Teaching Large Classes I – Classroom Management
By Rick Finnan and Donna Shaw

Workshop Outline

I. Objectives
This workshop is intended to help make large lecture classes more effective by introducing activities and strategies that enhance learning through effective classroom management. Participants are introduced to current theory and best practices. They are also given the opportunity to apply some strategies to specific classroom situations.

The objectives of this workshop are to
1. Investigate some of the challenges of managing large classes
2. Identify current best practices in managing large classes
3. Explore current theory concerning managing large classes
4. Offer strategies for improving student learning through effective classroom management
5. Give participants the opportunity to explore their management style, review the necessity of advanced organization and planning, and develop solutions to common classroom scenarios.

II. Introductions and Theoretical Background (20 minutes)
The workshop begins with introductions of the participants and facilitators. (5 minutes)

A KWL activity follows, asking participants to answer these questions: What do you know about large class management? What do you want to know about large class management? (10 minutes)

The KWL activity is followed by an explanation of large classroom management style/philosophy. (5 minutes)

III. Activities (90 minutes)
Think/Pair/Share Activity: What is your management style/philosophy? (20 minutes)

Keys to Large Classroom Management: Introduction to the concept that advanced organization and detail planning is the key to classroom management (10 minutes)

Brainstorm Activity: Brainstorm about the aspects of classroom management: (30 minutes)
- What advance planning needs to be done for a course?
- What do students need to know about a course and about the behavioral expectations?
- What routines need to be set up for a course?

Scenario Activity: Participants form groups of 3, are presented with classroom management scenarios, and develop solutions (30 minutes).

IV. Wrap-up and Evaluation (10 minutes)
The initial KWL activity is completed by answering this question: What have you learned about large classroom management?
Three Philosophies of How to Manage a Large Class

Treat the classroom as a “sacred temple of learning.” This management style or philosophy is marked by a strong notion of control and preparation. In this model of management, teachers are very prepared and plan for as many aspects of the class as they can. Teachers do not tolerate latecomers, side talking, reading, or early departures. They establish at the beginning of the term that the classroom is a place to be respected and students must behave in ways that are appropriate. The consequences for inappropriate behavior are public notice of the inappropriate behavior and embarrassment. In this management style, the teacher is not afraid to act as the policeman.

Treat the classroom as a relaxed, “laissez-faire” place of learning. This management style or philosophy is very relaxed and “hands off.” Teachers who use this style of management are very flexible and respond to changes easily. They do minimal planning, and while they can be quite prepared to deliver course content and material, they dislike rigid control and value the ability of respond to changes. The focus in this type of classroom is a comfortable, relaxed atmosphere where the teacher tolerates reading, talking, and late arrivals/early departures. Usually, the more attentive students sit in the front half of the classroom, and the teacher speaks to them.

Treat the classroom as something in between a sacred temple and a laissez-faire place of learning. This management style or philosophy is right in the middle of the two extremes. Here, teachers choose which aspects of the course they wish to control, how they decide to control those aspects, and what they are willing to let go. With this type of classroom management, the teacher decides which behaviors are tolerated and which are not. There is an expectation of respectful behavior, and the teacher will speak to students who are disruptive after class (rather than calling attention to the disruptive students during class). Also, some instances of late arrival and early departure are acceptable, with permission in writing from the teacher.

Keys to Classroom Management

From the passages below, it is clear that the keys to classroom management are advanced organization, detailed planning, establishing routines and consistently enforcing the rules. Effective classroom management is essential before we can begin to think about real teaching.

“There is no unique solution to the problem of managing a large class, since individual instructors vary and different institutions uphold different requirements and maintain a variety of expectations. It is our opinion, however, that managing a large group of students requires advanced organization and detailed planning. Students in a well set up course are better able to focus on their learning rather than dealing with logistical issues… One big challenge in teaching a large class is to make students aware that, regardless of its size, a large class is still a class with the instructor in charge. Any sign of the instructor’s insecurity will be met with students’ negative reactions resulting in loss of control and the ability to teach the class effectively. It is helpful for the students to spend a few minutes of the very first lecture articulating policies for the course, which include rules of conduct (regarding cell phones, talking in class, tardiness, etc) and address unacceptable behaviour. Occasionally, the instructor has to be tough and reinforce the rules.”

Good organization helps to promote good control, as it helps students to know what is expected of them and to get on task quickly and efficiently. Also, setting up routines early in the term helps the class to operate more smoothly.

“Laying down the rules early in the semester, both verbally and in writing in the syllabus, is paramount to creating the classroom atmosphere desired. Also, enforcing these rules strictly during the first few weeks of class will prevent erosion of classroom etiquette…It is important from the outset to let students know what it is you expect from them and then hold them to those expectations.”
Scenarios

#1
You are lecturing in a very large class. The course began well, with most students polite and attentive. However, about halfway through the term, you began to notice that your students were preparing to leave the lecture hall about 5 to 10 minutes before you finished your lecture. You find this annoying and wish that your students would wait until you are finished before they begin collecting their papers and prepare to leave. What do you do?

#2
You have been assigned to teach a new course and have been told that it is very important to take down the names of all students who attend each class. Last term, you circulated a paper and asked all students to write down their names. However, you found that you had more names written down than students attending the day’s class. The term before, you called out the name of the students enrolled in the course and noted who was present and who was absent. This method did not make you very happy because it took a long time at the beginning of the course and you could not note late arriving students. What are some different ways that you can keep attendance this term?

#3
It is two weeks before a new term is to begin. Last term, you noticed that fewer and fewer students were attending class. Your attendance numbers dropped as the term continued. What can you do this term to avoid this problem?

#4
One student in your class consistently receives mobile phone calls during your lectures. The student loudly answers the phone and leaves your class to complete the call. You tried speaking to this student after class about this and asked the student to turn off the phone. Today, it happened again. What can you do to stop this problem?

#5
You have three students who sit in the very back of your class and whisper to one another during your lectures. When you look at them, they stop talking and pay attention to what you are saying. Soon, however, they are whispering again. Other students around them are disturbed by the noise they are making and look at them. This does not stop the whispering. You are concerned about this because the three students are apparently bothering the others sitting near them. How can you stop the whispering?

#6
About midway through the term, you realize that students are missing due dates on important assignments and ask questions about when something is due. What could you have done at the beginning of the term to avoid this problem?

#7
It taking a lot of class time to collect and distribute papers. You find that you have less and less time for lectures. How can you avoid this problem?

#8
Now you come up with some scenarios based on experiences in your classes.