




# BEACONFLEX REPORT: SUMMARY & EXEMPLARS

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### BEACONFLEX FALL 2021 MEMBERSHIP

**Co-facilitators:** Suha Ballout and Carol Sharicz

**BeaconFlex Learning Community:**

Kathryn Archard

Suha Ballout

Robert Chen

Sabreen A Darwish

Ellen Douglas

Rita Kiki Edozie

Michele Giargiari

Chi-Kan Richard Hung

Jacqueline (Jackie) Lageson

Helen Poynton

Manu Thakral

Brian White

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**E-Learning and EdTech Team:**

Apurva Mehta

Irene Yukhananov

John Jessoe

Paula Thorsland

Rrezarta Hyseni

Zack Ronald

Lauren Luis

## PREPARATION OF THE SEMESTER

In preparation for the semester, a needs assessment was planned to identify the learning needs of faculty teaching BeaconFlex. As a new modality, it was important to know how the faculty can be supported. The co-facilitators held two listening sessions on Aug. 18 and Aug. 19 to ascertain what the needs and interests were of the incoming BeaconFlex faculty.

These listening sessions were well-attended (10 BeaconFlex faculty, Apurva, Zack, Rrezarta, John, Irene).

### **Areas of Concerns:**

The following were areas of concerns that came up:

#### **1. Concerns/Questions**

- a. How to explain BF to students
- b. Technology/inequities to be addressed
- c. Assessments and group work
- d. 30% of grade for one faculty for “attendance” – beyond BF but should be addressed
- e. Do students have to be vaccinated in a BF mode if attending virtually?
- f. Working with different time zones in BF
- g. Wearing a mask – how does that come across for the virtual students?

#### **2. Three areas of focus for exemplars**

- a. Equity
- b. Engagement
- c. Assessment

#### **3. Norms for BeaconFlex**

- a. If faculty can't get to class physically, tell students beforehand – they may not want to be in class without a faculty member there – also tell Ed. Tech so technical support does not show up
- b. Talk about expectations re: attendance/being present in the class and online

The input from these listening sessions helped frame the twice-a-month learning community sessions that Suha and Carol led.

With concern (1.a) above, how to explain BeaconFlex to students, the co-facilitators prepared the following paragraph to be included in the respective BeaconFlex faculty syllabi:

This course will utilize BeaconFlex teaching modality. BeaconFlex is UMass Boston's flexible teaching and learning model that allows students to participate in the same course session either in-person or remotely via web conferencing technology (i.e., Zoom). BeaconFlex gives students the choice in the mode of participation in the class session. Faculty will teach in-person and students can choose to be in the classroom for face-to-face experience or remote for a virtual experience. The design of the lectures will ensure equity of learning, engagement, and other activities for both students in the class and

those joining remotely. For more information:  
<https://www.umb.edu/elearning/beaconflex>

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional Development Day for BeaconFlex Faculty was held on September 2, 2021.

Based on the interests/needs that came from the listening sessions, the professional development day for BeaconFlex faculty was planned and implemented. The following provided the framework/focus:

1. For pedagogy...have faculty think of one aspect of BeaconFlex that we can share for best practices going forward
  - a. Example: equity, engagement, assessment
2. For dialogue:
  - a. What does it mean to be an engaged BeaconFlex student?
  - b. What is the students' responsibility of being a BeaconFlex learner?

## LEARNING COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

The co-facilitators held twice a month learning community sessions, starting in September.

The themes from those learning community sessions were summarized and a meeting with Andrew, Carol and Suha took place to share those themes.

The following was shared:

1. Good attendance with various BeaconFlex faculty
2. Themes:
  - a. **Technical issues** – remote students cannot hear the students in the actual classroom so well and vice versa
  - b. **Group work** – forming of groups; trying to be more seamless with that with in-class students and remote; trying to get students to talk in breakout rooms; faculty need skill development on how to be a facilitator in breakout rooms and/or have students be facilitators
  - c. **Academic honesty issues:** Students potentially cheating when taking exams; students find workarounds with the technical interventions
  - d. **Engagement and connectedness:** A couple of faculty feeling less connected with remote students
  - e. When we approached mid-semester, more students chose to be remote, less physically on campus

f. **What's working:**

- i. Flexibility is key to students who appreciated the option to be remote or in-person
- ii. Planning courses back-to-back in same room works
- iii. Once the technology was managed, the classes ran smoothly
- iv. Zoom transcription works really well for students
- v. Attendance: BeaconFlex yielded great for attendance with remote students (90%+)

g. **Evaluation:** We (Suha and I) developed a short survey – one for faculty and one for students when it was mid-semester that asks three questions:

Three questions for students:

1. What has your experience been so far with the BeaconFlex modality?
2. What changes (if any) would you recommend?
3. Would you want to take another course(s) in the BeaconFlex modality in subsequent semesters? Explain.

Three questions for faculty:

1. What has your experience been so far with the BeaconFlex modality?
2. What changes (if any) would you recommend?
3. Would you want to teach another course(s) in the BeaconFlex modality in subsequent semesters? Explain.

We did not launch this survey where it was around the time Janna joined the learning community to observe, provide feedback, and launch her own survey of faculty and staff.

## EVALUATION OF BEACONFLEX FALL 2021

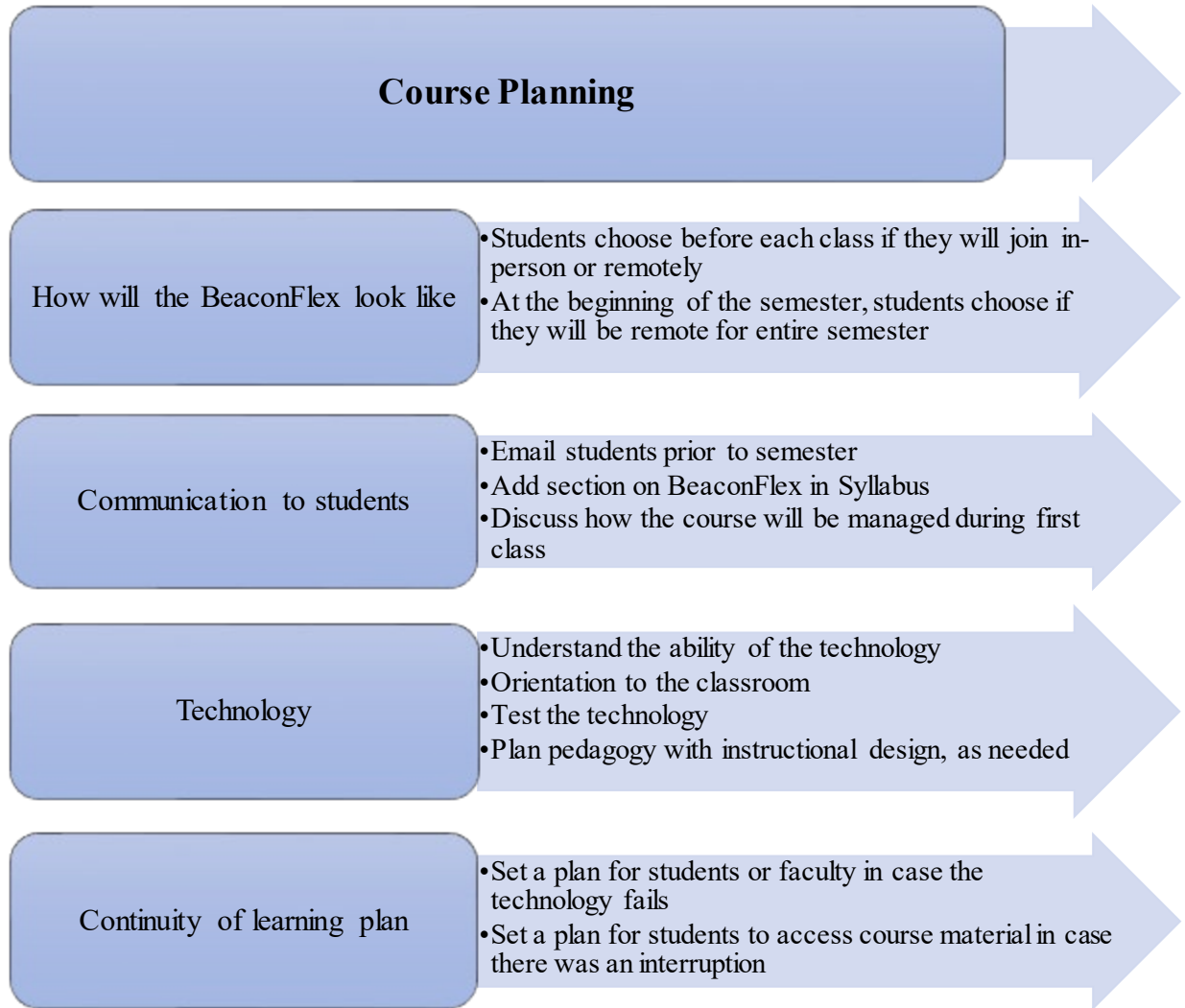
Janna Kellinger came onboard in November to observe our learning community sessions and to provide input. Before she observed a learning community session, Suha and Carol held a meeting with Janna to share what we have been experiencing so far. Janna has been scheduling times to observe four different kinds of classes: Bob Chen (large 500+ class), Manu (100+ class), Brian White (emphasis on active learning) and Jackie (“smaller” type classes). Findings of the evaluation can be found in a separate report submitted to the Provost’s office by Janna Kellinger.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND EXEMPLARS

One overarching recommendation for faculty coming into the Spring 2022 BeaconFlex modality is to discuss norms and expectations with students the very first week. Faculty need to define what BeaconFlex is and what the student’s role is in regards to participation and being engaged in this modality. The following three exemplars emerged during the Fall 2021 learning community conversations.

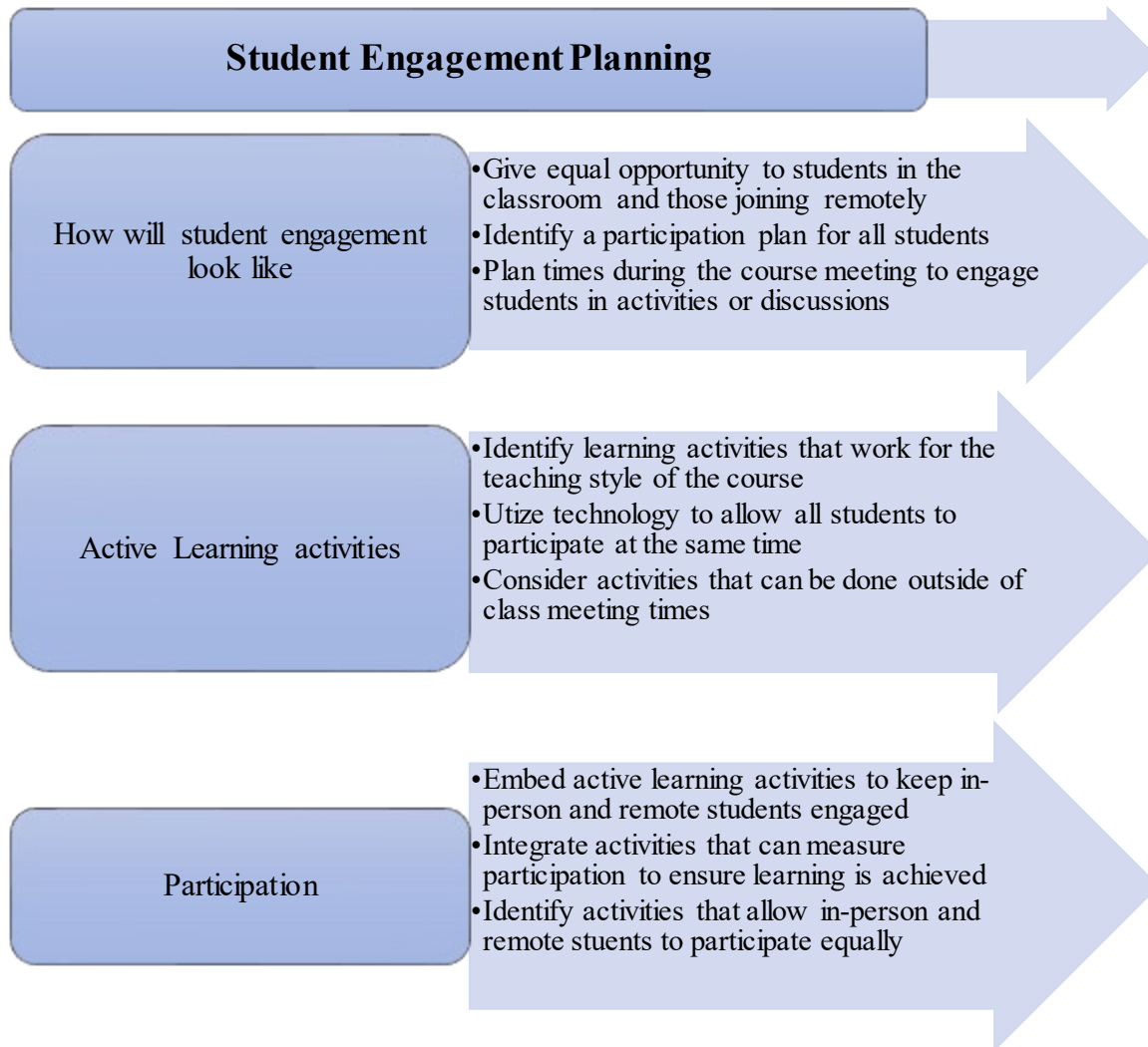
## EQUITY

Equity in the classroom was defined as all students enrolled for the course have an equitable learning opportunity and environment to the best of abilities as follows:



## ENGAGEMENT

Engagement in the classroom is important to increase socialization and networking among students, enhance analysis and synthesis of course material, and demonstrate application of knowledge. Planning student engagement activities is important to ensure student participation and enhance learning during class meeting times. These considerations may differ based on class size. For example, the same processes may not work in a small classroom of 20 students as they would in a large classroom of 140 students. However, the below principles can be used as a guide to plan student engagement in BeaconFlex classrooms:



## ASSESSMENT

Assessment of student learning is an important aspect of each course. Faculty measure student learning through different modalities. In BeaconFlex classrooms, it helps for faculty to plan assessments that follow to the best of abilities the policies of classroom attendance. In other words, consider assessments that can managed fairly in an in-person and remote environment. Here is some guidance that can help faculty plan assessments based on teaching style and course pedagogy:

