

A REVIEW OF HANOVER RESEARCH AND THE UNIVERSITY OF CHARLOTTE'S FACULTY FOR LEARNING'S REPORT ON TEACHING LARGE UNDERGRADUATE CLASSES: ITS APPLICATION IN THE UNIVERSITY OF PORT HARCOURT

Njoku Chimezie & Okoro Cecilia Onuwa
University of Port Harcourt
NIGERIA

Corresponding Author Email: chimezie.njoku@uniport.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

Undergraduate classes in the University of Port Harcourt are always with high enrolment so teaching the classes can be difficult for lecturers. These classes are most often taught by a lecturer teaching a sizeable group of students, creating a situation that can sometimes be inefficient and unrewarding for both students and lecturers. The difficulties in these classes have remained the same over the years. The goals for lecturers teaching large classes are to find ways to make the class feel smaller in order to give room to the students to participate in the classes and make themselves available to the students. For lecturers to achieve these goals it is important they make use of a variety of organizational and teaching methods. In this study we reviewed a Hanover research report on how large undergraduate classes are taught at higher education institutions in the USA, Australia, Canada and UK and the University of Charlotte's faculty for learning's report on how faculty members in the universities across USA are solving the problems related to teaching large classes. Our aim is to see if some of these strategies and procedures can be applied to the University of Port Harcourt's large undergraduate classes. After the careful review of these procedures and strategies, the researchers are of the opinion that despite the challenges of implementing some of them, there are still a good number of these strategies and procedures that can be implemented to provide an effective and engaging learning environment to the students in the University of Port Harcourt's large classes.

Keywords: Large class size, teaching methods, university of Port Harcourt, Hanover report, University of Charlotte report.

INTRODUCTION

In teaching a large class we face very different set of challenges than we typically face in our other classes. If we ask different lecturers from different faculties and from different universities across the country and around the world, they are likely to list many of the same types of challenges. These challenges are likely to fall into these categories according to Exter, Ameratunga, Ratima, Morton, Dickson, Hsu and Jackson (2010); management of the exams, management of distractions in the class like students talking while lectures are on, late arrivals to classes, early departures etc, perceived inconspicuousness of the students; difficulty in learning student's names; in taking attendance, in getting students to be active in class and getting them to do their assignments and also in a timely manner; Lack of flexibility in class activities; Diverse background and preparation of the students etc.

The teaching method mostly use in large undergraduate classes is lecture method where you see the instructor lecturing to a sizeable group of students; this situation can sometimes be inefficient and unrewarding for both students and instructors. If we look back the difficulties

in these classes have remained the same for decades. According to Aagard, Bowen and Olesova (2010) these problems have stayed the same as those noted by Maryellen Gleason in 1986.

These major problems according to her are; large classes take place in a big room, and communication doesn't feel personal because the instructor is so far away and tight rows make group discussion difficult. Another problem she observed was that large lectures are full of people, mostly persons who are unfamiliar, creating an environment for students that what they say and do doesn't really matter. Also because of the number of students, discussion during a regular lecture that includes everyone is difficult. The instructor appears detached, distant, and unavailable, and the communication gap between the students and the instructor feels very absolute. She also pointed out the sitting arrangement that is a theatre like sitting that support student's passivity.

Hanover Research explored common strategies and guidelines used by universities to best teach large undergraduate classes, including an outline of the many new technologies that are increasingly being used to teach these classes. This secondary literature is on how large undergraduate classes are taught at higher education institutions in the USA, Australia, Canada and UK.

This paper also discussed some peculiar challenges to university of Port Harcourt and ways to overcome some of the challenges to make lectures in large classes in the University of Port Harcourt more meaningful.

Teaching large Undergraduate Classes in the USA, UK, Australia and Canada (HANOVER Research Report)

The HANOVER report was organised into sections, section one of the report explains the organizational and teaching strategies that are non technological that lecturers use to best teach large classes. They outlined common methods and guidelines for creating a fruitful and systematized classroom environment that promotes student-faculty interaction and fosters active learning.

Section two of the report gave a framework of new technologies that universities adopted to help facilitate better learning environments in large undergraduate classes. These new technologies are grouped into two categories; those that reinforce the in-class experience and those that set up electronic tools and forums for students and faculty to use outside of class.

The report discussed how universities have used different technologies to serve the above purposes and the type of results they have seen. Discussed below are their key findings.

Key Findings

This report was conducted through a comprehensive online study of the secondary literature on how large undergraduate classes are taught at higher education institutions in the United States, Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom. The key findings on what strategies institutions commonly employ in teaching these classes are;

Organization

Classes are prepared with a clear structure and set of what the expectations are, and these are communicated to the students. The result of this is that it created a situation where the Instructor was prepared to teach, and the students knew what to expect in terms

of course, material covered and course expectations.

Carefully planned assessments

Assessments are planned with a realistic understanding of the administrative difficulties always encountered in grading students in large classes. Because of this, assessments were spread evenly over the course of a semester.

Teaching Strategies

Students were made to be actively engaged with the course material. They made use of a variety of techniques, such as using class discussion and group activities, these helped facilitate active learning.

Student-faculty interaction

They applied different ways to interact with students; they made use of text messaging, e mail, chat room etc. These helped them engaged with the course.

Opportunities for students to meet in smaller groups outside of the lecture hall

Large classes are put into small-scale groups to help students assimilate the material in a more collaborative and dynamic manner.

Using Technology in the Classroom

Visual aids, such as PowerPoint presentations, videos, and images from the Internet were normally used to help break up a lecture and hold students' attention. Audience response systems, including clickers and programs students can download were also used to create an environment where more students are able and willing to participate in class, thereby encouraging active learning.

Using Technology out of the Classroom

Variety of online social-networking sites, like Facebook, Twitter, Wetpaint, and sites that have specifically been designed for education, like Blackboard and Hotseat, were used to help facilitate student exchange of views and engagement with course material.

Sharing and managing information online such as lectures, homework, tests and quizzes was also a common feature. These helped the students to be always prepared for class, and helped lecturers be better organized, they class materials were organized, and student's performance were tracked.

Strategies And Procedures By Some Faculty Members Across USA Universities (University of Charlotte Faculty Center for Teaching)

Sallie, M the director of University of Charlotte's faculty centre for teaching in his book titled "Handbook for teaching large class" (2010) explored how faculty members all over USA have tried to solve the problems related to teaching large class. He organized these strategies and procedures around some set of questions and these questions are listed below, and the answers are also discussed.

a. How can I encourage attendance in my large classes?

The answers are below;

- i. Make the class informative, interesting, and relevant to students' lives by adding variety and entertainment to lectures. They suggested slide shows, demos, video clips, music, bringing guest speakers to their classes etc.

- ii. Put the course outlines up on your course Web page, so that students know what to expect and use them as a guide for their notes and not as an alternative for attending class.
- iii. Make use of lots of supplemental demonstrations and examples that students cannot easily get from any other place other than in class.
- iv. Give lots of exam-directed problems in class.
- v. Do the counting of class involvement toward the final grade.
- vi. Give students a topic to think about for the next class discussion or a puzzle to solve for fun or for credit.
- vii. Give regular announced or unannounced quizzes that will count towards the final grade. This can be done at the beginning of the class and to get feedback on assigned reading or at the end to test comprehension of material just covered.
- viii. Try to convince students that exam success depends on attendance. They gave an example of a faculty member that gathered data from previous classes to prove it and presented these data to his students.
- ix. Institute a policy that grades will be moved down according to the number of sessions missed.

b. How can I easily take attendance in my large Classes?

The following were the answers to the question on student's attendance taking in large classes.

- i. You can arrange for students to sign in at the door before entering the class.
- ii. Students can be assigned numbered seats and sign a seating chart when it is passed.
- iii. Some instructors take attendance at the end of the session rather than at the beginning, so as to prevent students from signing in or being signed in and then leaving before the class ends.
- iv. Taking attendance at irregular intervals may be adequate, especially if there is a clear policy for lowering grades when absences are immoderate.
- v. Give a practice exam problem at end of lecture. This is both a way to take attendance and to test students' ability to apply key concepts.
- vi. Make students to collect homework one week and return another in person. Students must be present both times to get grades.

C. How can I reduce the feeling of anonymity?

These were the answers;

- i. Know the names of at least some of your students:
- ii. Use a Polaroid camera to take pictures of groups of students in their class
- iii. Ask students to give you a copy of their ID pictures
- iv. Create a seating chart to enable quick attendance taking and identification of students
- v. Return assignment scripts and exams personally to connect names with faces and motivate students who are struggling.
- vi. Before class, learn the names of people sitting along the aisles and call on them during the class
- vii. Ask students to wear nametags so that you can call on them by name.
- viii. When giving a test, I ask the students to hang a sheet of paper with their names in large letters in front of them and you can wander around the room learning names
- ix. Create a more personal environment by letting students know you in appropriate ways
 -
 - o Your interests,
 - o How you first encountered a concept.
 - o How you used course-related materials in problem-solving
 - o Try to find ways to be accessible to students on a personal level.

- x. Arrive early and babble with students who are already there in the class.
- xi. Greet students as they come in.
- xii. Stay a few minutes after class to answer individual questions
- xiii. Give students your email address and encourage them to send questions and comments.
- xiv. Move around the classroom when lecturing or discussing to give students the feeling of being part of the class rather than simply being an observer and it also makes the class seem smaller and encourages student's involvement. Standing behind a podium or in front emphasizes the distance between you and the class.
- xv. Provide many avenues for feedback from students to check for understanding:
- xvi. Pass out observation forms to 10 students at the beginning of class and ask them to meet with you and discuss their observations about what works and what doesn't. This is especially helpful when you want feedback before student evaluations at the end of the course.

D. How can I better manage the class climate?

The answers are;

- i. Arrive at your classroom early with enough time to set up the room the way you want it.
- ii. Let students know what your personal teaching style is and how you like to be addressed and treated. For example, if you mind being interrupted with questions while the class is on and how you like to conduct a discussion.
- iii. Introduce students to each other to make them feel more relaxed and comfortable in the class.
- iv. Ask students to fill out index cards with their names, addresses and phone, any information about themselves which might be helpful for you to know.
- v. Create a first day experience that sets the tone for the rest of the term and leaves your students looking forward to the next class.
- vi. Do not lecture but talk. Teach as though you were talking to one person at a time about your subject.
- vii. Create a comfortable climate and still be in charge of the class.
- viii. Put down your expectations for student behavior in writing. Let them know that if they disturb your class, that they can be physically removed from the class by Security Officers.
- ix. Give feedback to students, especially when correcting a wrong answer or statement:
- x. Use of microphone on a regular basis should be considered.
- xi. Handle the students that disrupt your class immediately, approach them and ask them to help you out - tell them they are distracting you as well as some of the students around them. In a non confrontational and non-embarrassing way let them know that they are bothering people. If the problem continues, let them know that they can be removed from the class by Campus Security Officers.

E. What can I do about exams?

They gave the following answers to the question on conducting exams in a large undergraduate class;

- i. Based on the day's lecture request from the students at the end of class to write one exam question, this variation on the questions will not only give the instructor quick feedback but may also result in some good questions that could be incorporated on exams.
- ii. Puts short quizzes on overheads printed in large prints. This saves handing out several sheets of paper for every quiz.
- iii. If there are no TA (Teacher Assistant) support available, essays are not pragmatic ways of evaluating the large classes.

- iv. Students can work in groups and assign same grade to all members of the group, or the grades can be assigned differently on the basis of a blend of unspecified self-evaluation of individual contributions and instructor evaluation of the group product.
- v. Be on alert to new ways of cheating by students. An instructor said he discovered that students were using pagers to send each other the correct answers.
- vi. According to Tanya Furman a Geosciences instructor students should be given hard exams, and vary them every year. In his opinion only those who truly studied the material can succeed.
- vii. Dean Snow an Anthropology instructor advised that if one is faced with the problem of making sure that students taking exams are those registered in the course, should first of all input the student names and ID numbers into a database. From the data base one can generate a sign-in sheet and students are asked to sign on the first day of class or the first day they attend. Later the database is used to generate pressure sensitive labels with their names and numbers.

F. How can I improve my lectures?

They answered that one should think and remember the features of some of the worst lectures that one had as a student and try not to repeat them. These could be the following;

- I. Teaching in a monotone voice
- II. Reading from the text to the students or taking material straight from the assigned text only
- III. non-stop lecturing for over 50 minutes
- IV. Little or no eye contact with the students
- V. Presenting outdated or incorrect information
- VI. Uncoordinated and confusing lecture.

G. How can I use technology in my large classes?

Technology can be used in a variety of ways in a large class; here are some alternative uses in a general way.

Use PowerPoint for example to make formal presentations in class either in the form of outlines, lists of key concepts, etc.

Excel can be used to download class lists in a format suitable for reading into a spreadsheet.

Set up a class newsgroup or an electronic mail list where students can ask questions and get help from the lecturer and from other students.

Create a course website for the class that contains problems that students can practice, answers to sample test questions, homework, a rubric of terms, etc.

FileMaker Pro for example can be used to create a searchable test bank of questions.

Give out your office hours through email.

Applying Some Of The Strategies In The University of Port Harcourt's Large Undergraduate Classes

Lecturers individually are the best person to decide which strategies are likely to work for him or not work for him. There is no one strategy, method or procedure to teach a large class because a lot of things are taken into consideration; teaching style of the lecturer, characteristics of the students, the goals and objectives of the course etc.

University of Port Harcourt like many other Nigeria's public universities have their peculiar challenges that makes most of the strategies and procedures suggested above very difficult to implement in order to achieve results in our large undergraduate classes.

Some of these challenges are;

Little economic resources are available to provide for and support education in the University of Port Harcourt. There are very few large classrooms in the school and all the classrooms are not equipped with ICT facilities which makes it very difficult to make use of for example projectors to project information, PowerPoint presentations, audio and video tapes, flash cards etc.

It is difficult to promote the type of active learning suggested above when the resources are limited, there is no e-learning portal that is accessible to students, the public address system which in most times provided by the students or individual lecturers are not always readily available to use because of incessant power supply, sometimes the batteries are drained before the end of the class and requires charging again. As a result of this, student's individual responses are difficult to hear as well as the lecturer's teachings which discourages many students from participating in the class

Also, the fixed furniture in the classrooms hampers activities that are student centered. Putting students in groups for an activity and the ability of the lecturer to move round monitoring the group's activities is difficult. This also makes monitoring of attendance difficult. Teaching to facilitate students learning is a complex activity. This requires relevant educational expertise and adequate resourcing efforts by individual lecturers and the institution. If attention is not paid to this fact improving teaching in large undergraduate classes in the University of Port Harcourt will continue to have challenges.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Teaching large classes which is a very common feature in the University of Port Harcourt can be a very challenging task. However, a good number of some of the organizational and teaching strategies discussed above which lecturers in higher institutions in the developed countries like the USA, UK, Canada and Australia have used and confessed they worked in their large classes can also work in the University of Port Harcourt despite their peculiar challenges. Some of these strategies and procedures are; careful planning of assessment, student – faculty interaction, the ways they encourage attendance in large classes and take attendance, how they reduce the feeling of anonymity, improving lectures by reflecting on the features of some of the worst teachers they had as students and how they conduct exams.

There will still be some challenges because of the peculiar problems of the University of Port Harcourt but with dedication, professional expertise application and motivation some of the challenges can be overcome and lecturers can provide an effective and engaging learning environment to the students in large classes.

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ER RESEARCH DECEMBER 2010