

Resource Guide

Promoting Student Interactions in Large Classrooms

It can be difficult to engage and promote active learning with a large number of students in a large classroom, especially in rooms that have fixed seating that make it difficult to interact with students individually. However, there are small strategies you can use to promote student engagement and encourage interaction among students and instructors.

- **Chunk your lecturing:** Consider breaking your lecturing into 10-15 minute chunks to maintain student attention. Break up these segments with interactive activities, discussions, or other brief tasks.
- **Ask meaningful questions:** When assigning in-class activities/questions, make sure that the work encourages students to think critically and promotes group involvement. Recall questions, such as definitions or algorithms, can be answered individually and make it difficult to encourage discussion. Assign group work that asks students to apply, analyze or create knowledge to promote interactions within a classroom that does not naturally promote discussion.
- **Move about the room:** When possible, circulate through the room or change your position during lecture and student work time to help close the barrier between you and the students. Movement has also been seen as a marker for enthusiasm that may motivate students. Movement can take place through the aisles in the room or if space allows, you can block certain rows in the room (by placing a ribbon or other temporary barrier) to allow for movement through large sections of rows.

Resources

Yazedjian, A., & Kolkhorst, B. B. (2007). Implementing Small-Group Activities in Large Lecture Classes. *College Teaching*, 55(4), 164–169.

Grammer, J. K., Xu, K., & Lenartowicz, A. (2021). Effects of context on the neural correlates of attention in a college classroom. *Npj Science of Learning*, 6(1), 1-4. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41539-021-00094-8>

Henshaw, R. G., Edwards, P. M., & Bagley, E. J. (2011). Use of swivel desks and aisle space to promote interaction in mid-sized college classrooms. *Journal of Learning Spaces*, 1(1)

An PowerPoint that shows examples from Geoscience about how design questions to promote interactions using the ICAP Theory of Cognitive Engagement:

https://d320goqmya1dw8.cloudfront.net/files/earth_rendezvous/2020/program/afternoon_workshops/cullicott-amp-semken_icap-4-eer2020.pdf

For more information or to discuss how you might incorporate these ideas into your courses, contact the Reinert Center by email at cttl@slu.edu.