Teaching Large Student Numbers
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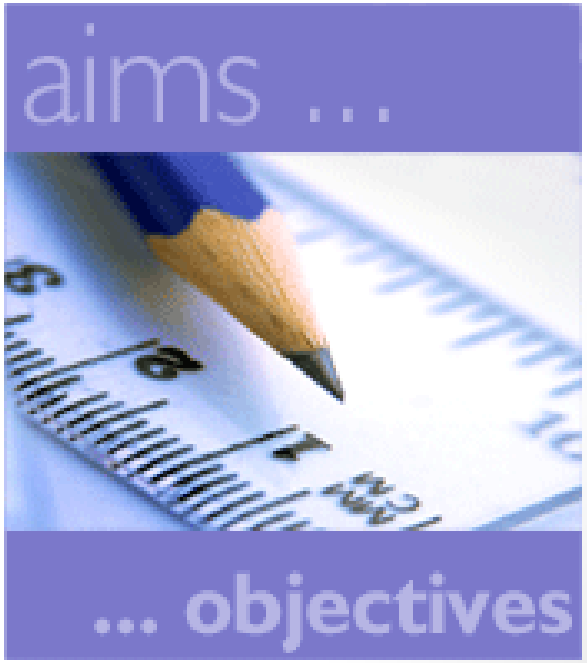
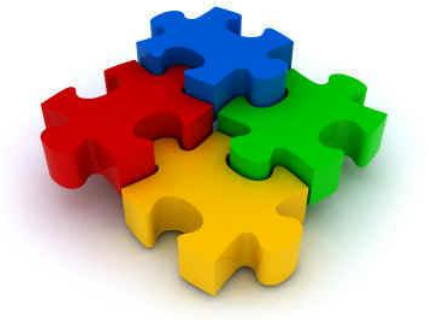
Innovation and the student experience - The ABS Learning & Teaching Conference 2013

Project aims and objectives

- identify different perspectives of “teaching large numbers of students”;
- gather examples of best practice for managing the student experience where large numbers of students are being taught;
- produce a toolkit to assist those involved with teaching large student numbers.



Methodology and timescale



- Initial desk research to identify previous projects (January/February 2013)
- Two questionnaires sent to “key contacts” (March 2013)
- Follow-up interviews (April and May 2013)
- Feedback from workshops and conferences (on-going)
- Submission of report and toolkit June 2013

Two different strands for the project:

1. **Teaching on campus:**
   - Lectures, seminars, workshops, tutorials

2. **Managing the delivery of modules across collaborative partnerships**
   - International, across campuses, regional

Questionnaire Responses

- “Large numbers” varied from: 1000 to 45 students
- Increase in number of overseas students has led to increases in class sizes
- Biggest increase is in postgraduate numbers – particularly with students from South East Asia
- Initial growth in undergraduate courses, but numbers over last 5 years have generally stablised
- Normally “core” modules have largest student numbers
- Large lectures (900+) supported by smaller classes (18-30)
- Varied subject areas, but particular focus on numerical subjects - accounting and finance and statistics
- Substantial changes made to how the module is taught, but assessment often remains the same
- Teaching team size varied from S:S of 25:1 to 90:1
- Some workload models do consider number of students on module as well as contact hours

Group Activity one:

Take ten minutes to discuss the following. Summarise your discussions on the flip chart.

1. What are the main challenges of teaching large student numbers on campus?
2. What challenges does delivering modules through collaborative partnerships present?
3. Are there common issues with both aspects of “teaching large student numbers”?

Questionnaire Responses

Positive

- Team teaching enjoyable
- Teaching large numbers - makes me think 'outside the box'"
- Cost effective
- A "safe" environment for the tutor
- A "safe" environment for the student
- Peer-to-peer learning and networking
- Increased pass rate
- "always looking to make improvements"
- International students not isolated as able to network with others from their country

Negative

- Dumbing down of content and assessment
- Lack of interaction with students
- Behaviour/attendance/noise management
- Team teaching can lead to fragmentation of sessions
- Burden of the assessment process
- Capacity constraints = repeat same lecture
- Administration of module
- Management of teaching team – particularly hourly paid lecturers
- Lack of workload recognition
- Lack of personal experience (student)
- Less time to devote to each student

Group Activity two:

Take ten minutes to discuss the following. Summarise your discussions on the flip chart.

1. Do the positive aspects of teaching large classes outweigh the negative aspects?
2. Are there common approaches to teaching and assessment which can be adopted to provide a positive learning experience whatever the class size?
3. It is possible to simulate a small class experience in a large class?

Group Activity three

Take ten minutes to discuss the following. Summarise your discussions on the flip chart.

1. How has the delivery of modules changed to accommodate large student groups?
2. How has the assessment process changed?
3. What strategies have you/your university adopted to enhance the learning experience?
4. What role does “innovation” play in the delivery of modules to large groups?
5. Can students in large groups be offered a “personalised learning experience”?

Some initial ideas to enhance the learning experience

- Greet your students!
- Be familiar with a selection of student names
- Ask questions during the lecture (to check students are keeping up with you)
- Introduce enquiry based learning and assessment
- Provide formative feedback in the lecture (true false quiz at start)
- Use personal response system (clickers)
- Introduce enquiry based feedback
- Invite questions – use a “Text wall”
- Engage students in interactive presentations through “paper show”.
- Hold small seminar groups to compensate for large numbers in lectures
- Move from large lectures back to “classes” of 40
- Make greater use of senior staff to lead and deliver modules, including professors
- “Professionalise” graduate teaching assistants
- Run module twice (consecutive semesters)
- Make extensive and effective use of VLE – communicate outside classroom
- Provide electronic marking and feedback

Your comments and feedback….

Thank you for attending the workshop

References

Negative and positive aspects and initial ideas

Gathered from participating Business Schools and respondents to questionnaire

Participation at "Personalising Learning Workshop" - Manchester Business School (27/3/2013)

Interviews with representatives from Lincoln Business School, University of Bristol, Cambridge Regional College

Images

1. http://www.philosophy.ox.ac.uk/lectures/john_locke_lectures/past_lectures
2. http://www.devstud.org.uk/about/
3. http://website.iiita.ac.in/workshop/ResearchMethod/index.html
4. http://www.priv.gc.ca/cf-dc/index_e.asp
5. http://laverne.edu/academics/institutional-review-board/questionnaires-surveys
6. http://lupekanje.blogspot.co.uk/2012_02_01_archive.html
7. http://oecdeducationtoday.blogspot.co.uk/2012/10/got-any-good-ideas-about-how-to-improve.html