

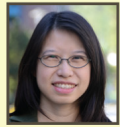
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THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Winter 2012

Centre for Teaching and Learning



Teaching Large Classes

Most instructors that are faced with teaching large classes are hoping to pick up some ideas about how to adjust their learning activities and the assessments. Students have concerns around getting assistance with their studies, connecting with the instructor and not getting lost in anonymity.

The first issue to address is physical space. Examine the teaching space you have been given to see if it fits your mode of delivery. Can you move around the room, will the technology you use be affected by the size of the room (PowerPoint too small, voice not heard, etc)? Will students in every corner and row be able to see you, the screen or any type of visual? You may find it useful to request that students leave some rows of seats empty to allow you to move through sections of the room and get closer to student groups or pairs during discussion times.

Learning student names is going to be challenging (see out brochure 'Learning Student Names').

When teaching large classes, more reminders about management issues are needed. For example, going over the norms or expectations around entering and leaving class, technology use, late assignments, etc., should be reviewed weekly at the start of the term.

For the most part, you can keep your routines and expectations the same but small adjustments will need to be made in instructional and assessment methods. Try to make the 'big', small by keeping some of your same activities, for example if you would normally demonstrate a skill to a smaller class, get assistants to do the demonstration with you but have

them spread throughout the room so all students can see/access the activity. If you would normally break into a discussion on a topic in a small class, break the large class into 5 or 10 discussion groups and monitor those or get assistance in monitoring them. You may not be able to hear the reports from all groups because of the constraints of time, but call on different groups each time so that the groups are always prepared to answer.

Most instructors choose to use group work as an answer to large class sizes. This accomplishes a couple of tasks – diminishes the number of assignments to grade and allows students to get to know each other as points of contact as opposed to discussing all concepts directly with the instructor. There are drawbacks to using group work that should be thought out carefully. Groups must have ample tasks to complete otherwise the students will not see the advantage of working in a group. They will be concerned with individual marks and the possibility of doing all the work while having others benefit.

Group formation should be considered, whether the students will choose their partners or whether the instructor chooses or implements a random selection tool. Another important element to consider when using groups are the learning outcomes of the course – is the development of group skills an objective of the course? If so, more weight and more guidance in team skills should be allotted to group activities and a formative evaluation process could be used to assist students in progressing in their team skill development over the course of the term.

Grading is an important aspect of group work to alleviate the abuse of group marks by students that do not pull their weight. Try to use some individual grades as well as group grades so that individual loafing will be penalized or at least not rewarded. Many instructors loathe group work because of the grading and loafing aspects that lead to student complaints and unrealistic grades for some students. When these drawbacks are thought out and planned for, group work can be very successful.

The Centre for Teaching and Learning will be pleased to assist you further should you wish to explore this topic.

Generally, in large classes, assessments will have to be modified in number and hence in weight. For example in a small class you may give 5 or 6 different pieces of assessment throughout the course of the term but with a larger marking load this may be unrealistic. Hiring a marker or a teaching assistant can be helpful but if those options are not available then cutting the number of assessments should be the answer and the weighting of them and even the mode of them will have to change.

Think carefully about what objectives are best met with current assessment methods, if that assessment piece was not used, how might the objectives be achieved otherwise? In most cases you can add objectives to one or two assessments and eliminate others. For example, one type of assessment used in larger classes is termed an extended project. The assignment is spread throughout the course of the term – an outline, a draft, a peer review and then a final project is produced, so that, as the assessor, you are grading the same topic or piece a number of times. That shortens your work by not having as much to assess all in one chunk and it gives the student an opportunity to develop each stage of a project with some feedback rather than putting all their efforts into one attempt worth many marks.

The goal with teaching large classes is to make it as effective a learning experience as you can for as many of the students as possible while preserving your sanity and keeping your workload manageable. Use of teaching assistants or other programs such as supplemental instruction can help too.

Centre for Teaching and Learning

The Centre for Teaching and Learning at UBC's Okanagan campus promotes and supports excellence in teaching and learning. The Centre provides campus-wide support for all models of teaching and learning, including online learning.

It is our Mission:

"To lead, support and promote teaching and learning excellence, innovation and scholarship at the UBC Okanagan campus."