

STUDENTS PLUS! HANDLING LARGE CLASSES EXTENDED ABSTRACT

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What might you do when you encounter a class that is much larger than you are used too? What do you do to cope? How do you promote discussion when you have too many students? How do you manage writing projects? You might search for suggestions of how to handle the mechanics of the larger class: how to monitor what is happening in the classroom (red cards, ombudspeople, one minute message), how to mark the larger number of assignments, how to look after the mechanics of presenting the lecture or of distributing marked assignments. A preferred option is to use the larger class as a context to reconsider how to facilitate learning.

Good learning is vital in any class size, but large classes are less forgiving than small ones so it's particularly important to promote good teaching. Consider these ideas to improve learning:

- Be clear on what learning and improving learning mean to you.
- Shift the focus from teaching to learning.
- Create an environment for active learning, where students are engrossed in thinking about the subject.
- Use cooperative learning, where students must cooperate with each other in learning tasks.
- Interact with students, providing both quality and quantity of contact
- Give prompt feedback.
- Expect students to succeed.
- Satisfy the different learning styles of students.
- Recognize that assessment drives the learning.
- Have consistent goals with measurable criteria.
- Motivate your audience.
- Help students develop process skills to manage the tasks of learning and interaction.

Let's expand on a few of these ideas: shifting the focus from teaching to learning, giving prompt feedback, and providing time-on-task.

FOCUS

One issue in handling large classes is the shift from a focus on delivery (the teaching) to a focus on learning (the receiving). With delivery, we concentrate on issues such as motivation, decorum, the collection and distribution of materials, getting feedback about lectures, copying, and doing course assessments. Shifting to a focus on receiving, we promote active learning, cooperative behavior, a "success" environment, student-faculty interaction, time spent on a task, understanding different learning styles, developing process skills, providing prompt feedback, and empowering students with assessment.

But how do we manage these shifts in focus? Providing prompt feedback to a large class may seem overwhelming. Some possible avenues include:

Mark fewer individual assignments

- Fewer total required
- Select a subset of the problems to mark
- Implement sampling and mark 3 out of 5
- Single cover page summary

Mark fewer cooperative assignments

- Group works together, but individual assignments are completed; one individual's assignment is randomly chosen, all in group receive this mark
- Mark group
- One person responsible for the assignment, completes it and peers in group mark and give feedback so that it can be improved before it is formally submitted

Mark a more structured manner

- Format student presentation for ease in marking
- Format for marking/feedback

Feedback from peers or self-provided

- Mark assignments in-class, teacher-facilitated
- In-class feedback
- In class diads, groups of 2 providing exchange
- In-class triads, groups of 3 providing exchange

TIME-ON-TASK

How do you help students spend time productively on the learning task? Some guides to keeping students on the target and on the task:

At the beginning of the task

- Rationalize the task and tell students.
- Have clear, unambiguous, observable goals.
- Tell the goals to the students.
- Explain the route ahead.
- Use transparencies or written material to enrich instructions.
- Ask "Everyone clear on the task?" before starting.
- Identify the allowed time (use "30 seconds" instead of "1/2 minute").

During the task

- Monitor the time, ask "Everyone completed?" or "20 seconds more?"
- Use and display a timer, or use a bell not a buzzer.

After the task is completed

- Always close with reflection, "What have you discovered?"
- Always close each activity with discussion about the task, a leader can summarize or have a diad discuss.
- Close full activity with goals.

- Summarize with a DISCOVERY sheet, have students summarize, or you summarize.

SUMMARY

This work represents some of our experiences, the experience of other educators, and collected feedback and information from workshops. It is a small sampling of the techniques that may be used to improve teaching and can be utilized when handling large classes. Some are easier to implement than others, some will require development to use in your particular circumstances, and some may not work for you. Take advantage of more effective learning and become more productive when handling large classes.

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