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Large Lecture Best Practices List (plus sample activity)

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Best Practices for Large Lecture Classes

Logistics

Formulate clear policies about grading, communication, missed assignments, and other issues, prior to the start of the semester, and stick to them.

Get comfortable with the classroom and its technology before the semester starts.

Give yourself a break before the big class to get your head together.

Use a microphone. Your voice sounds much more natural with it than shouting really loudly.

Bring a spare battery for the microphone to each class.

Record yourself giving a lecture in the space and listen to it for annoying speech mannerisms.

Lecturers generally keep both hands in front of them, forearms held horizontally.

The Teacher as Actor – Think about your character, your costume, your lines, your stagecraft, your voice, your hands, your body (Heppner). You can be more dramatic, flamboyant, and eccentric than you might in a small-class situation. This is theater.

And your audience – Recognize that your first-year students may have different expectations than yours. They are coming into an auditorium, which in their past experience involved something fun, interesting, stimulating and no work, like a pep rally. Explain that you recognize this but that this is a place of business.

Have students clump together, not spread out across the auditorium if there are a lot of extra seats.

Now you have a crowd and they will be able to share the magic of being part of an exciting communal venture (Heppner).

Use large fonts on your slides. At least 24 points, sans-serif.

When speaking with students, ask for their name and use it in the interaction.

On the first day of class, ask students to fill out a notecard or online survey stating their names, reasons for taking the course, and their expectations for it, and review them and keep them on file for whenever you have a meeting with them.

Provide an online discussion space for students to ask questions related to the course.

Make use of our brilliant ITS department to find out about the various technologies available to enhance learning in the large lecture class (Clickers, Poll Everywhere, Kahoot, Zoom, Slack, etc.).

Things to Say

I will do my best to be interesting if you do your best to be interested.

The idea that we are co-conspirators, resisting the constraints of the large lecture by trying some interactive stuff.

I will not be taking attendance. If you don't want to be here, don't come. However, know that attendance is the best predictor for student success in large lecture courses.

Higher education is the only service that consumers purchase in which they want to get the least return on their investment.

Active Learning Strategies

Break things up into 8-15 minute segments. Others say 20-25 minutes. Change things up with a variety of activities. Straight lecture equals death. Try a “commercial break”—1-2 minutes of something educationally useful.

Walk up and down the aisles if you can; don’t just stand at the front. This keeps students from feeling that large lecture anonymity. They’re more likely to pay attention if they think you can see them and are more likely to respond to questions if you are in close physical proximity to them (Buckles, et al).

Answering questions in a large lecture class can be intimidating. Better not to ask questions with a right or wrong answer, but rather opinions or experiences. Let students discuss their answers with classmates (Buckles et al).

Have them stand up periodically to recalibrate and energize.

Use an *engagement trigger*, something that captures student attention and initiates an effective interactive lecture segment. Physical props, cartoons, photographs, clips from the news, movies, tv, etc. Use cooperative learning – think-pair-share.

Try demonstrations and experiments, maybe with a small group in front of the class.

Pedagogy Ideas

Try to think about the affordances that a large group of people offer you as a teacher rather than seeing it as detriment. **(See below for example activity.)**

Try a “call and response” method while teaching poetry.

Class debate over a controversy.

Mock juries – in small groups students come up with a unanimous decision in a trial (maybe of a character). The foreperson must report the verdict (Heppner).

One-question game show quiz at the beginning of class about last lecture’s content (with prizes!).

Have groups of students perform something for the class.

Use note cards and exit tickets within the lecture. Make informal writing the heart of the class, writing to learn.

Students write one-minute papers worth five points each at the end of six lectures, each assignment asks them to state the main, most clear, or muddiest point in the lecture (Adrian).

Have students post six assigned responses on Blackboard during the semester in which they are asked to draw a conceptual link between materials from two previous lectures (Adrian).

“The Last Lecture” – Make the final lecture something special—impart some wisdom to the class. Make it personal. Perhaps about how and why you love your discipline and the topic of the course, how you got your start in it, how you struggled at first, etc. A kind of benediction, a wish that they go out and build on what they have learned and have a life full of curiosity and learning (Heppner).

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Sample Large Lecture Class Activity

Here is a sample activity attempting to use the unique affordances of the Large Lecture to engage students and help them appreciate the literature we are studying in the GE C2 category.

This activity would work, for example, in English 1120 Speculative Fiction: Horror.

There aren't many horror *poems* out there, but if there is a master of this sub-genre, it has to be Edgar Allan Poe. Students will read "The Raven" and "The Bells" to prepare for class.

The professor will remind students about the importance of the element of the *sound* of words in poetry. No other genre uses the rhythm and music of words so powerfully and intentionally as poetry does. Horror films often use background music to intensify fear and anxiety. How does Edgar Allan Poe use the soundscape of his poems to add to their frightening effects/affects? This activity will help students think through that question in relation to "The Bells" in particular.

1. The professor asks students to decide on their voice type—soprano, alto, tenor, or bass.
2. Once they decide, each voice type should move to the same area in the classroom.
3. Each group is assigned a different stanza of the poem to get ready to perform. Soprano stanza 1 (silver bells), alto stanza 2 (golden bells), tenor stanza 3 (brazen bells), and bass stanza 4 (iron bells).
4. Each group should decide on a director for their part and then collaborate on the performance, deciding on tempo and other voice effects, making sure that everyone can pronounce all the words, etc.
5. Groups perform their parts.
6. After the performance, professor leads a discussion (and/or students can write) about how sound works to create effects and meanings in Poe's poem and their performance of it.

The Bells by Edgar Allan Poe

I (soprano)

Hear the sledges with the bells
Silver bells!
What a world of merriment their melody foretells!
How they tinkle, tinkle, tinkle,
In the icy air of night!
While the stars that oversprinkle
All the heavens, seem to twinkle
With a crystalline delight;
Keeping time, time, time,
In a sort of Runic rhyme,
To the tintinnabulation that so musically wells
From the bells, bells, bells, bells,
Bells, bells, bells
From the jingling and the tinkling of the bells.

II (alto)

Hear the mellow wedding bells,
Golden bells!
What a world of happiness their harmony foretells!
Through the balmy air of night
How they ring out their delight!
From the molten-golden notes,
And an in tune,
What a liquid ditty floats
To the turtle-dove that listens, while she gloats
On the moon!
Oh, from out the sounding cells,
What a gush of euphony voluminously wells!
How it swells!
How it dwells
On the Future! how it tells
Of the rapture that impels
To the swinging and the ringing
Of the bells, bells, bells,
Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,
Bells, bells, bells
To the rhyming and the chiming of the bells!

III (tenor)

Hear the loud alarum bells
 Brazen bells!
 What a tale of terror, now, their turbulency tells!
 In the startled ear of night
 How they scream out their affright!
 Too much horrified to speak,
 They can only shriek, shriek,
 Out of tune,
 In a clamorous appealing to the mercy of the fire,
 In a mad expostulation with the deaf and frantic fire,
 Leaping higher, higher, higher,
 With a desperate desire,
 And a resolute endeavor,
 Now - now to sit or never,
 By the side of the pale-faced moon.
 Oh, the bells, bells, bells!
 What a tale their terror tells
 Of Despair!
 How they clang, and clash, and roar!
 What a horror they outpour
 On the bosom of the palpitating air!
 Yet the ear it fully knows,
 By the twanging,
 And the clanging,
 How the danger ebbs and flows:
 Yet the ear distinctly tells,
 In the jangling,
 And the wrangling,
 How the danger sinks and swells,
 By the sinking or the swelling in the anger of the bells
 Of the bells
 Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,
 Bells, bells, bells
 In the clamor and the clangor of the bells!

IV (bass)

Hear the tolling of the bells
 Iron Bells!
 What a world of solemn thought their monody compels!
 In the silence of the night,
 How we shiver with affright
 At the melancholy menace of their tone!
 For every sound that floats
 From the rust within their throats
 Is a groan.

And the people - ah, the people
They that dwell up in the steeple,
All Alone
And who, tolling, tolling, tolling,
In that muffled monotone,
Feel a glory in so rolling
On the human heart a stone
They are neither man nor woman
They are neither brute nor human
They are Ghouls:
And their king it is who tolls;
And he rolls, rolls, rolls,
Rolls
A paeon from the bells!
And his merry bosom swells
With the paeon of the bells!
And he dances, and he yells;
Keeping time, time, time,
In a sort of Runic rhyme,
To the paeon of the bells
Of the bells:
Keeping time, time, time,
In a sort of Runic rhyme,
To the throbbing of the bells
Of the bells, bells, bells
To the sobbing of the bells;
Keeping time, time, time,
As he knells, knells, knells,
In a happy Runic rhyme,
To the rolling of the bells
Of the bells, bells, bells:
To the tolling of the bells,
Of the bells, bells, bells, bells
Bells, bells, bells
To the moaning and the groaning of the bells.