

**From:** Provost

**Sent:** Thursday, July 9, 2020 2:16 PM

**To:** FACULTY GROUP <[faculty@belmont.edu](mailto:faculty@belmont.edu)>; ADJUNCTS GROUP <[adjuncts@belmont.edu](mailto:adjuncts@belmont.edu)>

**Subject:** HyFlex Teaching At Belmont

Dear Colleagues,

The arrival of the COVID-19 virus in early 2020 brought a sudden disruption to Belmont's instructional models for most courses during the Spring semester. The rapid international transmission of the virus, as well as the actions of local, state, and national governments, required an equally rapid response. Like universities across the country and around the world, Belmont needed to act immediately by transitioning courses into fully-online instructional models. Belmont's faculty responded with integrity, commitment and Herculean efforts in the face of anxiety, uncertainty, and ambiguity. Now, having managed that sudden change and cognizant of the potential of future outbreaks, we have the chance to think about what we learned, what we know, and what we want to provide for our students in the Fall 2020 semester and beyond.

As we move into the Fall 2020 term with no certainty about how COVID-19 and the coronavirus might impact our students, our campus, and our world, and with a great desire to return, as much as is safely possible, to our traditions of face-to-face coursework, the University has made the decision to change the academic calendar to allow as much on-campus instruction as possible. However, that action alone will not serve all of our students; nor would it recognize the benefits, as we have learned, that can be found in online teaching and learning to serve pedagogical, logistical, and health concerns. Some students will not be able to return to campus if they cannot access return flights from their home country. Others may not be able to return because they are immunocompromised. Even those that do return might not be able to participate in classes due to illnesses (e.g., COVID-19, the flu). At the same time, in this worldwide pandemic response, we must be prepared if the threat of another pandemic forces the University to move away from face-to-face instruction.

Moreover, decades of research have shown the efficacy of leveraging technological advances to serve twenty-first century educational goals. The challenges of spring semester presented us with the opportunity to grow and learn about the value of various pedagogical techniques that represent many options for valid, and valuable, instructional styles, types, and opportunities for all learners.

In the past, students who were unable to be in a class—for such reasons as illness, doctor appointments, travel on University business, and conflicts with another educational opportunity—were unable to participate in some regular classroom learning experiences. Students suffering from illness faced the dilemma of deciding whether they would attend class, and potentially spread the illness to others, or stay away, and miss its educational opportunity. The current Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines compound this significantly by recommending a self-quarantine for 14 days for anyone who has been exposed to someone with the virus or may have tested positive for the virus. Accommodating healthy students within social distancing guidelines also requires the University to somehow provide more “space” for students to engage in learning, encouraging Belmont to invest more fully in distance teaching/learning as well as to address logistical concerns in its facilities.

**The HyFlex Instructional Model**

The HyFlex instructional model will accommodate prevailing health concerns while continuing to serve students with the high-quality educational opportunities that Belmont has been providing for decades and, as such, should be seen as our predominant instructional model for Fall 2020. HyFlex is defined as “[a course] delivered both in person and online at the same time by the same faculty member.” (<https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/learning-innovation/fall-scenario-13-hyflex-model>) Rather than simply providing students the choice of attending a regular in-person class or not, this approach expects students to attend regular class meetings but allows students who need an online option, for special circumstances, to engage fully in the classroom experience. The HyFlex instructional model creates flexibility for student participation in various formats, but is not designed, at Belmont, to permit students to attend, or not, whenever they wish.

Our current fall plans are that, in the majority of scenarios, most students will meet with their faculty in classrooms at regularly-scheduled class times. Excepting certain courses in some colleges that require in-person teaching, students who cannot attend particular class meetings will still be allowed to participate in engaging instruction either synchronously (participating in real time) or asynchronously (watching a recorded class or engaging in equivalent learning activities specifically designed to be completed among groups of students in virtual “space”). These distance learners could include those students who may elect not to return to campus in the fall, or to Nashville, but still wish to remain enrolled in courses, as well as those who may need to self-quarantine.

In some courses, students will be regularly rotated through faculty-determined schedules of in-class and on-line learning to accommodate social distancing. Anticipating no change to current guidance by the CDC and recommendations from the Office of the Mayor in the “Reopening Nashville” plan, students will need to wear masks in the classroom and physical distancing will be accommodated by adjusting seating in classrooms to accommodate six feet of separation between individuals. This may reduce the number of people permitted in each classroom at any one time, requiring a rotation of students to participate in their courses either on campus or online. In either setting, the HyFlex model allows all students to participate in instruction every day. For example, if a course that meets three times weekly in a classroom that can accommodate 10 (based on distancing requirements) but enrolls 30 students, the faculty member would need to divide the class into three groups of 10, with each group meeting once weekly on campus and participating through online capacities for the other two meetings.

This approach provides highly interactive and classroom-based instructional opportunities while still accommodating greater physical separation for students. By making sure that we are delivering as much in-person instruction as possible on Belmont’s campus this fall, we take advantage of the resources our campus offers while helping to stem the potential transmission of COVID-19 throughout our campus community. The HyFlex model allows us to continue to safely pursue classroom-based faculty instruction, provides more options to access the classroom learning environment, encourages behaviors that will support a healthy campus environment, and allows student participation from various locations.

We are asking all faculty members to plan for the majority of instruction for the Fall 2020 semester to take place via the Hyflex modality so that:

- We can limit the number of students in a classroom at one time
- All students will continue to have access to the classroom experience for all courses.

To accomplish this, each classroom will be outfitted with:

- Access to a reliable video conferencing tool. The University has purchased a ZOOM campus site license which will provide every instructional faculty member, including adjunct faculty, with their own ZOOM account.
- A web camera with microphone that can connect students at a distance with the in-class instruction in that course. This would also allow instructors, using ZOOM with the web camera and microphone, to record class sessions for those that are unable to participate synchronously (allowing asynchronous viewing).

The Vice Provost, working with the Teaching Center, the Learning Centers, Instructional Technology, and other faculty and staff, are assembling materials that will provide examples of proven practices for the engagement of distance learners and these materials will be available later in the summer.

Learning experiences that are not amenable to online teaching and learning due to their dependence on specialized equipment, materials, facilities, and experiences (e.g., lab science, clinical placements, performances, etc.) may be determined by deans to be incompatible with the HyFlex model. Each college has been asked to think carefully and deeply about how information about these course will be communicated to students and how we can manage to support students toward on-time graduation through additional opportunities in future semesters.

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### **On-campus Course Scheduling**

In an additional scheduling change made for the sake of safety, we are also implementing a staggered course start time model for the fall. While the University will publish a timetable for the majority of courses, certain programs (mainly graduate programs) may have the opportunity to establish class schedules that are different from the University schedule. In an effort to avoid changing student course registrations and decrease hallway traffic, the Office of the Registrar and the Office of the Provost are developing a staggered class meeting schedule that will:

1. Create three distinct **start** times separated by blocks of 10 minutes for each “class window” so that not more than 1/3 of the sections scheduled in that window would start at the same time, thus decreasing the number of students travelling to classes during each window.
2. Create three distinct **end** times separated by blocks of 10 minutes for each “class window” so that not more than 1/3 of the sections scheduled in that window would end at the same time, decreasing the number of students trying to leave class in each window.
3. Allow each classroom to be available for 30 minutes between classes.
4. Allow no less than 10 minutes for students to change classes.

To achieve this, the previously “protected” 10:00 a.m. MWF slot would need to be used for instruction rather than WELL Core events, which will be offered virtually. A visual representation of the staggered course schedule can be seen at the University’s Returning to Learning webpage (<http://belmont.edu/return/return-to-learning/index.html>) and can be found [here](#).

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to your dean with specific questions.

Sincerely,

Provost Council

For more information on HyFlex, please refer to the following articles that show its growing popularity in the last ten years:

- <https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/learning-innovation/fall-scenario-13-hyflex-model>
- <https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/article/2020/05/13/one-option-delivering-instruction-if-campuses-open-fall-hyflex>
- <https://library.educause.edu/-/media/files/library/2010/11/eli7066-pdf.pdf>