A Pedagogical Organizational Model for Teaching and Learning
in highly-populated courses

(Work in progress)

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Individual treatment, group learning, response to different learning styles, equality in learning and focusing on students – can the Distance Teaching Methodology answer all these needs in large , highly-populated courses?

Highly-populated courses are common in universities, especially in introductory courses, as well as in high schools and other educational frameworks. Various models for organizing teaching in highly-populated classes have been introduced into these different frameworks. In schools, learners are usually divided into separate classes, each with its own teacher. In universities, lectures usually take place in large lecture halls which sometimes seat hundreds of students, often supplemented with practice lessons taught by TAs in smaller groups.

The Open University of Israel, a distance-learning institution, has developed a unique method for teaching of highly populated courses, which in recent years integrates teaching and learning technologies. The method is based on pedagogic assumptions as well as financial and logistic constraints, and enables any number of students to study near, or even in their homes, while maintaining high academic standards and providing support and help throughout the learning process.

Class size was found to have much impact on approaches to studying. It has influence on students' satisfaction, students' success and students' motivation (M. Fourie, 2003). Class size has particular impact in distance learning effecting the quality and extent of interaction among the students and between the students and the tutors of the course (Avner Caspi, Paul Gorsky, and Eran Chajut 2003). As the number of student the learning group increases, the perceived distance between the tutor and students increases (Chen and Willits, 1998) and students' satisfaction decreases (Welsh, Barone, Summers, and Dean 1997) accordingly.

In a study comparing satisfaction and success of students in small (30 students) and large (63 students) on-line synchronous video classes delivered by the same tutors, the students in the small class achieved better results and expressed higher satisfaction (Surge, Ritz and Hansen, 1999).
The common recommendation is to limit on-line class size to about 20 learners. (DEOS-L the Distance Education Online Symposium list serves)

In our lecture, we will present a pedagogically-based organizational model to manage highly-populated on-line courses. We will present the principles, illustrate various applications in different courses, raise a few questions and dilemmas, and suggest solutions. Some of the questions are: How does one conduct a forum for hundreds of students? When and how should activity in the on-line environment be divided? What constitutes a "class" in such an environment? What part of the discourse should take place in small groups and what part in the general forum? How should the data accumulated be organized? How does one overcome data flooding? And how can the entire teaching staff be integrated and involved in the on-line environment, and how does staff development take place in such an environment?

Bibliography:


DEOS-L (The Distance Education Online Symposium listserve)
http://lists.psu.edu/archives/deos-l.html