Teaching Spotlight Workshop #1: Teaching & Managing Large Classes

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Workshop Expectations

1. Challenges
2. Advantages
3. Best practices / Strategies
4. Resources
Challenges & Advantages:

*We’ll break up into 2-4 groups:*

Group 1 - In 5 minutes, brainstorm a list of as many challenges as you can think of for teaching large classes.

Group 2 – In 5 minutes, brainstorm a list of as many advantages as you can think of for teaching large classes.
Challenges & Advantages:

*Now Switch:*

Groups - Rotate to the other group’s poster & discuss their list, add new comments, vote up your favorite / most important issues.

Bring your pens with you to add new comments / notes / votes!
Some Possible Challenges:

1. Students not participating / not engaged.
2. Limited teaching style (e.g. lecture only)
3. Maintaining class discipline / expectations
4. Grading
5. Managing Office Hours / Student Emails
6. Utilizing TAs / LAs effectively
Advantages:

1. Large classes = always enough students for interaction.
2. Teaching large classes provides you with a large and highly diverse population of students (Wolfman, 2002; Wood, 2009)
3. Instructor is not the only resource:
   ◦ Leveraging TAs, LAs, and peer instruction
4. Students develop strategies for helping themselves & classmates.
5. Helps foster an atmosphere of collaboration & teamwork.
Best Practices / Strategies:

- In small groups (2-3 people) brainstorm at least one strategy / technique to tackle the challenge you’ve been given.
- In addition, identify ways to leverage or incorporate the advantage you have into your solution / strategy, or other strategies.
- 5 minutes to brainstorm & then your group will have 3-5 minutes to report out.

https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/teaching-large-classes/
Best Practices / Strategies – Group Discussion:

- Your group will have 3-5 minutes to share your challenge, your strategy, and ways of leveraging your advantage in large classes.

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Student Participation / Active Learning:

1. Think-pair-share
2. Voting questions
3. Minute papers
4. Group Discussion
5. Position Discussions

- Active Learning & making use of technology has been shown to increase attendance and is beneficial for managing a class (Deslauriers et al. 2011 & Mulryan-Kyne 2010)

Using approaches that incorporate both lecture and active learning have been shown to be useful tools for increasing student engagement (e.g. Carpenter, 2006; Mulryan-Kyne, 2010; Walker et al. 2008).
Maintaining Class Discipline / Expectations:

- Set classroom expectations at beginning & remind often.
- Establish routines
- Setting tone of mutual respect to each other & instructors
- Learning student names / establishing instructor demeanor & rapport with students.
Grading & Assessments:

- Light Grading on short assignments
- Utilizing Rubrics
- Rethinking formative assessments:
  - Discussion oriented activities – students still receive critical feedback.
  - Using technology: PollEverywhere.com; Clickers; other Voting Response systems; Canvas
- Peer Grading
- Proven student benefits of providing frequent feedback – can be done using all of the techniques above (e.g. Deslauriers et al. 2011)

Utilizing TAs / LAs Effectively:

- Hold regular TA meetings
- Use grading rubrics
- Divide up grading – make use Canvas Speedgrader
- Leverage them for in class time & student interactions, additional expertise
  - Some research shows that students often prefer LAs over graduate student TAs or instructors when they find themselves in need of help (e.g. Prather, Rudolph, Brissenden 2011)
- Want more info / discussion on this topic? Join the TIDES FLC on Learning Assistants – meets every other Thursday at noon!
Managing Office Hours / Student Emails:

Develop strategies to encourage students to make use of office hours:

- **Tip:** Frame Office Hours as “Free Weekly Help Sessions” (Prather, Univ. of Arizona)
- **Tip:** Small groups required in first few weeks.
- **Tip:** Variety of times / survey students for best times.
- **Tip:** Encourage students to utilize TAs & their office hours as well.

**Emails:**

- Set ground rules / expectations early on
- Have a FAQ page or sheet for where certain types of questions can be found: syllabus, course webpage – other than emailing as default.
Summary of Best Practices from Jenny Lloyd-Strovas, Texas Tech:

**Best Practices for All Class Sizes**

This is not a comprehensive list but it’s a good place to start!

- Write specific and measurable overall course outcomes using Bloom’s Taxonomy as a guide. Click here for tips on writing an effective syllabus.
- Write learning objectives for each individual lesson and base your active learning strategies on those objectives.
- Less is more! Focus on the most important content and spend your time designing activities related to those essential concepts.
- Make the material relatable to the students by showing them how it applies to their majors or everyday lives.
- Use a variety of teaching techniques and active learning strategies. This will allow you to engage all learning styles and therefore all students. Click here for more information on learning styles and active learning.
- Be very clear and explicit in your syllabus. Students should know what to expect in your class. Click here for tips on writing an effective syllabus.
- Be transparent about your pedagogy. Explain to your students why you use the strategies you do, what you expect them to learn, and how they will be assessed.
- Base your assessments on overall course outcomes and the learning objectives for individual lessons. Click here to learn more about designing exams and creating assignments.
- Build a positive rapport with your students. To learn strategies for building rapport in any sized classroom, click here.

References: Allen & Tanner, 2005; Bain, 2004; Knight & Wood, 2005; Nilson, 2010; TTU TLPDC online resources; Walker et al., 2008; Wood, 2009.
Resources:

- **Vanderbilt University resources** – Teaching Large Classes: [https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/teaching-large-classes/](https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/teaching-large-classes/)
- **TIDES Teaching Portal:** [https://cns.utexas.edu/teaching-portal](https://cns.utexas.edu/teaching-portal)