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
Geography/ Women's Studies
204 Davis Hall
(815) 753-6836
cgallaher@niu.edu

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
The Carbon Cycle

- The carbon cycle is the way carbon is stored and replaced on Earth. Some of the main events take hundreds of millions of years, others happen annually.
- The main way the carbon cycle is used is by organisms. The burning of fossil fuels like coal and oil, the use of natural gas, and the production of cement and other products. By burning fossil fuels, the carbon is added to the atmosphere. By the time the CO₂ relaxes back into the atmosphere, it has been in the atmosphere for a hundred times. That is, for every ton of CO₂ added to the air by volcanoes, about 100 tons of CO₂ have been added to the air by people.
- The main way carbon gets taken out of the atmosphere is by photosynthesis by being organisms. Some of this can happen naturally and in ways not related to the biological cycle. This is through a cycle that is called the carbon cycle. Carbon is stored in the carbon cycle in the form of carbon dioxide, CO₂ gets released into the air.
- Some of the carbon in plants also becomes part of the soil, when it can stay for a long time before decomposing.
- Another process takes CO₂ out of the air. Weathering by wind and rain washes CO₂ in the form of dilute carbonic acid. This washes with rock, helping to dissolve and destroy the rock and end up as carbonate.
- Breathing is a large consumer of the atmospheric carbon dioxide essential for breathing costs. Some CO₂ also dissolves in the oceans. Right now, the oceans are taking in more CO₂ than they are releasing every year. However, this is making the oceans more acidic.
- 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 carbon dioxide cycle between oceans. At the margins of plate boundaries (and some other places) volcanoes form and spew out CO₂. This completes the cycle.

Lecturing to a large class

Effective use of powerpoint

Lecturing to a large class

Making notes and study guides available

Advantages:

- Examples on Blackboard

Disadvantages:

- What techniques do you already use?
- Effective use of discuss 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

“Flipping” the classroom

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