Managing and Connecting with Students in Large Classes

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Think through your own experiences of being a student in a large lecture class...

Our goal as instructors
Convey information effectively in a way that still engages students

But how?
• Organization of material
• Create a connection with students

Organization
All about managing expectations
Minor inconveniences in small classes become big annoyances in large classes

Examples?

Organization
Being organized gives you the space to get to know your students in other ways

Areas of focus for getting organized:
• Syllabus
• Communication policy
• Attendance/participation
• Blackboard
• Layout/organization
• Communicating with Blackboard
• Automating quizzes/assignments
• Managing grades
• Assignment guidelines
• Exams and quizzes (deadlines and formats)

Syllabus

IT’S IN THE SYLLABUS
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Syllabus

Key ingredients:
• Instructor contact info and office hours
• Learning objectives
• Course outline
• Grading policy
• Communication policy
• Attendance/participation policy

Example syllabi

Blackboard

Things to consider:
• Layout/organization
• Communicating with Blackboard
• Automating quizzes/assignments
• Managing grades

Example blackboard courses

Blackboard

Layout/organization

Relabel content areas so it is obvious what is contained in each section

Blackboard

Announcements serve as a semester-long record of communication

Blackboard

Time saving devices:

Automating online quizzes and assignments

Setting up your gradebook
Course Organization

Clear assignment guidelines
• Minimizes questions before and conflicts after
• Helps students to perform at higher level
• Creates a pattern of regularity so students can improve

Examples of unclear vs. clearer assignment guidelines

Course Organization

Designing and administering exams/quizzes
• Purpose of exams/quizzes
• Frequency
• Format in small versus large classes
• Helping students to prepare
• Dealing with absences, family crises, etc.

Lecturing to a large class

Setting the tone– humanize yourself
• Tell students a little about who you are to help set the stage

Example from first day of class

Dr. Courtney Gallaher

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204 Davis Hall
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Office Hours: Tues 2-3pm, Wed 9:30-10:30am or by appointment

Lecturing to a large class

Lecturing versus storytelling– which should you be doing?

Use stories to illustrate key points
Personal stories help your students connect to you and the material better
Humor- even bad jokes– can be appreciated
Lecturing to a large class

Effective use of presentation

The Carbon Cycle

- The carbon cycle is the way carbon is stored and replaced on earth. Some of these processes take hundreds of millions of years, others happen annually.
- The main way that carbon gets into the carbon cycle are explosions and the burning of fossil fuels like coal and oil. The main reason for these processes is to make money! If we add a ton of CO2 to the atmosphere, about a ton of CO2 is taken out over a period of time.
- The main way carbon gets taken out of the atmosphere is by photosynthesis by living organisms. Some of this is done by plants for food and oxygen. But it is also by burning carbon in coal and oil. This is shown in the diagram by the green arrows. Some of the carbon from plants also becomes part of the soil, either by decomposition.
- Another process takes CO2 out of the air. Weathering by rain washes away CO2 in the form of dilute carbonic acid. This washes in with rain, and then it flows into streams. It also ends up in the oceans.
- "Dilution" is a large consumer of the atmospheric carbon dioxide, essentially for diluting carbon in the oceans. As the oceans absorb more CO2, the oceans become more acidic. This is shown in the diagram by the blue arrow. Eventually it returns to the air in carbonic acid cycles (carbonic acid is more acidic than CO2). This is shown in the diagram by the green arrows.
- The store of carbon in sedimentary rock is far greater than the CO2 in the atmosphere (this is not shown in the diagram). Eventually it returns to the air as carbonates in (limestone, limestone)

Advantages:

- Making notes and study guides available

Disadvantages:

- Lecturing to a large class

Examples on Blackboard

Interacting with students in a large lecture class

I.e. Strategies to make a big class feel smaller

- What techniques do you already use?
- Effective use of discussion sections
- Examples of small class activities that mimic the small class experience
  - Think pair share
  - 1-minute powerpoint
  - Diagramming
  - Small group activities
  - Other favorites from the group?
“Flipping” the classroom
Course Transformation Project (CTP) at NIU
What does a “flipped” course look like?
• Move lecture material online
• In-class time spent reinforcing key ideas and doing small group activities
• Active learning versus passive listening

Lessons from my CTP Geography 101 course:
Pros:
• Students were more ‘awake’ and engaged with the material
• Got to know individual students in a large class well
• Better grasp of key ideas

Cons:
• Logistically very complicated to coordinate
• Lots of grading due to small group activities
• Conflicts amongst group members
• Online content a challenge