Technology in Education

The Key to Success in
Hybrid Learning

Course design and delivery that makes optimal use of technology can transform virtual classrooms and boost the value of higher education.

A S COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES grapple with falling enrollment levels, they've had to take a long, hard look at their business models and the new realities of student needs and expectations. The fact is, a college education has become too expensive and time-consuming for many people, and the pandemic further underscored that reality.

According to estimates released by the **National Student Clearinghouse Research Center** in May, enrollment continued its downward trend in the spring 2022 semester. "Total postsecondary enrollment

fell to 16.2 million this spring, marking a one-year decline of 4.1% or 685,000 students," researchers wrote. "Following a 3.5% drop last spring, postsecondary institutions have lost nearly 1.3 million students since spring 2020."

The perceived value of attending college is also declining, as reflected in a recent **Pew Research Center** finding that "only a third of college graduates younger than 50 said their college experience was extremely useful in helping them develop skills and knowledge that could be used in the workplace" – compared to 45% of college graduates ages 50 and older.

At the same time, there have been significant changes in how, when and why students attend college. Many students are older than 25, attending part-time (perhaps while working and/or raising children) and not on campus. In a recent **blog post** titled "The Future of Higher Education," BestColleges.com put it succinctly: "Institutions designed to serve younger, traditional college students living on campus must adjust to support older, commuter and part-time students."

A Growing Interest in HyFlex Learning

The majority of students still see the value of education, but they are looking for flexible education models to better support their success. The pivot to remote classes during the pandemic has amplified the interest in anytime, anywhere learning. A **recent survey** by Bay View Analytics and Cengage, for instance, found that community college students increasingly support online learning. "The proportion of students who express a preference for the option for online courses continues to grow," the researchers wrote. "Three-quarters of all students now state this as a preference."

Many experts view hybrid flexible (HyFlex)

models as a natural and necessary evolution of teaching and learning that will keep higher education relevant in the fast-changing modern world. HyFlex allows students to participate in a class session in person or remotely (synchronously) or review a recording of the session at a later time (asynchronously).

Student engagement in online courses can be a challenge, but the pandemic has pushed videoconferencing to the next level, with companies continually expanding the technology's ability to encourage participation and collaboration among students while building trust between students and instructors.

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The key to using the technologies to their fullest potential lies in innovative course design – looking beyond a screen-shared presentation or on-camera lecture for a more engaging virtual learning experience. In other words, the best technologies are not enough; students need courses "deployed for clear purposes, in ways that fit with what we know about how students learn, and with inclusivity

top of mind," the 2022 **Educause Horizon Report** states. Instructors must "invest the time to … connect back up to higher notions of pedagogy, to understand why certain spaces and designs might work better than others for their particular educational goals and for the students they serve."

Fortunately, many instructors are finding creative ways to overcome the challenges to remote learning. "Topics originally believed to be impossible to teach or learn online are now being offered remotely using new strategies, such as simulations and take-home lesson kits, and innovative technologies, like videos and 3D apps," according to BestColleges.com. In addition, technologies such as virtual breakout rooms are enabling social learning in an online environment.

Skills that Translate to the Modern Workplace

The notion that the student experience should drive course design is not new. An **article** published in the *Journal of Instructional Research* in 2012 is still relevant today. Researchers at Grand Canyon University reviewed the studies on online teaching at the time and concluded that "achievement is connected [to] more than just the method of content delivery; student motivation, experiences and time management abilities are also factors in how well students perform in a particular course, despite how it is delivered."

That observation reverberates in the advice that the **University of Colorado Boulder** offers to students, with a technological twist. The university acknowledges that online learning can be overwhelming and recommends that students organize e-mail messages for faster access, sync their digital calendars with the university's learning management system to

stay on top of deadlines, request one-on-one virtual meetings with new professors and find ways to participate during online classes.

Although students must learn how to make the most of the technology at their fingertips, communicating and interacting with others is still paramount. In fact, the complex mix of skills students acquire while navigating a HyFlex environment are directly correlated to the skills they'll need to succeed in many modern workplaces.

"Today's workforce is more flexible than ever because of the pandemic, and teaching and learning should be in alignment with workforce needs to prepare students for their

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professional lives," wrote Jodie Penrod, senior director of technology at Ohio University's Heritage College of Osteopathic Medicine, in an *Educause Review* **article**.

The latest technologies make it easy for instructors to try something new and continue to improve course offerings based on student feedback. That combination of technology and pedagogical innovation creates an unstoppable force for transforming higher education.

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Facilitating Social Learning in the
Virtual Classroom

Customizable tools that take advantage of best practices in instructional design encourage participation and lead to richer educational experiences.

SOCIAL LEARNING MEANS giving students an opportunity to learn from one another and enabling them to actively participate in the educational process. If students are engaged, they're more likely to retain what they've learned.

In addition, enabling learners to contribute adds value for everyone. Adult students in particular bring a wealth of experience and a variety of backgrounds and perspectives. Social learning provides an opportunity for them to share ideas that can help broaden discussions in directions that instructors might not have considered.
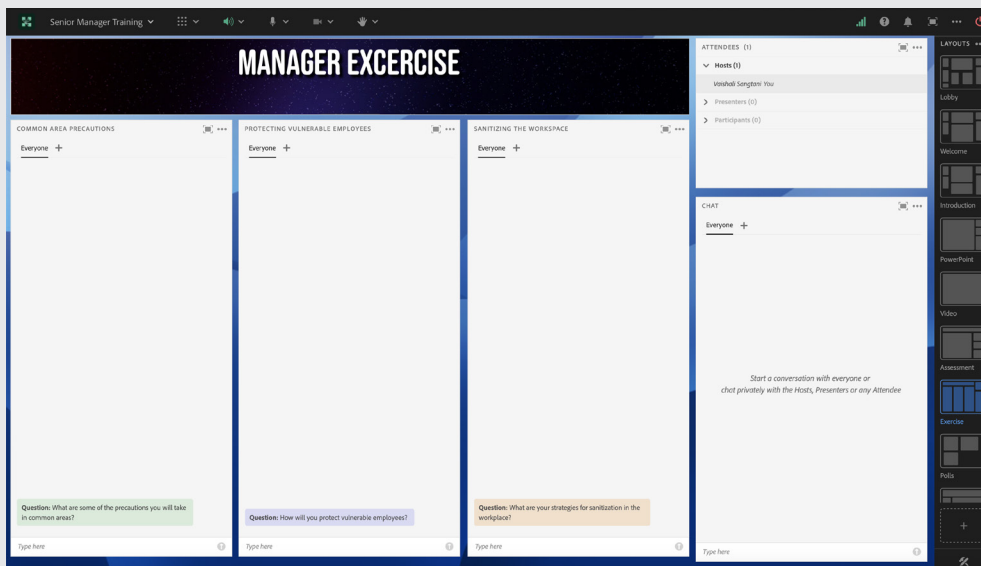
Adobe Connect is a live virtual learning delivery solution that specializes in engagement-driven learning and delivers learner experiences that go beyond videoconferencing or physical classrooms. With Adobe Connect, instructors can infuse their sessions with interactivity and create equal learning opportunities, even for participants with sight, hearing or mobility impairments.

With Adobe Connect, instructors can add multiple chat pods to virtual classroom layouts to encourage discussion.

FREE TRIAL

Chat Pods Enable More Focused Discussions

Adobe Connect helps simplify the process by making it easy for instructors to design their virtual and hybrid classroom experiences around social learning. One feature allows instructors to add multiple chat pods to virtual classroom layouts to encourage learners to contribute to conversations. Each chat pod can be dedicated to a specific topic to more sharply focus the discussions.

That approach can lead to higher levels of interaction because people are more likely to participate when there is a clear focus to the discussion. In addition, instructors can more effectively review the responses when they are organized by topic.

Breakout Rooms Foster Teamwork and Engagement

Breakout rooms are another valuable tool. They create an ideal opportunity for sharing experiences and knowledge because people are typically more comfortable interacting in a smaller group setting. A well-designed breakout room has a clear goal, and a team of students work together to accomplish that goal.

When students enter breakout rooms, Adobe Connect enables extra features so participants can interact with one another. They can use their microphones and webcams even if those features weren't available in the main session, take notes together, share documents, use a whiteboard and annotate content.

Instructors can set up the breakout rooms ahead of time and customize them with different exercises and content, and that functionality can be added to templates for future virtual classrooms. Instructors can also take any of the content from the breakout rooms – such as notes, chats and whiteboards – and bring it into the main room to share and review with the entire class.

The goal is to facilitate and then incorporate social learning into the broader educational experience.

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