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# Teaching Modalities after COVID: BSU Professors' Opinions of Hyflex, Asynchronous Online, Remote Synchronous, and In-Person Teaching

Ashley A. Hansen-Brown and Kevin McGowan

## Introduction

Out of the two co-authors of this paper, one of us (Kevin) had experience with Hyflex teaching whereas the other (Ashley) had no experience with online teaching before the Covid-19 pandemic. You can probably guess which of us fared better when BSU moved to remote instruction in March 2020.

Many faculty members have adapted to new ways of teaching and learned new skill sets as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. At BSU, most faculty members spent the second half of spring 2020 and the full 2020–2021 academic year teaching asynchronous or remote synchronous courses, many for the first time. Now that we are back to mostly in-person teaching, we've had to decide our current level of comfort with various types of online course offerings and grapple with how many in-person vs. online courses to offer our student body. Crucial to these decisions are the perspectives of both the students enrolled in our courses and the faculty teaching them. In this paper, we focus on the latter.

Much past research has examined the effectiveness of online courses (e.g., Peacock et al., 2020; Rovai, 2002; Shen et al., 2013), but surprisingly little work has examined distinctions between online course modalities. For example, only a handful of studies have investigated either remote synchronous or Hyflex courses (e.g., Kohnke &

Moorhouse, 2021; Kyei-Blankson et al., 2014), which were relatively rare before Covid-19. Further, most research into online courses focuses on student outcomes rather than faculty perceptions (Kohnke & Moorhouse, 2021; Kyei-Blankson et al., 2014; Peacock et al., 2020; Rovai, 2002; Shen et al., 2013). For example, Kohnke and Moorhouse (2021) found in a self-described “small-scale exploratory study” (p. 1) of a HyFlex course that despite difficulties in communicating between students attending in-person vs. online, students generally viewed the flexibility of the course positively.

To our knowledge, our current paper is one of the first to investigate faculty members' perceptions of different course modalities. We became interested in this question after the virtual 2021 CARS May Celebration, where Kevin attended Ashley's presentation on the results of a study examining BSU students' sense of belonging and loneliness during remote online instruction. Someone in the Zoom audience asked a question about how

students and faculty experience Hyflex teaching, which we both found interesting. Understanding this may help departments and administrators in planning future course offerings as we continue approaching a post-pandemic world.

We connected after the conference and decided to put our research skill sets to good use in a mixed-methods project researching how faculty perceive four different course modalities: (1) **Hyflex**, in which the professor and some students are physically present in the classroom while other students are attending remotely via videoconference; (2) **remote synchronous**, in which the professor and all students in the class meet virtually via videoconference; (3) **asynchronous online**, in which there are no in-person or virtual meetings during the course; and (4) **in-person**, in which the professor and all students in the class are physically present in the classroom. Ashley took the lead on designing a survey study and Kevin took the lead on designing a focus group study, both of which are described below.

## Survey Study with BSU Faculty

After gaining IRB approval, in spring 2022 we sent an invitation to participate in a survey to all BSU faculty via both the full-time and part-time faculty listservs. Participation was voluntary, anonymous, and open to any faculty member who had taught at least one class at the college level. Our sample consisted of 179 participants, ranging in age from 32–79 ( $M = 50.52$ ,  $SD = 12.13$ ). The majority of our participants (78) identified as female (44%), with 39 identifying as male (22%) and 62 not responding (34%). Our sample was also majority White/Caucasian (99; 55%), with 5 identifying as multiracial (3%), 5 identifying as Asian/Asian American (3%), 2 identifying as African American/Black (1%), 2 identifying as Hispanic/Latino (1%), and 66 not responding (37%).



Participants were asked to imagine they were teaching a course within their major next semester which they had not yet taught before. They were randomly assigned so that their instructions were specifically about a course in one of the four modalities; thus, some participants were instructed to imagine it as a Hyflex course, some as a remote synchronous course, some as an asynchronous online course, and some as an in-person course. Each modality was defined so that participants had the same understanding of what was involved. Participants completed a questionnaire about their perceptions of teaching in the given modality, modified from the Online Instructor Satisfaction Measure (Bolliger et al., 2014; sample item: “I think students in this course would participate enthusiastically”). Participants then answered a series of questions about their own teaching experiences and likelihood of wanting to teach in each of the four modalities. Lastly, participants

answered demographic questions and read a debriefing statement which explained the purpose of the study and our research questions.

To test our hypotheses, we first examined participants’ perceptions of the imagined course.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, our sample of professors believed that in-person classes would be superior to other modalities in terms of both student/student interactions ( $F(3, 121) = 10.71, p < .001$ ) and student/instructor interactions ( $F(3, 120) = 8.00, p < .001$ ). Overall, participants seemed to hold generally negative views of Hyflex courses, as participants believed affordances (i.e., convenience, flexibility, and accessibility) were lower in Hyflex classes ( $F(3, 121) = 4.37, p = .006$ ), believed they had lower institutional support for Hyflex classes ( $F(3, 121) =$

<sup>1</sup> We are presenting simplified results for easier readability. If you would like the full details, feel free to contact Ashley (ahansenbrown@bridgew.edu).

11.72,  $p < .001$ ), and believed Hyflex courses would be lower quality in terms of course development and teaching ( $F(3, 119) = 8.86, p < .001$ ) compared to other course modalities.

Next, we examined whether participants’ prior experience with each course modality influenced their likelihood of wanting to teach in that modality in the future. Because only one participant ( $n = 1$ ) reported never having taught an in-person class before, we do not report that analysis. People who had not previously taught a Hyflex course ( $n = 98$ ) were less likely to want to teach a Hyflex course in the future compared to people who have previously taught in this modality ( $n = 28$ ),  $t(34.94) = 2.20, p = .04, 95\% \text{ CI } [.05, 1.22], d = .57$ . Similarly, people who had not previously taught an asynchronous online course ( $n = 42$ ) were less likely than people who have ( $n = 84$ ) to want to teach an asynchronous online course in the future,  $t(115.47) = 10.00, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [1.60, 2.40], d = 1.65$ . Lastly, people who had not previously taught a synchronous remote course ( $n = 12$ ) were less likely than people who have ( $n = 114$ ) to want to teach in this modality in the future,  $t(124) = 3.07, p = .003, 95\% \text{ CI } [.46, 2.11], d = .93$ .

## Focus Group Study with BSU Faculty

For the focus group, we concentrated on the virtual options: Hyflex, remote synchronous, and asynchronous online. Our focus group consisted of five faculty members representing four departments. The focus group was conducted during spring 2022 via Zoom. The session was recorded and the transcript from the recording was analyzed using qualitative, inductive processes. This inductive process began by identifying and assigning labels to meaningful units from the transcript that conveyed specific ideas (Maxwell, 2013). Throughout the focus group data analysis process, data was reduced and transformed using axial coding

(Creswell, 2014; Maxwell, 2013). In using axial coding, meaningful components of data based on the words of participants were used to form initial codes. The process was continued in order to categorize and collapse codes until meaningful themes emerged for the Hyflex, remote synchronous, and asynchronous online options.

In exploring these teaching modality options, the following overarching themes emerged: (1) Hyflex – great in theory, not so much in practice; (2) remote synchronous – reimagining student engagement; and (3) asynchronous online – one size does not fit all. Participants did not have experience with teaching using the Hyflex option; however, all five had experience teaching with remote synchronous and four out of five had experience teaching in an asynchronous online format.

For the **Hyflex** option, participants thought that it was good in theory but were concerned about how to effectively implement this option in practice. For example, participants expressed concern about how to effectively manage the students that you have in class while simultaneously engaging with the ones that are virtual. One participant said, “The Hyflex option scared me. It was a lot to think about managing that much. You know, looking at the participant list, looking at the people in the room, looking at the virtual people, focusing on PowerPoint and keeping track of activities.” They were also concerned about having the necessary resources to effectively implement a Hyflex option. In addition, faculty were concerned with how this option would impact the evaluation of tenure-track faculty.

Participants indicated that **remote synchronous** teaching posed new challenges in terms of hands-on activities. For example, it took considerable time to find online options that simulate in-class, hands-on activities. In addition, participants discussed how

this option encourages creative thinking about how to engage students in large-group and small-group discussions. One participant stated, “With in-person teaching, I do a lot of hands-on stuff. With remote synchronous, I used online virtual manipulatives.”

With **asynchronous online** teaching, participants suggested that some students are not always aware of the independent aspect of online learning. Students need a certain level of self-direction in order to do well with the asynchronous online option. It was suggested that faculty be explicit about how their asynchronous online courses operate. One participant noted, “Asynchronous online is not for all students. I try really hard at the beginning of every semester to lay out in an email and intro video before class even starts, you know, here’s what you have to understand about this if you’ve never done one before.” In addition, participants discussed how some courses work well with this option and others do not.

## Implications & Conclusions

Overall, our survey study gave us valuable information about what BSU faculty think of the four course modalities. Faculty have negative perceptions of remote/online teaching modalities, especially Hyflex; however, participants with experience teaching in a given modality are more likely to want to teach in that modality in the future.

Results from the focus group indicated that more support in the form of professional development and in-class assistance is needed in order to make faculty more comfortable with the Hyflex option. Some of these in-class assistance supports included teaching assistants and access to in-class technical support. Focus group faculty responses regarding the Hyflex option were consistent with the responses indicated from the survey data given that focus group faculty had not taught using the Hyflex option. Focus group participants were more receptive to teaching

using the remote synchronous and asynchronous online options given that all of them had taught using the remote synchronous option and four out of five had experience using the asynchronous online option. This finding is also consistent with our survey data results indicating a more positive response based on previous teaching in a specific modality.

Overall, it seems clear from these two studies that faculty at BSU have mixed opinions about Hyflex, remote synchronous, and asynchronous online teaching. We began this article with an anecdote about how our different prior experiences with online teaching affected our experience during the pandemic; now that we’ve all had some shared experience with online teaching of some sort, it’s up to us to decide whether and how we offer online courses in the future, and how to ensure that our students have the opportunity for world-class education in whatever format it may come.



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