



Engagement in high enrollment classrooms: History of Costume, hybrid by choice

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With growth in student population, current budget constrictions, and increased enrollment, more and more instructors are facing the challenges of engaging students in a large format classroom (Dietz, 2002; UC Berkley, 2004). The traditional and often most-efficient teaching method is the lecture, but this format can be “impersonal, anonymous, and permits passivity,” all contrary to optimal student learning (Gehring, 2006). A number of trends including demographic shifts and the availability of new technology are prompting rethinking of teaching and learning in the high enrollment setting (Dietz, 2002; Gehring, 2006; UC Berkley, 2004).

The purpose of this project was to employ theory-based and practice-led research to enhance a large format History of Costume course. Taught within the context of a fashion program with 1200+ majors, this Sophomore-level course is offered every Fall semester with an enrollment of 110-115. Curriculum changes necessitated a condensation of content from two-to-one semesters, covering approximately 3000 years in 15 weeks.

The challenges of auditorium-style teaching and an abundance of material were compounded by composition of the student body. History of Costume is a required course for second-year Fashion Design majors, coinciding with coming face-to-face with the demands and realities of studio courses. Over several years of teaching, it became apparent that if students felt pressed for time, this lecture would be the “first to go.”

Over the years, our colleagues have presented many innovative and useful suggestions for enhancing History of Costume courses including group and individual research projects. After careful consideration, it was concluded these were not appropriate for this particular situation—with one instructor and no teaching assistants to help with guiding and grading. By reviewing the literature and analyzing creative strategies, the course was revised to integrate some best practices, including making the lectures more engaging by infusing them with additional classroom resources (videos and artifacts) and giving students flexibility and choice.

Research indicated good reason implement Turning Point technologies (clickers). “Students benefit from using clickers in class, because: clicker quiz questions connect each day’s material to exams (and thus to students’ grades), and clicker quizzes may improve student attendance and engagement.” (Brians, 2012). The practiced-based success of a discussion/quiz option in another large format course, led to an innovation in History of Costume, called “hybrid by choice.”

Each of the 20 lectures was accompanied by an “in-class activity” using clickers worth five points. Alternatively, there was a 10-question (.5 points each) quiz on that day’s chapter in the

textbook, available for 24 hours prior to the end of that day's class. If students were "unable" to attend lecture, they had the "opportunity" to stay current with the course material. In essence, students could choose to learn in the auditorium or from the textbook "online." Exams were a combination of class and quiz questions. Past quizzes were posted and face-to-face review sessions for each exam were offered, reinforcing lectures and allowing those who took the quiz the chance to see and hear a distilled version of the class presentations.

Student evaluations show positive reception to the "hybrid by choice" arrangement. For example, "Nice in case you cannot make it to class and still wanted to learn"; "Gave me the ability to get other classwork finished if needed"; "Very good way to participate and learn." The activity/quiz option comprised 20 percent of the course grade. A first analysis of student learning as measured by final grades indicates some interesting trends. Students who participated in a majority of activities had a slightly higher final grade. The real difference was seen in those who participated in all 20 in-class activities. They had an A average.

More investigation is required with data over several semesters cross-analyzed with variables such as commitment to the course, interest in subject matter, and GPA. An unforeseen circumstance arose when some students chose not to purchase the clicker, took all the quizzes, and then attended lectures. Another student response was the choice of purchasing the clicker, but not the book. Because both lectures and textbook cover essentially the same material in different formats, this served as a cost-saving measure, and was not seen as a negative outcome.

In conclusion, large enrollment courses can retain the lecture format, yet become more engaging by integrating creative solutions. One caveat, "hybrid by choice" needs to be coupled by a dynamic lecture. Without the additional resources of embedded videos and museum artifacts, there would be little competition between a "straight" lecture and the online quiz.

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