

Five Things I've Learned about Flexible Teaching from Conversations with Seneca Faculty

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by **Laura Page, Professor in the Teaching & Learning Centre**

Have you heard the recent buzz around Seneca's new **Flexible** delivery? As a Professor in Seneca's Teaching & Learning Centre, I have been lucky to have frequent conversations with faculty about what it's like to teach with this innovative new approach. At Seneca, this involves faculty teaching on campus, and learners joining in the classroom, joining live online, or working asynchronously through course materials. Here are five things I've learned so far.

1. Aim for Highly Structured Active Learning.

I am increasingly becoming convinced that the strongest model for Flexible courses is what Dr. Viji Sathy terms "[high structure active learning](#)." This approach sees learners engaged in some sort of preparation and/or independent learning before class, spending synchronous class time engaged in active learning, and receiving feedback on low stakes assignments throughout the term. Seneca faculty are finding that our learners really appreciate opportunities to engage with one another both during synchronous class time and also asynchronously through ongoing discussion boards on Learn@Seneca or Teams. While this is a different approach from lecture-based teaching, prioritizing learner interaction and engagement during class time really maximizes the sense of "togetherness" in a Flexible class, and builds social support and community for our learners.

2. Approach Technology One Step at a Time.

Seneca's commitment to high quality Flexible technology has been significant. When I explored the Flex classrooms with faculty groups during our *Micro-teaching for Flexible Delivery* sessions, we approached learning the new technology one step at a time. One professor uses a simple checklist to remind herself of the steps required to begin the video-conference, welcome learners in each participation mode, and manage the cameras and microphones throughout the session. Checking in with learners in a systematic fashion

helps. When you can, it's also nice to include a nod to your asynchronous learners, such as, "for those of you listening to the recording later, you can add your ideas in the discussion board." In Flexible delivery, having a simple and recognizable rhythm to the course will let the structure stay in the background and the focus be on the content itself.

3. Flexible Teaching involves a Paradigm Shift.

Walking into any school classroom, attendance is one of the first things you notice. We greet learners, ask them how they are doing, and feel a sense of community. Over the years, many of us wore high attendance numbers as a sort of badge of honour, perhaps even feeling hurt or confused when learners didn't come to class. "Why aren't they here," we might think, "Why didn't they want to come?" Of course, the campus closure has brought to light the myriad of demands on students' time, from care-giving roles, to employment, to illness, just to name a few, and highlighted the importance of flexibility. Like everything, Flexible teaching has both costs and benefits. As learners navigate the new choices they have, we have the opportunity to rethink what attendance means. If we have 10 learners in the classroom, 15 online, and 5 joining after hours, we are *30 learners together* in a seamless learning experience. For many of us, this is a new way of thinking, a paradigm shift, when it comes to our Flexible classes.

4. Participation is the new Attendance.

Due to the variable nature of learner engagement in Flexible classes, it may be more meaningful to discuss *participation* over attendance. As faculty find creative ways to simultaneously engage learners across the modes, simply just being in attendance in a room is not sufficient to ensure student achievement. For instance, one might brainstorm a question with learners attending live, and invite others to add their ideas in a collaborative space over a week's time. In this example, while learners attended in a different way, they all participated in the learning experience, and further, could choose the route that was right for them. Even in a traditional class, a variety of participation opportunities can boost engagement in meaningful ways, allowing students to work toward their goals in ways that match their learning strengths and preferences.

5. Be Yourself!

According to **Dr. David Rhoads**, Director of Teaching Excellence and Digital Pedagogy at Vanguard University, "Every person who does HyFlex has a unique way of doing it." Seneca faculty are engaged in lively conversations about Flexible teaching, and I am hearing from faculty who are finding the unique groove that works for themselves, their learners, and their subject area. Watch for new offerings of the *FunFlex – Fundamentals of Flexible Course Design and Delivery* course in **MyPD** that all faculty can complete asynchronously at a time that works for them.

Last, I've learned how important it is to listen to students' feedback, early and often. Ask:

How is our approach to this Flexible course working for you? Should we change anything? Should we try anything new? Often a simple “**Stop - Start - Continue**” survey will give you valuable information on how your learners are doing – both in their content knowledge and in their management of course expectations – and let you adapt as well. And these days, adaptation is certainly something we are all getting pretty good at.

Learn more about flexible delivery at Seneca

Flexible Teaching (HyFlex) resources curated by the Teaching & Learning Centre

Flexible Course Delivery information from the Teaching & Learning Centre at Seneca College

Visit our Flexible Delivery Nutshell: **Envisioning Your Course Through a Flexible Lens**

A Nutshell is a self-paced online module that will take you approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Teaching Tool

Survey: Brillinger, K. (2021, March 11). “Stop – Start – Continue.” Conestoga College.

<https://tlconestoga.ca/start-stop-continue/>

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Stachowiak, B. (Host). (2020, September 17). Misconceptions about HyFlex: A conversation with David Rhoads. Episode 324 [Audio podcast episode]. In *Teaching in Higher Ed.*, <https://teachinginhighered.com/podcast/misconceptions-about-hyflex/>

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