Faculty Forum - How to Relate to a Large Class
February 25, 2003

Presenters: Christopher Tucci, Caroline Bartel, Ken Froewiss
Facilitator: Stephanie Nickerson

Attendees**:** Larry White, Jeffery Simonoff, Al Lieberman, Sam Craig, Marianne Sciolino, Catherine Kaputa, Xavier Martin, Marshall Langer, Pat Cooley, Kim Corfman, Larry Longua, Paul Zarowin, April Klein, Eli Bartov, Susan Douglas, Eileen Fischer, Jack Jacoby, Elizabeth Morrison, David Backus, George Smith, Robert Kavesh.

CITL took notes during the workshop. We have done our best to quote each of you correctly.

Christopher Tucci – Berkley Center

Two issues are important to me with larger classes, primarily because I do almost no lecturing. We do a case every single class. So connecting with the class is key, and being very organized is important.

Connecting with a Larger Class
I try to memorize every student's name. It's hard in a large class, but I do it by using a seating chart and requiring students to sit in the same place each class, using name cards, and taking attendance. Also I use MetaMemo, a software program developed by the Berkley Center, which allows me to incorporate student photos with their individual response to the issue that we are dealing with in class. The students are required to submit a memo before class on the day's topic so I can scan down the list of responses with the students' names and photos.

Be Organized
I put an agenda on the board each class. And I follow it and push students to follow it. I make it clear that it is very important to keep to the class agenda. Getting off track can waste time and cause some students to lose interest. Most students do not like tangents. So I go back to the agenda throughout the class as a way to keep us on target.

<u>Caroline Bartel – Management</u>

How to Have a Relationship with a Large Class (handout)
CITL's notes from the workshop have been added in green.

Key Ingredients:

Learning is not a spectator sport: Make students accountable in the classroom
Learning requires experimentation & risk taking: Create a psychologically safe classroom

Possible Strategies for Promoting Positive Engagement:

You need to know your own personal style and make the first move: Convey interest and enthusiasm.

- Communicate that you want to be there
- Tell students about yourself—your passions as a researcher, the roles you serve at Stern
- Importance of initial framing —why the content is important in general & to them personally
- Highlight connections between course content and current events
- Back up words with actions—use voice & gestures strategically, get away from the podium. I take a kind of Phil Donahue approach; I work the entire classroom.

Make it difficult for students to hide or withdraw: Reduce anonymity.

- Learn student names and at least one unique piece of information about them. If Stern doesn't provide photos, ask your students for a *current* picture. Try to learn names ASAP. When possible, direct questions to students with personal knowledge/experience in a particular area --- show students that you know more about them than just their name and ID number. (See handout p. 1 for sample background information sheet.)
- Have students get to know one another through small group discussions

Define expectations and create norms for participation: Set the tone in your class the first day of class.

- Define your role in the class
- Define what high quality participation means in your classroom. Provide positive reinforcement when you see it.
    - *Content and process contributions, quality versus quantity*
- Define what low quality participation means in your classroom. Provide negative reinforcement when you see it.
    - *Digressions, monopolizing the discussion, being uncivil*
- Cold call early on to set expectations
- Contact students who do not participate. I write individual emails coaching them. Arrange for participation in advance.
- Manage "right" and "wrong" answers. This is an issue I grapple with. Students want to know when an answer is right or wrong, yet they don't want to be the one who is wrong. I don't want to squelch future participation by telling someone they are wrong. So you have to find a good way to be clear, but non-punitive.
- Balance control and flexibility in managing class discussions. Knowing when to break from your agenda or class plan is critical.

Calibrate the class periodically.

- For example, ask students if the pace of the class is working well.

Personalize the learning process by actively involving students.

- Invite students to present personal “mini-cases” that address past/present work situations
- Have small groups present to the class their analysis of a “breaking news” event

Don’t waste students’ time.

- Start and end on time; get there early to set up the room.
- Be organized: put an agenda on the board and get through it
- Give adequate airtime to assigned readings and cases
- Return assignments promptly; provide timely and high quality feedback
- Don’t let students waste each other’s time

Ken Froewiss – Finance

Since I am the last speaker, I will try not to repeat what Chris and Caroline have already said, unless I can take it from a slightly different perspective. Let me start with a few overall observations:

1. First, as I hope is obvious, there is no one template that works for everyone. All that we are trying to do is to suggest some things that have been useful for each of us.

2. Second, while the title of this session speaks of "large classes," I think that 90% of what all of us have been talking about is a set of techniques that make for good teaching in general, that is, things that apply to both large and small classes. The difference is that there is less margin for error in the large classes.

3. And third, there is the question of what constitutes a "large" class. In thinking about my remarks, I have had in mind classes in the 120-160 range, but I believe that everything that I have to say would apply to the standard "block size" as well.

    - You need to "assume command", but lightly. You want to project a sense of being in control, but you also want them to feel a sense of comfort.

    - Being organized clearly helps in projecting control. I do this by distributing a fairly detailed printed outline at the start of each class, and by listing the goals for that session on the board at the start of class.

    - I also try to arrive early, especially at the start of the semester. Having a chance to speak with individual students informally as they come in helps to establish a rapport with the group as a whole. It is also useful simply to observe them as they come in, to see what the intragroup dynamics are like. And arriving early has the further virtue of letting me check on the operational details (microphone, magic markers, etc.), which in turn conveys to the students that I'm ready to teach.

    - Learning as many of their names as possible is critical in my view, and I start by downloading the profile sheets as soon as they are posted on AIS. It is not necessary to learn every name, but if you know 30-50 of the names in a class of 150, it will appear to the class as if you know all of them.

    - You need to use the names apart from simply calling on people. One of the most helpful techniques for me is to answer one student's question by referring back to something that "Mary" just said, or to contrast it with the point that "George" just made. It really helps to make the class as a whole begin to cohere.

    - I look for "bellwethers," those students whose facial expressions will tell me whether I am getting through or not. As I scan the room, I try to make eye contact for a moment with as many of them as possible.

    - Again, as Caroline and Chris have emphasized, you are the source of energy in the room. You need to make the class cohere as a group, and whether you rely on walking around, humor, changing the pace, etc., you are the orchestra leader. But if you're willing to lead, they will follow.

<u>Questions and Answers</u>

Q: Jack: How can you get the class to respond to each other's questions, so it's not just a series of interactions between yourself and individual students?

A:
Caroline: Ask students to comment and respond to the person's question. You can also break into small groups for discussion. Or, ask the group to come to a consensus on the topic. Allow TAs to lead lectures so you can observe the class dynamics. Sometimes, I ask my TA to facilitate a discussion and I make myself the scribe, simply putting the important points the students make on the board. Then they have to speak to each other, because I am not part of the discussion.

Ken: Ask the class if they agree or disagree with the individual's comments or ask someone who commented on the topic earlier to respond.

Chris: I do not let students change topics until there has been sufficient discussion. I also never tell a student that they are wrong. Instead, I ask if other class members disagree with his or her point.

Stephanie: Another thing that really helps is to be quiet. Give students time to fill the pauses, not you. It's hard when you are new at building the class into a true learning community. It's hard for teachers not to be talking. Try to hold back your comments.

Al: Hand out short articles that students read quickly in class for discussion.

Q: Paul: Do you delegate grading to the TAs?

A:
Caroline: I train the TAs and go through the papers with them until I feel they understand my grading expectations. Then I spot check throughout the semester.

Larry: I choose to grade the assignments to which I can add the greatest value – written essays. The TAs grade exams and problem sets. I create a template for them to follow.

Q: Kim: Does anyone allow student contribution to threaded discussion in Blackboard as "class participation" for grades?

A:
Ken: I take it into account but do not weigh it that heavily. The quality of participation needs to be controlled. It's too easy for a student just to post an article or something.

Kim: I give my students explicit expectations regarding the type of comments I want posted to Blackboard and I pay attention to quality. (See handout pp. 2-3 for examples of Kim's guidelines.)

Caroline: Sometimes I ask the block leader (or class rep) to keep a running record of issues that students have said that they've encountered at work. I circulate an updated list periodically. That way, if a student has a problem/issue at work and wants to talk to a classmate about what they've done, the list will help them figure out whom to contact.

Kim: That's something you could even do online in a discussion forum. No administrative work and the students could access it any time.

Chris: I used to have Blackboard participation, but it became too time-consuming.

Jack: I encourage participation by recording who made comments in class right after each class. I then post periodic feedback to Prometheus.

Caroline: I send performance emails detailing if the student is doing well, has improved, needs to improve or is doing poorly.

Q: Marshall: Do you request feedback from your students any time during the semester?

A:
Caroline: I ask the students to fill out three-minute memos at the end of class (or every other class). The memo enables them to ask questions, comment on what they felt worked well and suggest what they would want to see in future classes. (See handout pp. 4-5 for samples of three-minute memos. Also see section on "Classroom Assessment" on the CITL website, under Articles and Research.)

Chris: I do not collect mid-semester evaluations. Instead, I have the TA phone 10 or 15 random students (plus students whose body language is negative in class) to ask for feedback.

Q: Eileen: How do you handle teams that do not work well together?

A:
Pat: I have instituted a firing mechanism. Teams can fire a member, and that person has to try to find another team that will take them. Also, peer review tends to work well. (See handout pp. 6-8 for sample peer evaluation forms.)

Caroline: You should be careful of the amount of involvement you take in changing teams. People cannot choose who they work with in real life.

Chris: Also, if you are willing to get involved it becomes too much your problem, and they need to deal with it. I don't even get involved in creating their teams. It's entirely their responsibility. They also complete team evaluations, which they know may lower the grades of freeloaders.

Q: Stephanie: Caroline, how do you hire and train your TAs?

A:
Caroline: I look for possible TAs during my classes and start to recruit them. I also talk with others in the department about who has been a good TA or who would make a good TA. For training, I give them explicit criteria regarding case analysis and we initially grade papers together and then discuss them until I am satisfied that they understand and are able to grade effectively.

Q: Chris: How do you handle re-grades?

A:
Caroline: I tell them I am a tougher grader than the TA and the grade goes down as often as it goes up, which discourages re-grades.

Ken: I re-grade the entire exam, and not just the question the student wants addressed. This usually deters many students from requesting re-grades.

Pat: I have students write formal memos that build an argument for their case.

Kim: I do a combination of all three.

Q: Marianne: This is not a question. I just wanted to say thank you. I am an adjunct. I used to teach language, but that was 21 years ago, and I have just gone through the STEP process and found it so useful. Thank you so much for having this kind of support for us. (For more information about the STEP process, please visit the CITL website: http://w4.stern.nyu.edu/faculty/citl/)