

Successful Self-Regulated Learners: Making Student Choice and Flexibility More Than Buzzwords in a HyFlex Course

Candice L. Freeman



Abstract

HyFlex courses are starting to become an available option for many community college students. Many community college educators may have questions about the HyFlex model's use and how to ensure students are successful in the course. This opinion piece discusses integration of self-regulated learning theory within the context of a HyFlex course and how that theory helps students, and instructors, make informed choices regarding attendance flexibility. By teaching students strategies surrounding planning, scheduling, goal setting, performance management, and reflection, instructors can provide an informed and supportive pathway to course goal mastery and success regardless of students' choice in class attendance.

Keywords: hybrid flexible courses (HyFlex), self-regulated learning, instructional design, community college

Successful Self-Regulated Learners: Making Student Choice and Flexibility More Than Buzzwords in a HyFlex Course

As an educator, it is critically important that I provide learners with choice and flexibility. Those two words, *choice* and *flexibility*, are used so often they can seem to become nothing more than buzzwords to college students. Buzzwords become ignored words and may ultimately fail to promote student success. I try very hard to ensure that my students know how their choice in course attendance flexibility can help them successfully meet the learning objectives and to give all course elements meaning and purpose.

According to Brian Beatty (2019), the authority

on hybrid flexible, or HyFlex, course design and development, “HyFlex courses are class sessions that allow students to choose whether to attend classes face-to-face or online, synchronously or asynchronously” (p. 1.1). HyFlex courses differ from blended, hybrid courses in that there is no dedicated online component or a dedicated face-to-face component, but students choose their mode of attendance and receive the same instruction regardless of choice. This choice and flexibility in course attendance allows students to attend and participate in basically any instructional mode that works best for their personal and educational needs. Often student choice to flex class attendance meets personal need but potentially not the educational one, which can impact student success (Bettinger et al., 2017).

Teaching Students How to Learn

I think about course experiences throughout my undergraduate and graduate education and can isolate a number of classes where the HyFlex option would have been helpful for my personal and professional schedules. However, I can also identify courses where it would not have benefited my learning experience. For this reason, I say the HyFlex course is literally for anyone but not everyone. Students enrolled in HyFlex courses need a supportive success framework designed to teach them how to self-regulate through and within the three instructional modalities. Self-regulated learning theory may be the answer to this problem.

Self-regulated learning theory posits that for learners to successfully master learning outcomes they need to be able to plan and organize the execution of learning activities, monitor their course

This article is brought to you for free and open access by the North Carolina Community College Faculty Association @NCCCS. It has been accepted for inclusion *North Carolina Community College Journal of Teaching Innovation* by an authorized editor of NCCCFa. For more information, please contact editor@ncccfa.org.

performance, and reflect on areas of adjustment and refinement (Zimmerman, 1990). Because HyFlex courses allow students the choice to attend lectures in an asynchronous format, it is vital for these learners to acutely self-regulate their learning experiences with the indirect guidance of an instructor. Although they may think they are learning content, without the ability to critically plan, monitor, and refine their learning, they could be mastering much less content than anticipated. Although watching a recorded lecture may seem to be the easiest route of lecture attendance, that route may not work for every student. This is why not every student should enroll in a HyFlex course but use discretion within the context of their capability to work autonomously.

Plan Lesson One on Self-Regulated Learning

The HyFlex course can have a positive impact on student success if learners can self-direct their progression. Teaching every student how to self-regulate learning may be the way students learn how to progress without the face-to-face direction of the instructor. The first few HyFlex courses I taught were a disaster, because my students who watched recorded lectures struggled, needed my help much more than other students, fell quickly behind the class as a whole, and ultimately scored much lower on my graded assignments and assessments. This very much frustrated me, and I took a great deal of time to examine what happened. After an extensive needs assessment of the course, I found my asynchronous students spent less time in online content, submitted assignments late, and often allowed their work to pile up, which created a significant extraneous load on their performance. This led me to believe that their ability to self-regulate through the work was weak thus negatively impacted success in the course. Refinement in my course design and instruction delivery began to include initial lessons on self-regulating practices. Teaching students about self-regulated learning at the beginning of the course became as critical as reviewing the course syllabus, possibly more so. Extending that instruction throughout each chunk of the course continually reinforced initial knowledge and helped many students cultivate self-regulating strategies within the course.

Instruction on learner self-regulation should be conducted during the first class meeting and must be more than simply explaining the theory and provid-

ing a graphic students can follow. Students in a HyFlex course have the ability to flex their class attendance at any time throughout the semester, so teaching all students the process of analyzing their performance, finding gaps, and altering their approach to instruction helps create informed learners with regard to both performance and to attendance choice. Keep in mind, though, most students could care less about a theory; they need practical learning strategies that result in more efficient and effective learning. Ditch the technical jargon and focus on the practice. Design of general instruction on self-regulated learning should start with goal setting, specifically using an easily understood goal setting framework such as the SMART goal model. Emphasis should be placed on measuring goal achievement and mastery in alignment with course learning outcomes.

Subsequent to goal setting instruction, performance monitoring and management strategies should be shared. Present performance monitoring examples that align with set goals to demonstrate goal achievement and reveal performance improvement needs. Students will gather two forms of data: mastered goal and opportunities for refinement and improvement. Activities and resources such as reflective journaling, spreadsheets, KWL charts, graphic organizers, and task prioritizing applications and Web based resources can serve to engage students in productive strategies that will promote focus, organization, reflection, and refining iteration.

Conclusion

The whole intent of the HyFlex course is to provide learner flexibility through choice. Face-to-face or online, synchronous or asynchronous, students find opportunity to attend college in spite of personal and professional scheduling conflicts (Beatty, 2019). This opens doors to individual academic and career goals that might otherwise remain closed due to scheduling. However, sometimes that choice may not align learner academic needs, but through pre-course instruction on self-regulation strategies, students can become equipped with resources that will help them be successful by customizing class attendance through planning, performance management, and purposeful reflection on performance. This equips the HyFlex course with student success strategies, promoting student retention and learner persistence to completion.

References

- Beatty, B. J. (2019). *Hybrid-flexible course design*. EdTech Books. <https://edtechbooks.org/hyflex>
- Bettinger, E. P., Fox, L., Loeb, S., & Taylor, E. S. (2017). Virtual classrooms: How online college courses affect student success. *American Economic Review*, 107(9), 2855-75. doi.org/10.1257/aer.20151193
- Zimmerman, B. J. (1990). Self-regulated learning and academic achievement: An overview. *Educational Psychologist*, 25(1), 3-17. doi.org/10.1207/s15326985ep2501_2

Author's Note

The author has no known conflicts of interest to disclose. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Candice L. Freeman, Allied Health Technologies, Fayetteville Technical Community College, 2201 Hull Road, HTC 242C, Fayetteville, NC 28303. Email: freeman@faytechcc.edu.