

# Common Language for Modes of Learning at York

Winter 2023

Draft Report for Community Consultations

## Executive Summary

The Common Language for Modes of Learning at York document aims to update and clarify existing and potential technology-enabled modes of learning at York University. The goals include being a stand-alone common language document across the institution, being included in university-wide explorations of the future of teaching and learning and minimizing the need for use-specific and custom course notes in each course description. Led by a representative steering committee, we are now consulting broadly with the community and soliciting feedback before finalizing the document. The “modes of learning spectrum” described below and tailored to be specific to York University is premised on the Modes of Learning Spectrum, created by the Canadian Digital Learning Research Association (CDRLA) that articulates technology-enabled modes of delivery and learning. The differentiation between modes in the York spectrum are based on 1) the location of structured learning, 2) the timing of structured learning and the 3) logistics of course assessments.

## Introduction

Created in 2014, *Common Language for eLearning* (Appendix A) reflected established and emergent language related to technology-enabled teaching and learning at that time. More recently, York has seen remote teaching and learning (REMT) come as an emergency response to the pandemic; with return to campus, the use of this terminology ceased. As well, two new modes of learning have been added to our lexicon – Hyflex (HYFX), and Online with Campus-based Assessment (ONCA). As a result, the Steering Committee was charged with updating the *Common Language for eLearning* document (Appendix A) to create a new document, *Common Language for Modes of Learning at York* (Appendix B). Note that we have re-defined the term *modes of delivery* to *modes of learning* to reflect our perspective that courses are not *delivered*; rather modes of learning are engaged with by students and educators to achieve course and program outcomes.

We recognize that though there is great value to having a common language for modes of learning across the university, there are disciplinary and historical rationales for using specific language related to modes of learning that may not align exactly with our spectrum, and that those modes may continue. Having said that, we highlight that at all times, we have endeavoured to prioritize discussion of pedagogy and allowed terminology and particular codes to follow.

The discussions of the steering committee were very careful to highlight the difference between “pedagogy” and the mechanism by which curriculum is delivered. That is, the instructor’s approach and method of teaching should not be confused with the mechanism through which teaching and learning occur. As an example, project-based learning, a pedagogical approach, could be used by an instructor who engages with the students in a blended mode of learning or in a synchronous, online mode of learning, or in a lecture-based mode in a classroom. That is why, for instance, the reader will not find reference to experiential education (EE) in this document. EE is a pedagogy that can be engaged in many different ways, including in-person or virtual, as we saw through the pandemic.

We focussed our efforts on discriminating among modes of learning that are technology-enabled. For example, prior to the pandemic, there was a period of stability in classroom technologies, many being equipped with digital presentation and learning tools intended to enhance the in-person learning experience. In our post-pandemic landscape, we are now seeing integration of live streaming technologies into classroom spaces, extending the in-person experience to those in other locations.

The information contained in the modes of learning is far reaching. For students, the mode clarifies where and when structured learning (classes) is to take place; for the course directors and TAs, they allow for course design, delivery and assessment practices to be adapted and optimized to the timing and locations of teaching and learning the course will encompass. And for administrators, they help to ensure that classrooms are appropriately and efficiently allocated, based on intended use. As such, we have considered the different modes of learning in terms of three principal characteristics: WHEN teaching and learning happens, WHERE teaching and learning happens, and the LOCATION of assessment. The goals for this document include:

1. Being a stand-alone common language document for technology-enabled modes of learning across the institution.
2. Minimizing the need for use of specific and custom notes in course descriptions.
3. Being included in university-wide explorations of the future of teaching and learning.

## Process

Our work has focused on the clarification and updating of the descriptions of existing and emergent modes of learning, through direct consultation with various stakeholders, including students, educators, and the Office of the University Registrar.

The steering committee has been meeting since January 2023 and will continue until the final report is complete, expected later this spring. This draft report for community consultation will be made available to the York community in April, with opportunities for both written and verbal feedback to be provided. The feedback will then be reviewed and integrated, with a final version of the document to be distributed later this spring.

## Steering Committee Membership

NAME	POSITION
Frankie Billingsley	Associate Registrar & Director, Student Records & Scheduling, OUR
Gordana Colby	Associate Professor, LA&PS
Will Gage (Co-Chair)	Associate Vice President, Teaching and Learning
Richard Hornsey	Associate Dean, Academic and Students, LSE
Tamara Kelly	Professor, Pedagogical Innovation Chair in Science Education, FSc
Ana Kraljević	Undergraduate Student
Parmin Rahimpoor-Marnani	Undergraduate Student
Pablo Ramos-Cruz	Graduate Student
Emily Rush	Director, Academic Programs and Policy, Office of Vice Provost
Peter Wolf (Co-Chair)	Advisor, Office of Associate Vice President, Teaching and Learning

## Our Starting Point – The Modes of Learning Spectrum

Our environmental scan showed few other Canadian universities undertaking similar initiatives as with, for example, the *University of Windsor*. More visible efforts towards developing common language for technology-enabled modes of learning are, however, taking place at a national level. The Canadian Digital Learning Research Association (CDRLA) recently published *Evolving Definitions in Digital Learning: A National Framework for Categorizing Commonly Used Terms* (2022). In this document the author describes how institutions are defining terms such as online learning, distance learning, remote learning, and hybrid learning; and used the results of qualitative interviews and their 2021 National Survey of Online and Digital Learning to inform their work. Emerging from their research is The Modes of Learning Spectrum, which articulates technology-enabled modes of delivery and learning.

## The Modes of Learning Spectrum

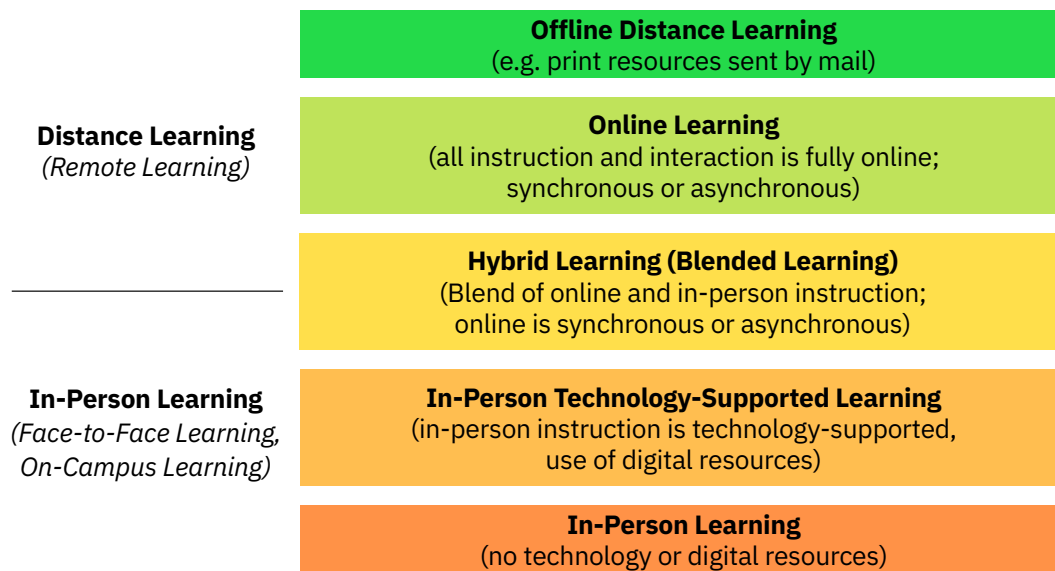


Figure 1 – Modes of Learning Spectrum (CDRLA, 2022)

This framework became our foundation and starting point. We have aligned York’s current modes of learning to this spectrum and have used it to envision and articulate possible emergent modes of learning, explored later in this report. Of note, we built on the spectrum by incorporating the needed classroom technologies alongside each modality, recognizing the importance of our physical spaces and classroom technology suites, as well as the digital.

## Current Modes of Learning at York

The Steering Committee made a pointed effort to adopt a student-centric perspective to underpin most of our discussion. Specifically, we maintained a focus on the idea that students predominantly need to know WHERE they need to go for their learning (e.g., a particular classroom space, online) and WHEN they need to be there. A key goal, therefore, of articulating modes of learning is to clearly, unambiguously communicate these parameters to the students. Alongside the mode of learning code (e.g., LECT), the Notes section of the course description has been typically used to detail specific expectations narratively. These expectations are not communicated consistently across courses, nor always read by students. The resulting student confusion (and subsequent interventions needed to clarify) is an added stress to the beginning of many course experiences, both for students and instructors.

The current listing of modes of learning at York emerged over time and in response to evolving approaches or needs. Given certain changes in the use of codes and understanding of modes of learning (e.g., the creation and then dissolution of REMT) over the past few years, many are experiencing increased confusion with the emergent variations of modes of learning and depend on narrative text in the course descriptions to articulate specifics of delivery. This serves to increase student confusion and as such, we have endeavoured to minimize the need to use the Notes section.

**Table 1 – Current Modes of Learning and Descriptions**

YORK MODES OF LEARNING	NOTES
Online (ONLN)	All instruction and assessment fully online; synchronous or asynchronous.
Online, Campus-based Assessment (ONCA)	Virtual, with campus-based assessment.
Blended (BLEN)	Combination of Virtual and In-person, Instructor will define whether virtual components are synchronous or asynchronous.
Hyflex (HYFX)	Concurrent synchronous in-person and livestreaming – all course components are available in virtual and in-person modes.
Lecture (LECT)	In-person instruction is technology-supported, use of digital resources.

### Clarifying Modes of Learning

Using the Modes of Learning Spectrum as a starting point, the steering committee explored the full range of possible modes of learning, available in **Appendix C**. The spectrum we used ranges from fully online with no scheduled classes (that is, online and asynchronous) to fully in-person and in real time (that is, a traditional classroom-based learning experience), with gradations of hybrid learning in-between. While we explored several variations, we chose a moderate number of learning modes, based on the current modes available, with clear differentiators and less need for custom details to be articulated in the Notes section of course descriptions.

We differentiated *course* modes of learning from the *occasional* use of educational approaches or technologies for specific experiences, like a class or module. For example, if a *lecture* course informally uses the classroom-based live streaming technologies to bring in a guest speaker, we would still consider this a lecture course. Only if the entire course itself is **essentially and predominantly** delivered online across the semester would the mode then be consider online.

We used instructor and student lenses to provide clear differentiators between modes, minimizing jargon used as well as the need for extensive text to articulate requirements in the Notes sections of course descriptions. As a result, Blended is likely the only mode that will continue to require notes of some detail.

To distinguish between the modes of learning, we use three critical differentiating characteristics:

1. WHERE students are expected to be – in-person, virtual or a combination.
2. WHEN students are expected to be – scheduled, not scheduled or a combination.
3. ASSESSMENT LOCATION for student assessment – In-person, virtual or a combination.

Table 2 – Proposed Modes of Learning and Differentiators

YORK MODE OF LEARNING	CURRENT CODE	WHERE* VIRTUAL OR IN-PERSON	WHEN* SCHEDULED OR NON-SCHEDULED CLASSES	ASSESSMENT LOCATION* VIRTUAL OR IN-PERSON	CLASSROOM NEEDS	NOTES
Online <i>Asynchronous</i>	ONLN	Virtual	No scheduled classes	Virtual	None	
Online <i>Synchronous</i>	–	Virtual	Scheduled classes	Virtual	None	
Online campus assessment	ONCA	Virtual	Scheduled classes	In-Person	Assessment spaces	
Blended	BLEN	In-Person & Virtual	Scheduled classes	Virtual &/or In-Person	Typical	Schedule and locations to be clarified in NOTES or systematized in other ways.
		Instructor-determined				
Hyflex	HYFX	In-Person &/or Virtual	Scheduled classes	In-Person &/or Virtual	<i>Standard Plus</i>	Students can choose their mode and change at will. May also include an option for students to participate without attending scheduled classes.
		Student Choice				
<i>In Person</i>	LECT	In-Person	Scheduled classes	In-Person	Typical	LECT In-Person Scheduled classes In-Person Regular LECT courses may also be directly associated with small group modes of learning (e.g., TUTOR, SEMR, LAB).

\*Essentially and predominantly.

## Discussion

The focus of the Steering Committee was to articulate a common language to simplify and clarify our community's understanding of technology-enabled modes of learning. As a result, we chose to utilize York's existing language for the learning modes and associated codes. There was interest in re-coding some of the modes to better reflect their full definitions, though this was outside of our terms of reference. For example, the term lecture is commonly understood to mean in-person, scheduled classes with in-person assessment. However, the term itself suggests a narrow perspective of what might take place in this mode. We would suggest, though not recommend at this time, re-naming the code for this mode (LECT) to a more meaningful term, like INPE (in-person) or PLEN (plenary) to reflect the diversity of approaches to teaching that take place in this mode. Another example, the code ONCA suggests being similar to ONLN; however, ONCA is synchronous while ONLN is asynchronous, a totally different mode that would benefit from being more closely associated with the (new again) synchronous online mode we recommend adding.

The **online synchronous** mode we added is a re-framing of the REMT code that was used as an emergency response mode during the pandemic. We see the value of enabling online synchronous courses, not as an emergency response modality, but optimally designed and delivered for this mode, when bringing students together at the same time in different locations might be the most appropriate mode.

It is anticipated that undergraduate and graduate programs will increasingly integrate a **mix of learning modes**, building on fully in-person learning experiences that will continue to be foundational. To fully capture the advantages of the modes of learning spectrum and their appropriate integration into program learning, systems, practices and spaces would also need to align to support a mix of modes of learning. For example, program committees would benefit from intentional processes through which a program learning mode *mix* could be developed to provide cohesion and clarity to course design and delivery. One possible approach to developing a learning mode mix at the program level is offered in **Decision-Making for Program Modes of Delivery**.

If students will continue to have a mix of learning modes in the future, as they do today (i.e., in a given day some courses are in-person and in a classroom, and other courses are online and synchronous), then students will benefit from access to informal campus-based technology-enhanced spaces where they can participate in various of modes of learning. This will allow students to participate in scheduled live streaming classes while on-campus, for example, in between in-person courses.

## Conclusion

To this point, the Common Language for Modes of Learning at York Steering Committee has worked as a collective to clarify and differentiate modes of learning at York, through our own experiences and perspectives. By distributing this draft document with the hopes of receiving meaningful and helpful feedback, we will finalize and distribute the final Common Language for Modes of Learning at York later this spring.

## Resources

- Baker, N. *Course delivery modes in the spotlight: Defining our approaches to teaching and learning*. Teach and Learn. (2021).
- Bates, T. *Teaching in a Digital Age*. BC Campus. (2019)
- Fawns, T. *An Entangled Pedagogy: Looking Beyond the Pedagogy–Technology Dichotomy*. Postdigit Sci Educ 4, 711–728 (2022).
- Johnson, N. *Evolving Definitions in Digital Learning: A National Framework for Categorizing Commonly Used Terms*. Canadian Digital Learning Research Association. (2021).
- Moir, W, Nahornick, A. Wolf, P. *Decision-Making for Program Modes of Delivery*. York University Guide. (2022)

## Terms and Concepts

**Asynchronous:** Not Happening at the same time

**Modes of learning:** Traditionally referred to as modes of delivery, the modes in which the course is made available to students, clarifying the timing and locations of learning This is differentiated from Teaching Approaches: The strategies used to deliver instruction and facilitate learning. This is differentiated from learning approaches (i.e. case-based learning) as well as the educational technologies that can enhance a variety of learning modes (i.e. online discussions).

**Modes of Learning Mix:** Intentional approaches to determining the diversity and proportion of various modes of learning, usually at a program level, with a focus on the overall student experience of timing and locations of learning.

**Virtual learning:** Also known as online learning, a mode of delivery in which educational materials and instruction are provided through digital technologies and the internet. Virtual learning can take many forms, including live videoconferencing, text-based and recorded lectures, online discussions, virtual laboratories, and online assessments.

**In-Person:** On-campus, in-class, live and together. In real life.

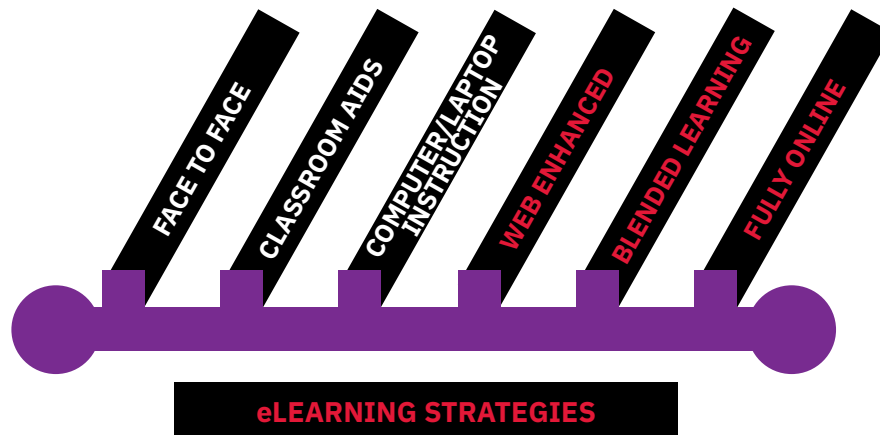
**Predominantly and essentially:** The threshold for determining the mode of a course; consistency of mode across the course experience, as opposed to a one-off or occasional experience.

**Standard Plus Classroom:** Room is equipped with: ceiling mounted auto tracking camera, audience ceiling microphones, two large reference monitors at the back of the room, teaching podium with two monitors, instructor wireless microphone, audio system to hear remote participants

**Synchronous:** Happening at the same time.

## Appendix A

### Common Language for eLearning



*Last Revised: March 26, 2014*

#### **eLearning**

eLearning is the development of knowledge and skills through the use of information and communication technologies to support interactions for learning including interactions with content, learning activities and with other people.

#### **Face-to-face**

A “traditional” lecture or seminar format is used without technology.

#### **Classroom aids**

A traditional face-to-face lecture format is supplemented by the use of presentation or online tools such as PowerPoint slides, videos, “clickers”, etc.

#### **Computer labs/laptop instruction**

Face-to-face instruction occurs in a setting where every student has access to a computer (lab or personal laptop) instruction. and the computer applications or online materials are integral to the instruction.

#### **Web-enhanced learning**

A face-to-face lecture delivery format is utilized where learning is supplemented by web materials, resources or activities. Web-enhanced courses will use a learning management system (LMS) such as Moodle to make lecture notes and recordings available, provide links to resources, online quizzes, discussion forums, etc. Usual face-to-face instruction time remains the same in these courses despite the addition of a web component.

The flipped classroom is a form of web-enhanced learning which involves the practice of giving students access to lectures electronically and using the face-to-face class time for interactive activities.

#### **Blended learning**

In the blended mode, also known as ‘hybrid’, class time is a combination of face-to-face and online delivery.

Face-to-face instruction is replaced by online instruction for one third of the course, while one third of the course is delivered face-to-face. The remaining third may be any combination of online or face-to-face.

Total course contact hours will remain the same as a traditional face-to-face course.

#### **Fully online**

Students do not physically attend classes. All lectures and course activities are delivered online. The student may be required to come to campus (or another location) to write tests or exams.

Course directors may create opportunities for students to come to campus but attendance is not mandatory.



## **Appendix B**

### **Terms of Reference**

#### *Common Language for Modes of Delivery and Technology-Entangled Teaching and Learning at York*

##### **Mandate:**

Chaired by the Office of the Associate Vice-President Teaching and Learning, this steering group will update the *Common Language for eLearning* (Appendix A) document to be the reference document for stakeholders across York to use in modes of learning-related policies and practices.

Our goal is to update the *Common Language for eLearning* document with one entitled, *Common Language for Modes of Delivery and Technology-Entangled Teaching and Learning at York*. The creation of this document will include the updating and enhancing the descriptions of current delivery modes, through direct consultation with various stakeholders, including students, educators, and the Office of the University Registrar. These descriptions will include articulating key characteristics and implications for each.

##### **Membership:**

Will Gage, Associate Vice-President, Teaching and Learning (Chair)

Peter Wolf, Office of the Associate Vice-President, Teaching and Learning

Representatives from Associate Deans, Teaching and Learning, AVPTL, VPA, Office of the University Registrar, Course Directors and Faculty, Undergraduate and Graduate Students

Teaching Commons (TC), University Information Technology (UIT), University Services Centre (USC), Student Services, Library

##### **Timelines:**

Meeting frequency – Bi-monthly

Project Completion – Summer 2023

## Appendix C

### *Spectrum of Possible Learning Modes at York (for consideration and discussion)*

Below is the comprehensive list of the range of modes of learning the steering committee discussed. Of note, this appendix identifies the modes we chose not to include in our final Proposed Modes of Learning and Differentiators (table 2).

The modes NOT included are grey shaded row below:

- Online Asynchronous, campus assessment – We omitted this mode as there are no current courses using this approach, nor any demand.
- Block Blended – Differentiating weekly blended from block blended was discussed but eventually eliminated as the need for custom notes would not be reduced. Blended courses will likely require the most custom notes to clarify location and timing expectations and creating two versions of that might add to confusion.
- Hyflex Max – Currently the university has identified hyflex course as synchronous. We recognize that adding asynchronous components (in lieu of class attendance) to hyflex delivery may well come to pass in the future, but at this point, this mode of delivery has yet to emerge.

YORK MODE OF LEARNING	CURRENT CODE	WHERE*	WHEN*	ASSESSMENT LOCATION*	CLASSROOM NEEDS
		VIRTUAL OR IN-PERSON	SCHEDULED OR NON-SCHEDULED CLASSES	VIRTUAL OR IN-PERSON	
Online <i>Asynchronous</i>	ONLN	Virtual	No scheduled classes	Virtual	None
Online <i>Synchronous</i>	-	Virtual	Scheduled classes	Virtual	None
Online Synchronous, campus assessment	ONCA	Virtual	Scheduled classes	In-Person	Assessment spaces
Online Asynchronous, campus assessment	-	Virtual	No scheduled classes	Virtual	Assessment spaces
Weekly Blended	BLEN	In-Person & Virtual	Scheduled classes	Virtual &/or In-Person	Typical
		Instructor-determined			
Block Blended	-	In-Person & Virtual	Scheduled classes	Virtual &/or In-Person	Typical
		Instructor-determined			
Hyflex	HYFX	In-Person &/or Virtual	Scheduled classes	In-Person &/or Virtual	<i>Standard Plus</i>
		Student Choice			
Hyflex Max	-	In-Person &/or Virtual	No Scheduled classes &/or Scheduled classes	In-Person &/or Virtual	Standard Plus
		Student Choice			
<i>In Person</i>	LECT	In-Person	Scheduled classes	In-Person	Typical