Going Hybrid in Higher Ed:

Trends and Challenges for the Next Generation Campus

class
Technologies Inc.

With vaccines widely available, many U.S. colleges and universities plan to return to in-person instruction in fall 2021. But as students return to long-empty campuses, the virtual classroom will not become obsolete. In fact, according to the Best Colleges 2021 Online Education Trends Report, 49% of students said they plan to continue learning virtually even after the pandemic is over. While this statistic may come as a surprise to some administrators, the advantages of virtual learning have proven out over a year when, for most colleges, there was no other option.
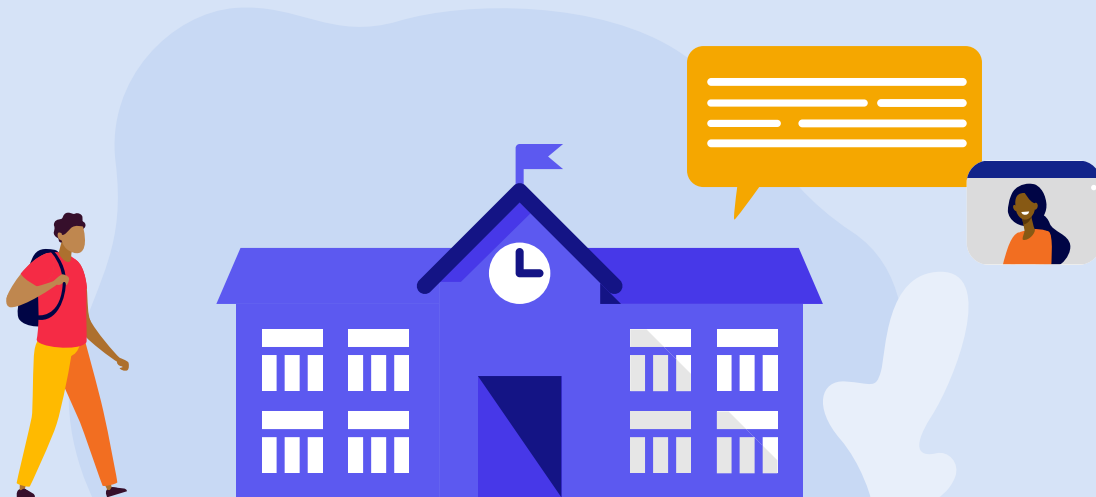
Many institutions have chosen a hybrid learning model, which gives students the flexibility to choose between synchronous online, asynchronous online, and in-person learning options. Some colleges are even offering "hyflex" courses, which support both in-class and online students in the same section.

What does it mean to bring hybrid learning into a post-Covid world? In part one of this e-book, we'll explore why many institutions are choosing to go hybrid; in part two, we'll discuss the challenges of implementing a hybrid model—and how to solve them.

Hybrid vs. Hyflex

Many institutions have chosen a hybrid learning model, which gives students the flexibility to choose between synchronous online, asynchronous online, and in-person learning options. Some colleges are even offering "hyflex" courses, which support both in-class and online students in the same section.

Part One: 4 Reasons Why Institutions Are Choosing Hybrid

The pandemic revealed several key benefits to learning online—and accelerated a digital transformation that was already underway before Covid hit. Here are four reasons why colleges and universities are opting for a hybrid learning model:

1 Institutions can expand their reach

Higher education has been experiencing an enrollment crisis for years now, with college enrollment declining by more than 2% per year since 2010. After Covid hit, FAFSA applications saw a year-over-year decline of more than 9%, indicating a significant decrease in the number of low-income students planning to attend college. This decline in enrollment, along with lack of government support and financial mismanagement, has contributed to an ever-growing list of universities closing their doors.

There are many factors behind the enrollment crisis, including the fact that there are fewer young people in this generation and, thus, fewer prospective students. But for institutions struggling to attract new students, hybrid learning offers an opportunity to expand their geographic reach and appeal to a wider variety of students. This is especially true for colleges and universities in more rural parts of the country. By offering online and hyflex course options, institutions can appeal to working students and students with longer commute times who may not be able to come into the physical classroom every week.

Online Learning as Competitive Edge

Many colleges and universities that increased their online offerings have experienced huge boosts in enrollment. **In summer 2020, Georgia Gwinnett College's summer enrollment went up 14%, and Arizona State University saw a similar leap in numbers.** The schools credit their success to diverse and lucrative online offerings, like courses in technology and public health, and flexible class schedules.

The good news is that so far, the transition to hybrid learning is working. Many schools that increased their online offerings have experienced considerable boosts in enrollment. In summer 2020, for example, Georgia Gwinnett College's summer enrollment jumped up 14%, and Arizona State University saw a similar leap in numbers. The schools credit their success to more flexible class schedules and diverse and lucrative online offerings, including courses in technology and public health.

There are many reasons why students might prefer learning online at least part of the time, and school districts can more easily accommodate those needs in a virtual academy environment.

2 More inclusive learning environments

In March 2021, FAFSA applications declined by more than 9% from the previous year, with an even more considerable decrease at Title I schools and among students of color. Increasingly, students from marginalized communities are choosing not to attend college post-pandemic—a reality that has motivated many institutions to refocus their attention on equity and access.

To stay relevant in this changing landscape, colleges and universities need to think about how to support students with varied life circumstances and accessibility needs. Hybrid learning is one way to make schools more accessible for working parents, students with physical and cognitive challenges, and other non-traditional students who can't commit to living on a college campus full-time or attending classes during a typical 9-5 schedule.
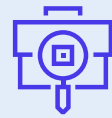
During the pandemic, colleges and universities have seen many instances where hybrid learning improves access. For students with functional disabilities that make it more challenging to leave home—like mobility issues, chronic illness, or chronic pain—hybrid learning gives them the flexibility to log in and learn, and visit the in-person classroom when they can. For working students, online and hyflex learning make it easier to attend classes and manage a full-time work schedule. Overall, flexible class schedules and the ability to learn asynchronously benefit a wide range of students, making it easier for colleges and universities to support a diverse student population.

3 New opportunities for career readiness

Hybrid learning provides students with more opportunities to participate in work opportunities that can support their career goals.

Under a traditional, in-person learning model, many college students reserve internships and other hands-on learning opportunities for the summer months—if they can afford to access them at all. With hybrid learning, however, students have more flexible schedules, making it easier for them to fit work experience in during the school year.

Work experience isn't just about money—it also gives students practical experience in the field and increases their likelihood for job placement after graduation. In 2017, a team of researchers at Mt. Holyoke College in Massachusetts found that internships increased a student's chances for job placement within six months of graduation. By building high-quality internship programs and giving students a more flexible, hybrid learning environment in which to obtain real-world experience, colleges and universities can increase students' likelihood of career success.

Building in Career Readiness

Internships increase a students' chances for job placement. By building high-quality internship programs and giving students a more flexible, hybrid learning environment in which to obtain real-world experience, colleges and universities can increase students' likelihood for career success.

4 Greater resilience and continuity

The pandemic taught us that disruptions happen—and not just on a small scale. While about 50% of the U.S. population is vaccinated as of summer 2021, new Covid variants may impact in-person learning in the fall semester and beyond. And Covid isn't the only threat to learning continuity. Climate change has increased the risk of natural disasters in many parts of the country, and catastrophes like floods and wildfires can significantly disrupt learning for weeks, or even months.

The post-Covid education landscape necessitates robust learning-continuity plans. Ultimately, institutions that choose a hybrid learning model are more resilient because they are prepared to reach students in the event of an unexpected campus closure. On top of that, hybrid learning provides a more accommodating environment for students and faculty who may need to isolate themselves if they or a family member becomes ill.

Part Two: 3 Challenges for the Hybrid Campus, and How to Address Them

The benefits of hybrid classrooms are clear—but that doesn't mean implementing them is always easy. This section will highlight the challenges institutions face during this transition and what they can do to address them.

Challenge 1: Internet and device access

When Covid shut down campuses in March 2020, it became apparent that many students don't have access to reliable internet and devices. Indeed, a Federal Communications Commission study from 2018 indicates that 14 million Americans lack internet access, while an additional 25 million have unreliable or slow broadband. Rural students, low-income students, and students of color were more likely to have limited access to both internet access and a computer at home. CARES Act Funding allocated more than $30 billion to colleges to improve online instruction and provide students with access to essential hardware. But institutions moving to a hybrid classroom model still need to ensure every student has access to the tools they need to learn.

How to address it: Colleges should start by understanding what their students need. In areas where students don't have internet access at home, for example, institutions can offer hotspots on campus and in the community. If cost is a barrier, schools can also put students in touch with service providers offering free or low-cost internet access. Many colleges and universities also provide students in need access to laptops and other devices through loaner programs and grants to help bridge the digital divide. In response to concerns about education and equity, the Biden administration has already announced plans to improve broadband across the nation. But in the meantime, surveying students to understand their needs, and then connecting them to resources, will make virtual classrooms more accessible for more students.

Accessibility Starts With Internet Access

A Federal Communications Commission study from 2018 indicates that **14 million Americans don't have internet access,** and an additional 25 million have unreliable or slow broadband. Rural students, low-income students, and students of color were more likely to have limited access.

Challenge 2: Meeting higher student expectations

In a recent webinar, higher education author Jeff Selingo said: "Today's students are accustomed to learning by toggling between the real and virtual worlds." After more than a year of online learning, students have much higher expectations than their predecessors. They are accustomed to hybrid and online learning—and they expect institutions to meet their expectations for virtual learning. In a survey by the Chronicle of Higher Education, 94% of high school students today expect their college classes to have a virtual component—with 35% of students anticipating that more than half of their college classes will rely on technology. The increased level of expectations pose new challenges for instructors and administrators as they determine how to best integrate technology into the classroom.

How to address it: Today's students aren't new to online and hybrid learning, and that means they expect more from their hybrid courses. Colleges and universities need to address those expectations by supporting and training their virtual learning teams, leveraging platforms—like Class—which were created to deliver the best classroom experiences, and collecting feedback from students in hybrid and online courses.

Challenge 3: Expanding instructor training

Teaching online was a brand-new skill set for many educators in March 2020. Instructors spent hours learning how to engage students in a virtual classroom. Even though teaching in a hybrid environment does blend elements of in-person and online learning, it also brings its own unique challenges—and that means instructors need to train themselves again for our new hybrid world. For example, faculty will need to make decisions about how to evaluate attendance and participation equitably in online asynchronous and hyflex classrooms. They will also need to consider the role that technology plays in the physical classroom and strike a balance between online instruction and in-person learning.

How to address it: Instructors need training for this new learning environment, and tools that can help them streamline the teaching process. To support professors during this transition, administrators should develop and share hybrid learning best practices, offer ongoing professional development opportunities, and ensure faculty have access to the technology they need to succeed. This includes access to real-time data around student engagement, so instructors can quickly adapt their lessons to meet student needs.

Hybrid Learning Delivers the Best of Both Worlds

What does the next generation campus look like? In many ways, institutions are still trying to pinpoint that answer. We do know that the hybrid solution will mean taking everything we've learned over the last year and transforming it into a more flexible, more accessible learning environment that will better support the learners of tomorrow.

Every transition comes with challenges, and hybrid learning is no exception. Colleges and universities can support instructors and students during this period with access to reliable, versatile technology that simplifies the learning process, while looking for deliberate ways to help students stay connected—on and off-line.

Want to add teaching tools to Zoom?
Visit class.com or call 202-964-7111 to learn more.

class
Technologies Inc.

:: class

Thank you for downloading this Class White Paper!

To learn how to take the next step toward acquiring Class' solutions, please check out the following resources and information:

For additional information:
carah.io/classoverview

For additional Citizen Experience solutions:
carah.io/CitizenExperience

To set up a meeting:
sales@carahsoft.com
888-662-2724

To purchase, check out the contract vehicles available for procurement:
carah.io/classcontracts