



Flexible Education at SFU

Senate, May 16, 2022

SFU

SIMON FRASER
UNIVERSITY

Flexible education at SFU encompasses the ways in which the university community collectively and individually designs and provides relevant and community-engaged academic programs in response to changing student needs.

- the 2015 final report of the Task Force on Flexible Education

The SFU logo consists of the letters 'SFU' in a white, bold, sans-serif font, set against a dark red rectangular background.The text 'SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY' is written in a white, all-caps, sans-serif font, positioned to the right of the SFU logo.

Flexible Education

- Definitions of learning/teaching modalities
- Opportunities and challenges of different modalities
- What's next for SFU?



In person / face-to-face

All course components are on one of our three campuses

- Extraordinary flexibility in how class is conducted
- Can adapt class activities “just in time”
- Some students can find pre-set class times challenging
- Students must rely on each other, recordings (if available) if class is missed

Online (OL, CODE)

All course components are online and asynchronous, except exams

- Course completed at the time, and the pace, of student's choosing: highly flexible
- Pedagogical, content decisions must be made well in advance
- Students need excellent time management skills; some struggle to stay accountable
- Experience can be isolating for some students

Blended

A combination of in-person (synchronous) and online (asynchronous). Online component replaces rather than adds to traditional “class time”.

- Experiential activities a good fit for in-person component
- In-person component builds community
- Can adapt in-person activities “just in time”
- Asynchronous online activities provide flexibility for students
- Pedagogical, content decisions for online component must be made well in advance



Hyflex

Students choose whether to attend in-person, online synchronous, or online asynchronous for any given class

- Students choose the mode of their learning
- Faculty have to double-prepare and do so well in advance (pedagogy differs in-person vs. online)
- Little flexibility for teaching; often encourages “least common denominator” of lecturing at a podium
- Presence disparity for students choosing to engage online
- Requires significant time-management skills for students
- Room infrastructure requirements (cameras, microphones in student areas) and technical complexity of managing both in person and online students, or learning in both modes

What's next?

- What has been your experience (of opportunities and challenges) with different teaching modalities?
- What do you think is needed to support flexible education today?
- What's next for flexible education at SFU?

Summary of conversation at Senate

- Students vary in their interest in, and perception of their ability to learn in, different teaching modalities. We should recognize considering accessibility and flexibility in our courses supports students, whether it is options for those who prefer in-person learning, supporting students who have other commitments or wish to reduce time commuting to our campuses and so prefer more online options, or providing lecture recordings or other supports for students who we are encouraging to stay home when sick.
- Given what we've learned from emergency remote teaching, it's important to consider how to build community/socialization in our courses regardless of teaching mode, so students feel connected to the course, the instructor, and one another.
- When designing online or blended courses, creating intentional, well-designed activities will maximise the student experience, and CEE can help with this.
- When we expect students to be in-person, we should ensure we maximise the experience given the barriers some feel to coming to our campuses.
- There is variation among instructors in comfort/interest in different teaching modes; it's important to recognize the expertise and good will of instructors and their desire to create great learning experiences.
- Variation in how appropriate different teaching modes are for different subjects or points in the progression of the degree (labs, some course experiences must be in person; online or blended might be highly appropriate for "bottleneck" courses). The student population clearly matters as well (e.g. Indigenous or other students living outside the lower mainland). Departments and Schools should be strategic about the degree sequence and which courses are taught in different modes.
- It would be useful to continue this conversation and new ways to support innovation and flexibility in our classrooms.