

# Teaching Large Classes

## Linse's Recommendations

### Clear Learning Expectations

Be explicit about what you expect from students. Define specific, measurable learning outcomes using “action verbs” (see handouts). Share those outcomes with students on day one, refer to them when you explain your grading criteria on each assignment, and periodically review the objectives with students so that they can see they are learning

### Detailed Syllabus

Create a detailed syllabus and course schedule (timeline), and stick to it. Avoid adding readings or assignments after the semester has begun. Changes in favor of the students grades are usually ok, but only if applied to everyone (e.g. if a question on an exam is misinterpreted by most students, then add the points for that question to everyone's score or do not deduct points for incorrect answers).

### Reward vs. Punishments

Try to reward students for the work they have done, rather than punish them for not doing something. For example, reward points for doing the reading. Grades and time are precious for students, so they spend time on activities that have a high “return rate.” If doing the reading results in a higher grade, students are more likely to do it. It is reasonable for undergraduates to be “grade-motivated” because their future prospects often depend on grades (future employers and graduate schools request transcripts and/or grade point averages from new graduates).

### Grading

1. Be systematic in your grading practices because it will help you be more efficient in your use of time. For example, use a Grading Rubric (see grading handouts available <http://www.temple.edu/handouts/handouts>).
2. Consider alternative grading policies to address student variability and reduce high-stakes grading. For example, allow students to determine the weighting of different aspects of the course, within reason or within pre-set ranges. Consider having student take exams individually first (turned in), then again with group members.

### Active Learning: it can happen in large classes!

Teach using active learning methods, even if you choose to use a predominantly lecture format. Research on human learning and attention spans indicates that students will learn and retain more if you give them occasional breaks during which they recap, use, apply, or extend the material you have just presented. See handouts.

### **Active Learning: Recommendations for Success**

1. Start small (e.g. 1 activity, 1 class session)
2. Provide the rationale and purpose of the strategy (what do you want students to learn?)
3. Be explicit about the students task(s)
  - What will they do?
  - How long should it take?
  - What is the product?
4. Wrap-up/Debrief
  - What happened?
  - What changed?
5. Expect to improve!

### **Collaborate with your TAs**

1. Talk to your TAs about your teaching philosophy. This is particularly important when you are teaching an introductory course and when working with new TAs or TAs deeply embedded in the discipline. Course material should be appropriate for the students' level of familiarity with and investment in the discipline. Some new TAs and faculty forget that they did not learn everything about their discipline in their introductory courses, nor did they think of it then with the same level of complexity as they do now.
2. Schedule weekly meetings to discuss primary topics, previous and potential challenges, issues of consistency, new requests or challenges raised by students. Set a time limit for the meetings (e.g. 1-1.5 hrs).
3. Give your TAs ownership of some part of the course. Divide the course tasks across TAs and utilize their individual skills, knowledge, experiences, and preferences. Decide on the semester topic list (e.g. have each TA choose a number of weeks when they will prepare the lab, discussion, quiz section, or breakout session guides and materials).
4. Make the TA sections worth a portion of the grade (e.g. proportional to the amount of time spent in sections).
5. Do not use different grading scales or different assignments in different sections of the course. Students talk to each other! Differences foment perceptions of unfairness—whether or not there is actual bias or unfairness is irrelevant.
6. Explicitly address students' concerns about differential grading by TAs. Many students in large classes are afraid that their grades will suffer because, by chance, they ended up in a section with a harsh TA grader. Assure them that 1) all of the TAs will use the same answer key, and 2) at the end of the course you will compare score distributions and adjust scores upwards if the grades of one TA are significantly lower than other TAs. Follow through on this promise!