

Revolutionising the campus experience for a post-COVID-19 world

To support a safe reopening during the COVID-19 pandemic, Northeastern University built a hybrid, flexible (hyflex) learning model, known as “NUFlex,” which has left a positive, lasting mark on the student experience and the future of learning.



Call for change

A safe reopening for university students

As soon as it became clear that a traditional college experience in the fall of 2020 would not be feasible, Northeastern University (Northeastern) began preparing for a return to school that would provide students with a safe and flexible learning environment that also fosters human connection and supports high quality education. The plan included everything from launching an on-campus testing center to de-densifying classrooms and dorms. Two key elements of this return were the institution of

the NUflex learning model and the launch of the Student Hub. Northeastern could not risk letting the pandemic further disrupt the student experience, which left many feeling distracted, off track, lonely and unable to focus on their studies. Northeastern needed to maintain a sense of community to keep students enrolled. And that required creating an innovative student experience that remained socially and academically engaging in whatever learning format students felt comfortable.



Engaging digital learners

Drawing from Accenture's expertise in digital design, as well as their partnership with Northeastern, the team successfully developed and deployed three digital tools within a matter of weeks to allow around 30,000 students to safely return to campus.

The primary tool is the Student Hub, a portal that serves as the students' home base for key class information, applications, resources and community engagement. It helps students navigate and keep track of their busy lives using a variety of Microsoft products. Digital features include:

- Access to Outlook and Canvas
- Registrar announcements and overview of course schedules
- Account information from student financial services
- Updates on dining plans, laundry

- bucks and university card balances
- Quick links to OneDrive, Yammer and other Microsoft 365 apps

To protect the health and safety of the broader community, students use the COVID-19 Scheduler, to manage required testing appointments and schedule their vaccines. Next, they leverage the Dynamic Class Scheduler on the Student Hub and submit their weekly preferences for attending class in-person or remotely. The tool then assigns available seats to students who want to physically attend class and provides Northeastern faculty with a roster of who has been cleared to attend. Together, these tools deliver integrated insights, notifications and university content to enable NUFlex and deliver a highly personalised experience that encourages greater collaboration and engagement, while also keeping students and staff safe.

The transition to NUFlex and the implementation of these digital tools involved extensive collaboration with cross-departmental Northeastern leaders and community members. The team also relied on social listening tools to solicit and incorporate student feedback throughout the discovery, design and implementation phases to ensure the digital experience would engage and delight the Northeastern student. The team conducted interviews, focus groups, design thinking workshops and useability testing sessions with approximately 70 students and employees to ensure a tailored solution. Embracing Northeastern's culture of experiential learning, the project team also regularly collaborated with a group of 10 student interns, who directly and continually provided insight into the student experience, helped prioritise new features and shaped content for the site.

"When giving feedback I try to think of not only what I think but also what my peers may think," said one student collaborator. "I really appreciate that the team actually takes our feedback and suggestions and applies them to the design/flow," noted another.

When tech meets human ingenuity

A day in the Life

Students begin their day on the My Day tab on the Student Hub. This page syncs events from their Outlook calendars and displays their classes for the day. For more information about each class, they can move to the Classes Tab to view their instructors, class locations and grades as well as schedule their preference for in-person or remote class attendance using the dynamic scheduling tool. To support Northeastern's commitment to co-ops and outside of classroom learning through service, extracurricular

activities, and work experience, the Student Hub integrates with experiential learning data, events and opportunities. From here, students can access events, clubs and organisations to foster connections within the Northeastern community. Additionally, students can interact with each other and ask questions through Yammer. If they need information on university services, students can check out the Resources tab of the Student Hub to browse the many university websites and departments they can contact.





A valuable difference

A tailored experience – all in one place

Northeastern achieved immediate results with these new digital tools:

- It safely reopened the school during an uncertain time. Since re-opening, the University has seen a total of 1,112 positive tests, an average daily positive rate of just 0.25% of administered tests. Students and faculty report feeling safe on campus and confident in administration policies.
- Students gained the flexibility to attend class remotely or in-person; **nearly everyone** enrolled at Northeastern **accessed the Dynamic Class Scheduler** during the first semester to choose their learning preferences.
- To date, more than 25,000 unique users have used the COVID-19 Test Scheduler tool to schedule **537,531 COVID-19 tests**. The ease of the scheduling process has contributed to the university being able to maintain around **95% testing compliance**.
- A central location helped engage students and allow them to manage their daily tasks. To date, students have initiated **873,737 unique Student Hub sessions**.

While we all hope for a future where COVID tests are no longer regularly required, the tools and practises that have been developed will leave a lasting mark on the future of teaching and learning at Northeastern. Looking ahead, Northeastern will continue to improve and innovate to meet the needs of its students in a post-COVID era and fulfil its vision of becoming a bold and visionary leader in higher education by focussing on the human experience.



“I really appreciate that the team actually takes our feedback and suggestions and applies them to the design/flow of the Student Hub. Mostly I'm just happy to help in the process of creating something that I as a student will end up using everyday.” —Student Collaborator



“It's really important to take the opinion of a customer before delivering a product and that's what was done, feedback is very important and I was very happy to see that the feedback was implemented and taken into account.” —Student Collaborator



“I am in love with this tool. It's really one place for everything.” – Student Collaborator

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