

Course Design Guide

Instructional Strategies for Large-Enrollment Courses

A practical guide for faculty on promoting engagement and equitable participation in large-enrollment courses.

THE CASE FOR INTENTIONAL LARGE-COURSE DESIGN



DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES

Large-enrollment courses bring together a broad range of backgrounds and viewpoints, enriching peer learning when structured intentionally.



ACTIVE LEARNING

Strategic design transforms large lectures into participatory experiences, improving student retention and reducing disengagement.



PROFESSIONAL READINESS

Navigating complex, large-group environments mirrors professional contexts and builds self-advocacy, collaboration, and adaptability.

Promoting Student Engagement

Purpose:

Large lecture environments can limit opportunities for meaningful interaction. Intentionally designing for participation encourages students to take ownership of their learning and contribute to the learning community.

Structure Class Time:

Divide sessions into 10-20 minute segments, each anchored by a question or activity.

Active Learning Strategies:

- Team-Based Learning (TBL) uses pre-structured small groups with organized content-activities and assessments to sustain engagement and participation throughout large class sessions.
- Polling & Clicker Questions: Real-time responses across the full class; use divergent results to spark peer discussion.
- Ask students to reflect on what and how they are learning. At the end of a class session, ask students to summarize the main points of a lecture, or share their takeaways.

Building Community:

- Be sure to move around the room as you lecture.
- Collect student information at the start of the semester to gauge how course content connects to their career, interests, and professional skill set.
- Group students together by their interests when possible.
- Balance participation by drawing in voices from across the room.
- Use asynchronous discussion boards to create space for quieter students.

Assessment and Grading

Purpose:

Assessment design in large courses must balance meaningful feedback with a realistic workload. Both formative and summative tools should be deployed deliberately

Formative Assessment:

- Use short quizzes, polls, and in-class problems for timely, low-burden feedback.
- Grade journals and discussion posts on a 3-5 point scale with defined criteria.
- Leverage LMS-integrated automated grading for homework and quizzes.

Summative Assessment:

- Allow students to choose among prompts (e.g., 2 of 4 essays) to vary responses and reduce grading repetition.
- Group projects of 3-4 students reduce grading volume while preserving skill-building.
- Build in peer review to support accountability among group members.

Grading Tools:

- Rubrics: Ensure consistency across multiple graders and reduce time spent on written comments.
- Comment Key: Use a shorthand legend for common feedback; add one personalized comment per student.