead of relying on classroom discussion, for example, ask students to respond to your questions through live polling, in Zoom or whatever conferencing platform they use. Those polls can also foster back-channel conversations, which can enhance, or provide an alternative to, classroom conversation.

Collaborative note taking, in which students take turns working in a shared online document to take notes on a class discussion, is another way to foster community, he writes. Group work can be done that way as well, with online students working together in breakout Zoom sessions.

Another setup that Bruff likes, which works well with social distancing and hybrid teaching, is called fishbowl. A few students form a circle and discuss a topic, with the rest of the class observing. Some of the observers might then summarize the group's conversation. Afterward, students reconfigure to form another small discussion group. This can also be done on Zoom or some other platform.

Like Cohn, Bruff suggests that faculty members organize the course as an online experience, supplementing it with classroom work. In other words, make sure that all materials, assignments, group work, and other activities are housed in your learning-management system, so they can be easily — and equally — accessed by

students no matter where they are on any given day.

That also prevents a common misconception with HyFlex (or its variations), he says: that you have to create two versions of your course, one for the classroom and one online.

Bruff admits that HyFlex is intimidating, especially during a pandemic. Still, he says, “I’m not the kind of guy who will throw up my hands at a teaching challenge and say, ‘This isn’t going to work.’”

Will you be teaching in a hybrid format this fall? If so, what strategies do you plan to employ for discussion, activities, and group work? And what questions do you have about how to make it work for your students both in person and remotely? Write to me at [beth.mcmurtrie@chronicle.com](mailto:beth.mcmurtrie@chronicle.com), and your comments and questions may appear in a future newsletter.

## Further Resources

*For more ideas on hybrid teaching, check out these links.*

On her blog, Jenae Cohn created a useful overview, [Hybrid, HyFlex, Online, and Everything in Between: Course Models at a Glance](#).

Brian Beatty, an associate professor of instructional technology at San Francisco State University, who pioneered HyFlex, wrote an open-source book, [Hybrid-Flexible Course Design](#).

Jose Antonio Bowen, a former president of Goucher College, offers "[The HyFlex Flip: Planning for Courses in Fall 2020](#)," in which he proposes that faculty members replace lecturing with small-group active-learning activities. He also wrote [Teaching Naked: How Moving Technology Out of Your College Classroom Will Improve](#)

## [Student Learning.](#)

Kevin Kelly, an online-teaching expert and lecturer in education at San Francisco State University, [writes about HyFlex](#) in a guest post on the blog PhilonEdTech, and includes examples of how a HyFlex class session might work.

## **Supporting Students of Color**

“As the pandemic and the racial-injustice crisis continue to take a toll on Black people and other marginalized groups, colleges face a newfound urgency to support the mental health of students of color,” writes my colleague Sarah Brown, in a [story](#) this week about the topic.

For cultural and other reasons, many Black, Latinx, and Asian students are less likely to seek out mental-health services on campus than white students are. And when they do, they often encounter campus therapists who don’t look like them. Sarah shares some of the ways that colleges are developing flexible, accessible, and culturally responsive resources for their students.

That also includes investing in anti-racism efforts across the campus and thinking about preventative services, like food pantries and emergency financial aid, “so that low-income students, who are disproportionately people of color, don’t have to stress as much about basic needs.”

If you’re wondering how you can show support to your students, my colleague Beckie Supiano has written about how instructors can include a note of care in their syllabus. Read about that [here](#).

Thanks for reading Teaching. If you have suggestions or ideas, please feel free to email us, at [dan.berrett@chronicle.com](mailto:dan.berrett@chronicle.com), [beckie.supiano@chronicle.com](mailto:beckie.supiano@chronicle.com), or [beth.mcmurtrie@chronicle.com](mailto:beth.mcmurtrie@chronicle.com).

-Beth

TEACHING & LEARNING

## Beth McMurtrie

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