**Large Class Teaching Tips**

Because the composition, goals, and material covered in each class are quite diverse, it is impossible to develop a single comprehensive list of teaching strategies that will best help students in all large classes. However, at the core of all successful teaching is student engagement. Research consistently shows that engaged students put greater effort into learning the class material, attend class more frequently, and learn more of the course material.

Given the value of student engagement, the following is a list of some strategies that faculty can use in their classes:

**Lecture for no more than 15-20 minutes at a time**

Research shows that student focus and ability to retain presentation information drops precipitously after about 15-20 minutes of uninterrupted lecturing. However, if students are provided with an opportunity to process, organize, and digest the material (as little as one minute), not only are they able to better learn the material, but they are better able to reengage and learn additional material.

**Vary the use of non-lecturing teaching activities**

Faculty members have a wide array of non-lecturing activities to help students learn course material, such as asking students to pair off during class and to engage in a quick activity with one another to assess understanding or having them share their notes with one another to help them to fill any missed material covered.

In order to avoid student complacency and to use techniques that best meet the needs of the learning situation, faculty should avoid using the same types of non-lecturing activities repetitively. By mixing strategies, faculty members are able to use the best non-lecturing activity at that moment and student interest is maintained through changes in what they are asked to do in class.

**Teach to multiple learning styles**

Research shows that as class size grows, faculty members become more homogeneous in their use of teaching strategies. Specifically, as class size grows, faculty members tend to rely almost entirely on lecturing to teach their material. While lecturing has its place in the classroom, complete reliance on this pedagogical approach has its drawbacks. Faculty members should find ways in their large classes to reach students regardless of whether they are auditory, visual, kinesthetic, or read/write learners.

**Carefully plan the use of in-class group activities**

Well-intentioned faculty members seeking to engage students in the learning process sometimes turn to the use of in-class group activities. While these activities can be valuable in the learning process, if poorly executed they can negatively affect student learning. Faculty members using in-class group activities should consider the purpose for using such activities and only do so when appropriate. More importantly, faculty members should (1) provide clear instructions on the purpose of the activity, (2) allocate a reasonable time to complete the task but not so much time that idle time is created, (3) monitor the activities by checking on the progress of each group to answer questions and to provide feedback, and (4) adequately debrief students so they see how it helps to better understand the material being covered.

In addition to considering ways to enhance student engagement, other strategies that have been found to be generally effective in large classes include the following:

**Identify “Threshold Concepts” for each class**

Most faculty members agree that for each class there are certain important concepts that are key to the mastery of the material being covered. Faculty members should determine the threshold concepts and design the course to focus on these concepts. Not only should students be made aware of the threshold concepts, but faculty members should design the course so that these concepts are prominently featured.

**Use teaching aids such as Power Point appropriately**

The emergence of Power Point and other similar teaching presentation software has assisted faculty members in organizing their course material in a systematic manner. Unfortunately, the use of Power Point and other similar teaching presentation software is typically done poorly. Faculty members should follow simple rules such as using optimal contrast colors, selecting non-ornate font, making it a rule to use sufficiently large font, avoiding overcrowding content on individual slides, and resisting the temptation to simply read what is projected onto the screen.

**Test at multiple levels of understanding**

Research shows that faculty members in large class tend to test at the recall level. Testing at the recall level signals to students that they are simply learning how to memorize material. Faculty members should find ways to test students with questions that require the use of higher order thinking such as those questions that ask student to apply and synthesize information. Using higher ordered questions in testing expands the types of knowledge that faculty members are testing which allows them to better assess student mastery of the material covered.