

# *Large Class Teaching*

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# Large Classes?

A number of common themes emerge in this teaching environment:

1. Attendance
2. Traditional lectures (“passive”) vs interactive (“engaging”, “active”) approaches (e.g., case & problem methods)
3. Delivery Modalities – 1/2/3 hour lectures? Large lecture + small class tutorials/labs/practicums? Blended?
4. Teaching skills (analysis, synthesis, critique, evaluation) vs delivering content in large classes
5. Planning
6. TAs

# What works? **The usual suspects:**

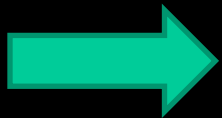
- **Clarity of expression**
- **Structuring / organising the session**
- **Creating a positive classroom environment**
- **Personalising the large class to prevent crowd dynamics forming**
- **An impression of expertise (even if you don't feel it!)**
- **Showing enthusiasm for your subject**
- **Use traditional lecturing approaches to:**
  - **introduce new topics,**
  - **deliver content (not otherwise readily available and or which must be delivered in a specific order),**
  - **provide supplementary explanations/examples/opinions or views**
- **Use active approaches to teach skills, arouse interest, & develop understanding**

# Active learning?

A large class does not automatically mean that you have to only lecture!

Action interspersed with lecture delivery of content

- engages students with the topic
- relieves cognitive load, fatigue, boredom
- breaks down crowd mentality while building a sense of collective belonging
- enables them to check their understanding relative to others in the class
- can be serendipitously fun




Improved attendance & retention

# Make it work

- Explicitly set the expectation for participation (and other acceptable/unacceptable student behaviours) on day 1
  - “You will not be passive learners in this course”
  - “Engage or fail !” “Turn your phones to silent now!”
- Model engagement to build safety; e.g., be respectful towards students; actively listen to their responses
- Model open communication and legitimate reasoned disagreement
- Encourage discussion between students, and with you, so they
  - Obtain multiple perspectives
  - Learn the skills of active listening by doing and modelling
  - Begin to differentiate between assumptions, assertions, beliefs, theory, and evidence based knowledge

# Example simple activity 1

## Think-pair-share

- Present a problem or ask a question
  - Students individually have a minute or 2 to think of an answer or solution
  - Ask them to pair with a person beside them (or behind/in front) to discuss their answer (3-5 minutes)
  - Use a buzzer/bell or shout a 1 minute warning
  - Asks several students to share their answer with the class (usually requires you to repeat so whole class can hear)
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# Example simple activity 2

## Buzz groups

- Similar format as think-pair-share but
- Use groups of 4-6 (2x2; 3x3)(2-3 in front talk to 2-3 behind)
- Allow slightly more time but no more than 5 minutes (the pressure creates the buzz)
- Use a buzzer/bell or shout for a 1 minute warning
- Ask a group to share their answer with the lecture (again rephrase their answer so whole lecture can hear)
- Then invite disagreement / agreement from the other groups

# Example simple activity 3

## 3-step interview

- Groups of no more than 3 (seated in a row works)
- Ask them to nominate 1 as the interviewer, 1 as the interviewee and 1 as the recorder
- E.g. Q – *What is the one thing you learned from last weeks class that you thought was most interesting? Why?*
- E.g. Q - *What is the one question from last week that you have that still needs answering?*
- Every 2 minutes ask them to rotate.
- Randomly select groups (or those that seemed most engaged) for their feedback
- **NOTE:** These kinds of activities can be done in **any** room configuration. And keep them short!!



# Slightly more complex activity...

## Say-something

1. Hand out a reading to students in class
2. Ask them individually read either the whole document or a section of it (give them x time to do this)
3. When the time is up, simply say “Now turn to the person beside you and **Say Something** about what you have just read”
4. Repeat steps 2 & 3 until the entire reading is done.

(Prime them that the things they should say can be a summary, a key point, a criticism, an idea arising, or a question arising from the reading)

# More complex activities ...

Can still be done BUT take more planning (& hence have more risk).

## Example:

- Present a story/case/problem to the class that involves multiple perspectives (people/values/ethical stance etc) (more complex cases/problems should be given out prior to class)
- Ask different groups of students to take a particular perspective and ask them to answer a multi-choice quizz question about the case /problem from that perspective
- Take student responses (clickers are best for this)
- Use the differences in responses between the groups to illustrate the learning point you were trying to make.

NOTE: Students really do like this kind of thing. The art is in writing a question that has multiple correct answers depending on the perspective taken.

# But note:

Students still expect to be lectured and engage in a typical range of behaviours in that environment. They feel cheated if you don't give them content.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Total
Take notes by hand or on a laptop	2 (1%)	1 (0%)	4 (2%)	10 (4%)	233 (94%)	250
Listen to the lecture	1 (0%)	2 (1%)	7 (3%)	51 (21%)	186 (76%)	247
Record the lecture	146 (64%)	23 (10%)	30 (13%)	12 (5%)	19 (8%)	230
Read and/or annotate the handout	21 (9%)	17 (7%)	51 (22%)	77 (33%)	72 (31%)	238
Ask questions	124 (54%)	76 (33%)	26 (11%)	2 (1%)	1 (0%)	229
Surf the internet	92 (39%)	67 (29%)	46 (20%)	25 (11%)	4 (2%)	234
Think about other things	19 (8%)	51 (22%)	120 (51%)	49 (21%)	7 (3%)	246

Figure 3. What do you do during lectures? (student survey)

# Personalising the large class?

The primary differences between small & large classes are:

1. You cannot remember all their names
2. The feeling of individualisation is lost
3. Behaviour norms shift from small-group to crowd dynamics

## CROWDS...

- Allow students to feel depersonalised (*deindividuation*) as they merge into a larger entity
- Create a sense of invisibility and hence reduced responsibility for their actions (or inaction) (*diffusion of responsibility & social loafing*)
- Create an opportunity for a minority to capture the majority (in terms of collective behaviour that would not be tolerated from individuals acting alone) (*contagion theory*)
- Allow behaviour to escalate in emotionality (by suppressing usual constraints on the expression of existing frustrations, anger, excitement, dislikes)

# The thing is...

Students want to 'know who you are' as their instructor  
They also want to feel part of the class (as a collective)  
And interact in a positive way with their peers

**Failing to manage these needs creates the opportunity for crowd behavioural norms to become established.**

What to do?

- Make time to talk to your students informally and formally out of class
- Show empathy with their situation
- Share your enthusiasm for what you do
- Walk and talk (reduces sense of space & interpersonal distance)
- Make eye contact
- Use interactive in-lecture activities so students get to know each other
- Arrive early and stay late in the lecture; chat with students
- Drop in to tutorials/labs/practicum classes
- Learn the names of individuals and use them during class
- When you ask students to answer a question, also ask their name

**NB: Be friendly BUT you are not there to be their "friend".**

# Planning the large class

Nuts and bolts stuff. Nothing too exciting and not much different from any other class (just quantity)!!

- **Procedures** – for handing in assignments, receiving feedback (I suggest via the tuts/practicums/labs)
- **Policies** – is late submission allowed? Penalties beyond the AUT/Faculty 10%? Bad behaviour. Plagiarism & cheating. Groupwork.
- **Scheduling** – assignment due dates, inclass tests (check with other core papers and those in your major – communicate with your peers!!)
- **Contingencies** – for when it all goes bad. Technology fails, holidays appear mid-week, TAs don't turn up, guest lecturers won't do all the streams, the crowd becomes restive & revolts, individuals are disruptive.

# & TAs

1. Pay them to come to lectures! & then use them in lecture activities.
2. Make your expectations clear at the first meeting – get off to a good start
3. Run a once a week paid briefing/debriefing session: what is coming up this week, what went wrong last week
4. Give them clear marking rubrics
5. Pay them for real hours re marking, not rip-off estimates (but some are just slow. They need to learn how to mark fairly but efficiently!)
6. Don't bury them in moderation. A good rubric, clear discussion of expectations and meaning of the grade points (A, B, Excellent etc), and monitoring TA variance in their distributions should suffice.
7. Sit in on at least one TA session each week (& give feedback)
8. Respond quickly to any student complaints. **DO NOT IGNORE!**
9. Be real – if they didn't cut it, don't rehire them. It's a job, not a charity.

# Resources

<http://www.teaching.utoronto.ca/topics.htm>

<http://ic.ucsc.edu/CTE/teaching/tips/tips-resources.html>

[http://pandora.cii.wvu.edu/cii/resources/teaching\\_tips/large\\_classes.asp](http://pandora.cii.wvu.edu/cii/resources/teaching_tips/large_classes.asp)

[http://cte.uwaterloo.ca/teaching\\_resources/tips/activities\\_for\\_large\\_classes.htm](http://cte.uwaterloo.ca/teaching_resources/tips/activities_for_large_classes.htm)

<http://www.schreyerinstitution.psu.edu/Tools/Large/>

[http://www.cad.auckland.ac.nz/index.php?p=tchg\\_lge\\_classes](http://www.cad.auckland.ac.nz/index.php?p=tchg_lge_classes)

<http://teaching.uncc.edu/articles-books/best-practice-articles/large-classes/handbook-large-classes>

<http://www.cte.umd.edu/library/teachingLargeClass/guide/index.html>



# Yet more resources

<http://serc.carleton.edu/NAGTWorkshops/earlycareer/teaching/LargeClasses.html>

<http://ctfd.sfsu.edu/feature/top-ten-tips-for-teaching-large-classes-and-lectures.htm>

[http://www.celt.iastate.edu/teaching/instructors\\_share.html](http://www.celt.iastate.edu/teaching/instructors_share.html)

<http://www.crlt.umich.edu/tstrategies/tsllc>

<http://www.google.co.nz/search?q=large+class+teaching+tips&start=10&hl=en&sa=N&rls=com.microsoft:en-nz:IE-SearchBox&prmd=imvns&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&ei=saWQULfAG6mRigf6loCACg&ved=0CEQQsAQ4Cg&biw=1680&bih=909>

# Other Points for Discussion?



