NOTES ON THE 1ST NATIONAL WORKSHOP, UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE, JULY 8 2001

Summary of discussions – Session 1

Summary of the five major areas discussed in Session 1 – with all participants contributing

Contents:
1. Student issues
2. Teaching management and curriculum issues
3. Administration, resourcing and institutional issues
4. Teaching and learning strategies
5. Assessment issues

1. Student issues

1. In what ways does a large class impact upon students?

- Students feel anonymous, alienated, threatened
- Students encouraged to be passive/hard to create interactivity Teachers seem impersonal
- Competition for resources
- Catering to a wide range of abilities and backgrounds [heterogeneity]
- Students more likely to lose interest
- Hence, knowing where to pitch lectures
- Heterogeneity of teaching staff
- Students more likely to cheat/plagiarise
- May encourage ‘regurgitation of facts’

2. What other problems do large classes present with regards to this topic?

- Control issues and noise levels
- Administration and timetabling
- Content issues – content often more emphasised than process

3. What have you or your universities done to address these student issues?

- Tutor-training
- On-line tutors to answer questions posted on web site – about 30% ask questions, another 40% access it
- Tutors to remember and use students’ names
- Be honest with students up front about issues
- Let students know when you are available
- VUW built smaller lecture theatres with swivel chairs in semi-circles for discussion groups
- Team teaching
- Powerpoint slides on web with RealAudio (audio streaming)
- Discussion forums on web
- Policy decisions: faculty/ system acknowledge that large classes are harder and use incentive/s
- Relocating funds to provide more support, monetary allowances and teaching load re-adjustments etc.
- Inter-staff mentoring
- Set ground rules for respect, communication etc.
4. What are the effective strategies you have used with large groups? Why?

- PASS and peer tutoring/mentoring
- Encourage participation through modelling first with a small group of students
- Break up 50-minute lectures using variety of techniques such as, role plays, demonstrations, experiments, testing/quick quizzes, case studies with buzz groups, games to maintain interest
- Staff to mentor ‘at risk’ students
- Drop in tutorials

- Problem-solving task with a reporting back process encourages participation & higher order thinking
- Set ground rules from the start for respect, communication, noise levels, etc.
- Test in lecture, mark by peers and handed up
- ‘Muddiest’ point and ‘clearest’ point in lecture
- Students to organise conference involving fellow students

5. What are the least successful things you have tried or seen used with large groups? Why?

- Over-reliance on &/or inappropriate use of technology
- Content emphasis, neglecting process
- Drop-in tutorials
- Having no tutorials
- Discouraging questions, expecting students to just simply listen

2. Teaching management and curriculum issues

1. In what ways does a large class impact upon teaching management and curriculum issues?

- Getting students to see links between topics/themes within the course/degree program
- Consistency of teaching with multiple teaching staff/lecturers
- Achieving good communication with tutors/other lecturers
- Tutors running ‘mini-lectures’ in tutes
- Multiple/repeat lectures by one lecturer can lead to fatigue or omitting of material
- However, multiple teachers can lead to lack of ownership of course (whereas a single lecturer ‘owns’ the subject)
- Need for recognition/compensation by the school/faculty for subject or year-level coordinators involved in large classes

2. What other problems do large classes present with regards to this topic?

- Keeping tabs on attendance
- Workloads and overload of student inquiries via email re subject and assessment
- Timetabling issues (clashing classes etc.)
- Wide range of abilities and backgrounds [heterogeneity]. Hence, knowing where to pitch lectures
- Designing curriculum to be more interactive

3. What have you or your universities done to address these teaching management and curriculum issues?

- Meeting regularly with tutors/other lecturers face-to-face or email to ensure consistency
- Clip boards around the room - students ‘sign-in’
- Lecture templates (see C. Franklin’s case study)
- Approach Heads etc. to make timetabling, room allocation and admin issues a higher priority. Also, increased consultation with academic staff responsible for delivery of subjects
- PBL to stimulate higher-order thinking processes (and to integrate theory and practice)
- Subject web-site to reduce student inquiries
- On-line tutors to cut down on student inquiries
- Web CT discussion sites (all questions and answers posted for all students to see). Must be set up at start and demonstrated/advertised
- Tutors participate as students at start of
3. Administration, resourcing and institutional issues

1. In what ways does a large class impact upon administration, resourcing and institutional issues?

- Timetabling – inflexible, clashes, does not allow for variety in class arrangements
- Coordinating tutors (only paid for contact time, not motivated to attend meetings)
- Venues – making classes interactive in tiered lecture theatres with fixed furniture (radio-mikes can be used); difficult if being videoed for flex delivery
- Recruiting quality tutors
- Lack of resources to support smaller groups
- Competition for materials in library
- External access to computer systems can be a problem for students
- New copyright laws – violation of electronic copyright access, impacts on online learning
- Income disproportionate to resource allocation
- Technology – level of support, technology training for teachers

2. What other problems do large classes present with regards to this topic?

- Lack of resourcing and admin support, especially for senior academic staff teaching large classes
- “Short straw” mentality in first year teaching
  Should be compulsory for all staff to work on first year unit or a rotating roster utilising team teaching.
- Allocating students to tutorials and lecture groups – getting even distribution
- Need an incentive to include in workload formula for large class teachers
- Technology failing to work
3. What have you or your universities done to address these admin/resources and institutional support?

- Peer tutoring/mentoring schemes (eg. P.A.S.S.)
- Incentives to support large class lecturers, eg. extra workload bonus, 50 hours of admin assistance per semester, EFTSU
- Recognising on a faculty level 1st year as a critical area of student retention
- 1 week of no classes for students to meet with lecturer individually 30 minutes per student
- Designated technician – ‘red (panic) button’ in lecture theatres for immediate help
- “Mind Trail” software- template of responses – allows linking of objectives and marking criteria
- Student liaison support officer – student inquiries, contact person
- Involving all staff in large class teaching
- Using technology for flexible delivery (Web CT etc. reduces paper work both in and out of class)
- Online compulsory unit taught, organised and supported by 6-8 lecturers per team
- $1000 incentive per person for winning team consolidated, unified effort by all staff where 1st year was given 30 minutes per student to assess their work – 1 week, 15 staff, 300 students
- Adequately resourced theatres for the class size

4. What are the effective strategies you have used in this area with large groups? Why?

- Tutor training schemes with academic staff (1-2 whole days or on-going)
- Computer marked tests
- Electronic submission of assignments (also reduces plagiarism)
- Moderator for electronic traffic
- Pay staff to attend professional development
- Maximise networking between students eg. get to know you sessions, tutorial group support, email groups, bulletin boards, etc. to exchange information and prior learning
- Timetabling – appropriate technology, room size, avoid clashes in order of preference (database problem, not allocation problem)

5. What are the least successful things you have tried or seen used with large groups? Why?

- Mentoring program of second years by academic staff – not focussed, too loosely structured
- Peer- and group-assessment (probably better for smaller classes)
- Allowing students to self-select tutorial times/groups
- Large video-linked lectures (up-linking)
- Problems with implementations of programs

4. Teaching and learning strategies

1. In what ways does a large class impact upon teaching and learning strategies?

- Difficulty in getting students to change their learning style from high-school and achieve higher-order thinking and independence
- Heterogeneity of students – making material relevant to different disciplines (eg. business & humanities students in same subject)
- Alienation of students coming to university for first time, esp country students; also alienated by remote, ‘up-linked’ lectures
- Lack of innovation, ‘trying new things’, creativity due to teaching overload, fatigue
- However, large classes have forced innovative responses (incl WBL) to encourage interactivity
- Motivating students and maintaining interest
- Absenteeism – getting info to these students
- Courses designed in reverse and teaching strategies determined largely by size of class, not learning goals.

2. What other problems do large classes present with regards to this topic?
First year is the ‘short straw’ class. Need a rotational system or incentive scheme.
Zero management and organisational skills for teachers – need for training.
Need for succession management – ie. when one large class lecturer leaves they help/mentor new lecturer for one session.
Using web to ‘cope’ – not pedagogically driven by good teaching principles.

Move away from qualitative to quantitative way of thinking and teaching.
Generally increased complexity due to size, no of tutors, heterogeneity, admin and assessment and a general lack of recognition by faculty.
Need to record ‘tacit’ knowledge of good practice and add to curriculum eg. training on how to present lecture material orally, developing written marking guidelines, etc.

3. What have you or your universities done to address these teaching and learning issues?

| Integrated units in 1st year across core subjects within an organised framework (eg. Business) |
| Teaching and tutorial manuals |
| Current teachers recording progress and changing/improving existing teaching manuals |
| More casual teaching staff (however has its own problems) – use for marking only |
| Using half a lecture for info delivery and half for PBL or cases studies ie. establish discussion |
| Mentoring new teacher to lecture in front of 300+ students |
| Developed a teaching manual for running a course in 8 different locations. Included written instructions to help coordinate course, etc. |

4. What are effective strategies you have seen or used with large groups?

| Succession management – ie. when a lecturer leaves he/she briefly mentors the new lecturer |
| When using MCQ tests, give feedback or tell students where to find explanations eg. Q1-5 from Chapter 1, Q6-10 see Chapter 2 etc. |
| Students to ‘practice’ and report back to class differences they found and what they learned in class (ie. theory versus prac) |
| Online testing with appropriate feedback helps expose weaknesses in a private space |
| Filling in PowerPoint slides in lectures helps engage students |
| PBL and case studies, use of videos as eg.s |
| Model essay writing steps, style and format etc. |
| Outlines with spaces for student input |
| Music, mixed media, humour, unpredictability |
| Web-site to ‘dob-in’ a colleague, ie tell about good teaching on-line |
| Illustrate differences between pass and fail, credit and pass, credit and distinction etc. |
| Senior staff & heads of school teach some large classes |
| Key questions (open-ended, higher-order thinking) near the end of a session – get students to respond with written summaries and hand in. Use these to lead discussion for the next class. |
| A register of teaching innovations |
| Keep register of good tutors, re-employ them |

5. What are the least successful things with large groups? Why?

| Short discussions in lectures – can’t ensure students actually do it, can’t get students back and lose precious lecture time |
| MCQ exams |
| Break lectures into smaller lectures for streaming into cultural or discipline groups |
| Traditional lecture format for 1 hour straight |
| Too much focus on content |
5. Assessment issues

1. In what ways does a large class impact upon assessment?

- Marking load, time taken to mark essays and exams
- Feedback impossible or limited/in frequent
- Moderation or quality control more difficult
- Turn around time to give feedback too slow
- Using/devising meaningful, realistic criteria
- Pressure on teachers
- Limited resources in first year
- Lack of tutes/small groups in some courses
- Need ways to encourage students to form and attend informal learning groups.
- Catering to diversity

2. What other problems do large classes present with regards to this topic?

- Assesses generic, irrelevant skills (such as exam taking skills etc)
- Sustainability of academics doing all marking
- Student anonymity means quality feedback is hard to give
- Coordinating exams – timetable clashes
- Pressure on library resources, competition for short-term or closed-reserve items
- Literacy skills not maximised by limited time using resources
- Plagiarism, cheating increased with large groups
- Managing online assessment systems

3. What have you or your universities done to address these assessment issues?

- Sessional/casual markers and different/varying types of assessment
- Small group work focussed on learning coupled with a ‘module system’ facilitating feedback, where lectures follow tutorials
- Web-based assessment with written exam at the end – cheating now resolved
- Criteria for consistency in essay marking
- Students in first year do a Foundation Unit – students at risk identified
- Small group work with feedback mechanisms (reporting back etc)
- Assessment policies – 45 workshops in schools for full time and distant education
- Learning centre staff involved in courses and in identifying weaker students

4. What are the effective strategies you have used in this area with large groups? Why?

- Peer review - formative
- Marking criteria and past papers available
- All staff to spell out criteria clearly and provide standardised feedback sheet too all staff and students
- Changing assignment questions each semester to overcome plagiarism
- Teaching group process skills in one course that all students attend and use in other classes
- Use ‘teamwork’ versus group work ‘team of two’, learning buddies’ etc. encouraged to evaluate each other’s work
- Online system for managing assessment - collection, marking and distribution

5. What are the least successful things you have tried or seen used with large groups? Why?

- Pass/fail grades; non-graded assessment
- MCQ if not properly constructed
- Feedback by asking questions in lectures
- Peer- and self-assessment – student resistance
- Setting common/general questions that could lead to plagiarism
- Any innovations in the assessment tasks implemented by individuals – leads to inconsistency
- Using criteria for group-work ie. how to do…..
- Teaching technical skills in workshops that are voluntary and are too big