

Dealing with Large Classes

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Classes of 50, 100 or more present logistical challenges to effective teaching and learning. This session will provide advice and examples that help can help make large classes an effective educational environment.

- Establishing a collegial atmosphere and using “icebreakers”
- Managing communications and student support (office hours, study sessions, and so forth)
- Being realistic about expectations relative to class-size and logistics
- Engaging the students during class time
- Establishing and managing an attendance policy
- Dealing with student problems
- Other issues

Suggestions from a variety of sources

- Icebreakers – think-pair-share format with wide range of possible questions, variations of paired introductions
- Have students complete a student information sheet to get background information that you can then use to “personalize” the class.
- Learn names of some your students (all if possible) and address them by name.
- Have students state their name before they talk in class.
- Talk with students before and/or after class
- Use learning management systems effectively (WebCT, Blackboard)
- Be clear about your availability (and resist the temptation of an “open door” policy)
- Write comments on exams (e.g., Great - for a grade of A, Very good - for a grade of B, to Please come and talk with me about the exam - for a grade of F, and Good Improvement when appropriate).
- Have a seating chart so you can call on or recognize students by name.
- Offer study sessions (group study/review sessions) as one or two of your office hours.
- Give review sheets and offer review sessions before exams
- Rather than ask “Do you have any questions?” you might ask “What questions do you have about this topic”, “If you had to challenge this, how would you do it?” or “I bet I haven't explained this clearly--where have I left it vague...”
- Require students to bring a 3x5 notecard to class everyday to respond to a question (these can be counted toward participation “points”)
- Informal writing assignments such as a free-writing assignments at beginning of class to focus attention or the “one-minute” paper - What was the most important point(s) of today’s class, the muddiest point, or what question(s) remain unanswered?
- Break up your class sessions into segments to vary the pace.
- Use hands-on techniques during the class, such as demonstrations and activities that require audience participation.
- Use a question box for receiving written questions after class. You can use these to as a lead for the next session
- Consider graduate or undergraduate assistants to help you grade, help in class, and/or help develop activities/assignments.
- Other suggestions?