

## What is meant by ‘hybrid’ delivery and how does it work in higher education?

Greg Whateley

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There appears to be some confusion in the Sector around the meaning and application of ‘hybrid’ delivery to higher education students. The misleading (and incorrect) view is that teaching students online while also providing a face-to-face classroom option requires two sets of activities. In fact, ‘hybrid’ delivery is a simultaneous activity requiring no more preparation or time than F2F teaching. What it does require, however, is a commitment to excellence.

The Toyota Kluger Hybrid<sup>1</sup> lays out the foundations for the concept. It is one car with two options. The driver decides which mode to use and this can be altered, as required, along the journey. Using the analogy then, in the context of higher education and the delivery of teaching and learning within the context – teaching would be available in both modes simultaneously (online and F2F) and the student would decide on the mode – and this could be altered along the journey.

### Hybrid higher education

Barnes (2021)<sup>2</sup> recently missed the point in a recent article and has somehow constructed a model of teaching twice: first online then F2F—effectively doubling the effort. Zhou and Tariq (2021)<sup>3</sup> suggested that although the hybrid practice requires effort, it is not a duplication of activity and there is certainly no ‘doubling up’. In reality, it is a single (demanding) task delivered in a dual mode. The model is well described on the Monash University site.<sup>4</sup> The student chooses the mode that best suits them and their circumstances. This can vary from subject to subject, and in fact, from week to week. That is, one week a student may view the course on line and the following week decide to step on campus for a F2F experience – this may continue throughout a trimester as the student best sees fit. The real issue will lie in the capacity management by the campus management ensuring a COVID safe environment at all times. A range of protocols are already in place that minimise exposure and maintain a very high level of hygiene.

Basically, a well set up classroom - with elements of a TV studio added - provides the perfect location and vehicle for hybrid delivery. The more theoretical the subject, the easier the task. Practical classes, however, come with certain challenges. These challenges may require a physical presence on campus – whether for a full trimester at a time will be determined by the nature of the practical. If the session is practical/observation then the hybrid model works well. This will vary from course to course and institution to institution. In my institution – a business school – the hybrid model is ideal.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.toyota.com.au/Kluger?gclid=CjwKCAjw8cCGBhB6EiwAgORey-F1x4q5010qRnR601dR7-WSwfQ-daWvSOXQQQ8CO49yWFq37BJhhoCwA4QAvD\\_BwE](https://www.toyota.com.au/Kluger?gclid=CjwKCAjw8cCGBhB6EiwAgORey-F1x4q5010qRnR601dR7-WSwfQ-daWvSOXQQQ8CO49yWFq37BJhhoCwA4QAvD_BwE)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/jun/20/universities-ramping-up-hybrid-learning-means-double-the-work-for-same-pay-staff-say>

<sup>3</sup> <https://blog.highereducationwhisperer.com/2021/06/teaching-hybrid-mode-in-dual-delivery.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.monash.edu/learning-teaching/teaching-resources/search/user-guides/hybrid-teaching-models>

## Requirements

There are, however, certain requirements for delivering the hybrid mode and these will require both careful consideration (from the outset) and capital investment (from the outset and along the way).

First, the activity needs to take place on campus irrespective of the number of students wishing to physically attend the session. The lecturer / presenter in situ then provides the option of teaching a fully online class or alternatively (and simultaneously) allowing students to sit in class in a COVID-19 safe manner - not unlike a live television audience. My institution refers to them as TEDx-style presentations.<sup>5</sup> The 'live audience' option fulfils the criteria for a 'hybrid' approach. The model requires a well-equipped and maintained studio environment with designated seating locations for the students if on site.

Second, there are certain IT requirements needed to ensure the quality of the delivery including *picture* (ideally a tracking camera), *audio* (essential) and supporting *slides / graphics*. The look and feel of the presentations must be impressive, from the outset, and this will require appropriate *lighting* and *dress code*. Essentially, we need to be aiming for TV quality output. The special emphasis needs to be on audio – which is usually the tell-tale sign of poor production. This no doubt puts pressure on the presenter from the outset. Teaching needs to be informed, efficient and entertaining – essentially the requirements of good teaching anyway. There is little room for low end presentations with tedious disruptions and poor audio graphics. The model requires a professional approach with appropriate IT support and maintenance.

Third, the lecturer / presenter needs to remain aware that it is a 'live' presentation and requires a commitment to a dynamic (dare I say entertaining) performance. Shuffling through notes, head down, coughing, grumbling and repetition are unacceptable. These events need to be focused and dynamic; they need to be well prepared; and seamlessly presented. A live audience can sometimes enhance the presentation with appropriate responses but the teaching needs to be 'mindful' that many students are online.

Finally, hybrid education is *not* about recording a presentation and reusing it in subsequent trimesters / semesters. Recordings are valuable revision resources for students but nothing can (nor should) replace live sessions, albeit online or F2F. This is not about cost cutting and time saving - it is about a quality, multiple mode delivery. The temptation for a number of institutions has been to record once – and deliver the same product over multiple trimesters – this has been heavily criticised by students (as demonstrated in the 2020 QILT outcomes) who in return find it difficult to reconcile the presentation standard with the fees charged. The temptation to deliver from home (as opposed to on campus in well-equipped studios) has had significant impact on quality and high levels of student dis-satisfaction. The student experience is not necessarily diminished using the hybrid option.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ted.com/watch/tedx-talks>

## Future of hybrid

There is little doubt that hybrid (in its true sense) will be with us for some time. It is predicted that 2021 and 2022 will be a hybrid period but elements of the concept will remain in the long term.<sup>6</sup> Busteed (2021) is of the same opinion.<sup>7</sup>

It will come as no surprise that many students (both international and domestic) onshore in Australia will choose online delivery as well as F2F. In a recent survey of students at my own institution<sup>8</sup>, 92% expressed the current desire to stay online, even in place of a hybrid option. It is likely that students will wish to return to some form of F2F throughout 2022 – but it is also highly likely that students will want to maintain the option of mode choice – ‘hybrid’ moving forward.

The hybrid model of delivery affords higher education providers a genuine quality option that can be delivered effectively and efficiently, and certainly without the double effort mistakenly proposed by some. Hybrid is not a shortcut though, it is an attempt at a quality outcome given the extraordinary circumstances in which we find ourselves embedded. It also has far reaching opportunities for students who, for whatever reason, find access to provider facilities difficult.



**Emeritus Professor Greg Whateley** is Deputy Vice Chancellor, Group Colleges Australia

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.campusreview.com.au/2021/06/what-the-lack-of-onshore-international-students-in-2021-means-for-2022/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/brandonbusteed/2021/05/02/pandemic-to-permanent-11-lasting-changes-to-higher-education/?sh=137189bb452f>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ubss.edu.au/>