Managing Large Classes

As class size increases, instructors face new challenges. Effectively teaching larger numbers of students requires extra planning and management techniques.

Pre-Semester Planning

Read the pedagogical literature of your discipline. Build on the successful strategies others have used for larger classes.

Become familiar with campus instructional support. Plan to use a course management system, the resources of the Center for Teaching and Learning, Academic Enhancement, the Writing Center, Disability Services and other units that support teaching and learning. Consider using a *Personal Response System* (a.k.a "clickers") to encourage active student engagement and to make daily activities (e.g., taking attendance) more efficient.

Establish the prerequisites for the course. Plan to administer a basic concepts assessment to allow ill-prepared students to drop or to seek remedial help. Identify strategies and student services for reviewing basic concepts.

Identify materials that reflect a variety of student interests. Include the contribution minorities have made to your discipline and choose materials that are relevant to a wide range of student interests and career goals.

Plan for out-of-class learning. Consider incorporating peer learning groups into your course, as well as online self-paced learning, help sessions, and flexible office hours.

Check semester calendar. Note and plan course activities around religious holidays and campus events that might influence class activities and test schedules**.**

Check room assignment. Make sure you are scheduled in a room that accommodates the size of the class and the learning goals of the course. Confirm room assignment for special testing needs such as evening testing or group exams.

Course & Classroom Expectations

Use a syllabus as an academic contract. Detail all expectations, deadlines and consequences regarding academic work. Include a statement that you can not legally talk with others about a student's work unless that student has given written permission.

Establish attendance and participation grades. Students who attend class and participate are more successful learners. Start class on time and make punctuality and readiness to learn a priority. Begin with a transition activity to get students focused on topic. Provide in-class activities and learning that can not be duplicated out of class. For ease in taking attendance, use a seating chart or "clickers", daily signed feedback from students using classroom assessment strategies, or student generated test bank questions.

Encourage student ownership of classroom expectations. State your roles and expectations and let students develop and agree upon other interactions that enhance the learning environment and the consequences for those who do not follow rules.

Plan to remind students of agreed upon class conduct and consequences when necessary. Disruptions by late arrivals or early departures, cell phone or laptop use, talking or inattention inhibit learning for other students and must be addressed. Usually a general polite, but firm, reminder is all that is needed. Be realistic and minimize disruptions with designated seating for late arrivals or early departures. Employ the agreed upon consequences.

Create a student-advisory group. Have five to seven students monitor class needs, issues and progress. Create a mechanism for all students to communicate with the advisory group online or with a suggestion box. Meet with the advisory group regularly and listen and act upon class concerns.

Classroom Management Strategies

Reduce student anonymity by using names. Have students copy their student ID picture and paste it to a seating chart. Or use name plates. Use course management system student pages to collect information. Before individual conferences, read this information.

Be accessible to students. Arrive early, chat with different students. Schedule some office hours directly after class to facilitate student use. To encourage student interaction with you, move out into the class and use online discussion tools for class discussions and questions.

Can they hear you? Use a microphone and projection system if necessary. Repeat student questions to clarify and help others hear.

Save instructional time by eliminating paper. Use the class management system to post all handouts. Remind students to print them out when needed.

Provide a skeleton outline of PowerPoint presentations. Before class, post the session outline. Expect all students to read and print it out to prepare for new concepts and vocabulary. Students should come to class to complete the outline and identify the important concepts. Summarize important points at the end of class.

Vary methods to maintain student interest. Use interactive lectures which encourage student responses via clickers or color-coded cards. Reenergize class every 15-20 minutes by changing method to discussion, audio visuals, or student-led pairs practice. Provide out-of-class opportunities in study groups, online or with assigned readings and field experiences.

Provide frequent short writing assignments. Use short ungraded writing assignments to help students clarify concepts. Collect one-minute papers, one-sentence summaries and definitions of important concepts to gauge student understanding. Use peer shared writing activities and feedback for short papers with specific guidelines. Include short essay exam questions reflecting what they have practiced.

Demonstrate successful performance. Model how you might think about a problem or approach a question. Provide samples of various graded material to demonstrate different levels of learning. Offer many opportunities for practice. Emphasize your commitment to helping them learn. Suggest alternatives for difficult material.

Suggest time management strategies. Design large assignments with check points for different stages so students and the instructor can adjust their attention to each stage rather than the whole project at once.

Assessment Strategies

Provide frequent low-stakes assessment. Ungraded and self-graded assignments encourage student preparation and responsibility for learning. Correct answers can be posted online. Ungraded assignments can count toward a participation grade.

Collect student-generated test questions. Students can formulate test questions on that day's material, which encourages attention and gauges their understanding of material. Use as a test bank to create exam questions after each session. Use to take attendance and count toward their participation grade.

Reduce cheating with new test questions and testing methods. Vary order of test questions and paper color of the exams to discourage cheating. Arrange for extra proctors on test days.

Vary testing method to measure different levels of expertise and ways of learning. Allow for recovery from a low test score with more frequents tests and to encourage continued engagement.

Avoid handing out tests. Put questions on projection system or use computerized testing.

Eliminate make up exams and extra credit assignments. To avoid verifying excuses and having to create make up exams, have frequent exams and allow students to drop one exam or assignment grade or provide a comprehensive exam that doubles the weight of the missed exam material.

Check student ID. Have proctors collect exams, check ID picture, signature and ID code.

Post correct answer key immediately. Use web to post answers, review frequently missed questions and as review for a comprehensive final. Give participation points to students who use the web review.

Provide secure return of assignments and tests. Fold and staple so name is visible but grade is not. Put graded material on table in alphabetical order and monitor pick up. Do not publicly post grades tied to student identity. Use course management system to post grades for student private access.

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