Teaching Large Classes

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Strategies for Large Classes:
Management, Assessment, and Supporting Teaching Assistants

Objectives

▶ Discuss challenges and strategies for classroom management for courses with increased enrollments

▶ Describe strategies for classroom assessments for large courses, using Bloom's taxonomy as a guide for assessment design

▶ Identify tips for teaching assistants (TAs) for large courses
  ▶ Including working with faculty, other TAs, and students

Assessment Strategies for Large Classes

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Assessment: The *Ideal*

► **Ideal**
  ► Design assessments that target higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy

Bloom's Taxonomy

create — Produce new or original work
Design, assemble, construct, conjecture, develop, formulate, author, investigate

evaluate — Justify a stand or decision
appraise, argue, defend, judge, select, support, value, critique, weigh

analyze — Draw connections among ideas
differentiate, organize, relate, compare, contrast, distinguish, examine, experiment, question, test

apply — Use information in new situations
execute, implement, solve, use, demonstrate, interpret, operate, schedule, sketch

understand — Explain ideas or concepts
classify, describe, discuss, explain, identify, locate, recognize, report, select, translate

remember — Recall facts and basic concepts
define, duplicate, list, memorize, repeat, state

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Image source: Armstrong, P. (2010). Bloom's Taxonomy. Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching. Creative Commons. Retrieved August 25, 2022, from
https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/blooms-taxonomy/
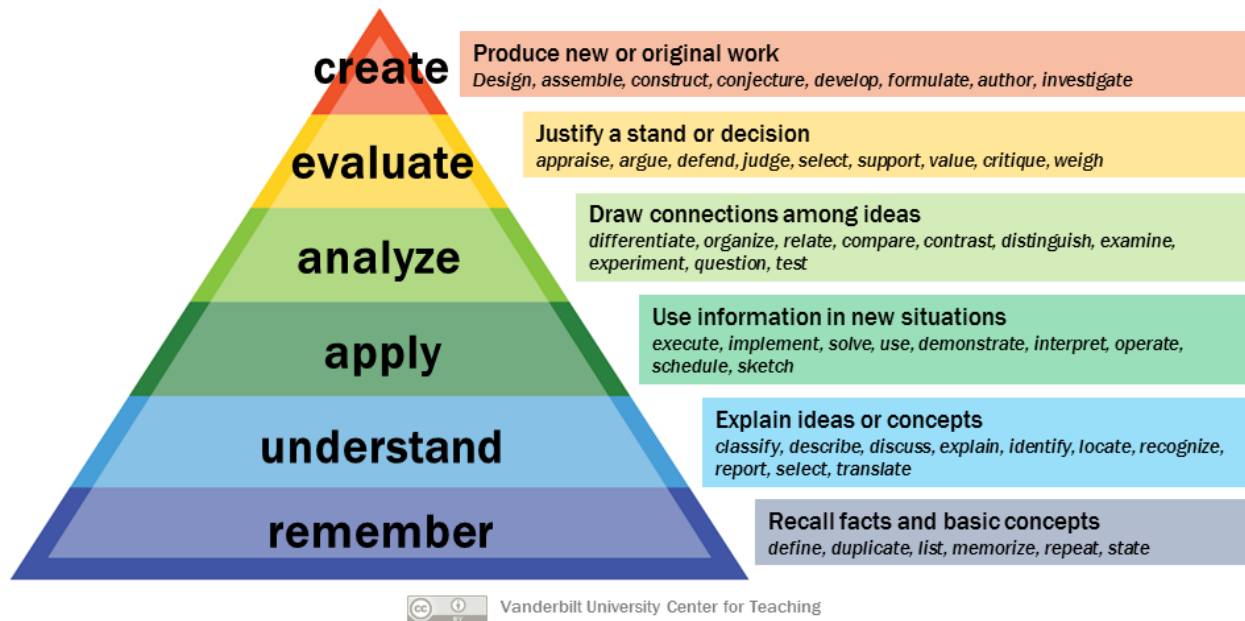
Assessment: *Challenges*

► **Ideal**
  ► Design assessments that target higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy
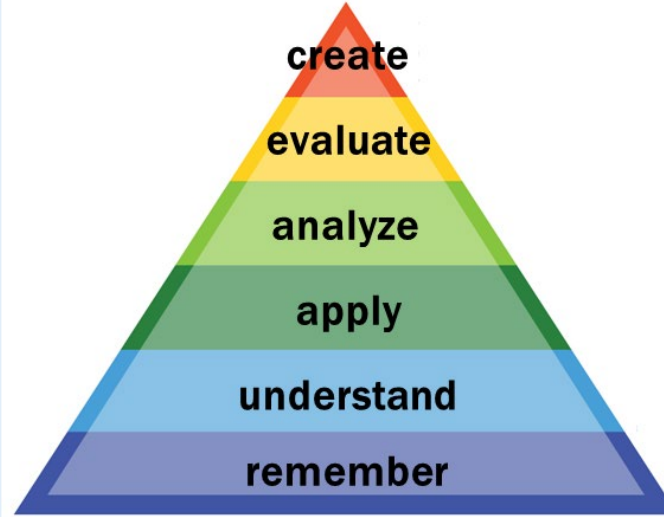
► **Challenges**
  ► These are more difficult to create than those at the bottom
  ► With large class sizes, these can take a *lot* of time and effort to grade!

Bloom's Taxonomy

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Strategies for Challenge 1: Go Higher

► Require critical thinking on assessments
  ► Incorporate range responses
  ► Ask students to **apply** their new knowledge to a new scenario; ask them to **analyze** or **evaluate** the results—or even to **create** something new

create

evaluate

analyze

apply

understand

remember

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► Develop a rubric for these assignments
  ► Sets expectations
  ► Removes ambiguity

► Helpful for subjective assessment

Strategies for Challenge 2: Scale Up

► Incorporate both formative (non-graded) and summative (graded) assessments
  ► Why?
    ● We learn by making mistakes!
  ► Can grade completion yes/no

Assessment	Advantages
Pre- and post-assessments	• *Pre*: tells instructor baseline level and gives students a roadmap for the course • *Post*: shows progress
Practice problems	• Allows students to try out their new skills • To avoid the need to grade and correct, post answer key
Small group project	• With or without presentation to the class or a discussion
In-class polling (during class)	• Can be done online; gives instructor the pulse of the class; can adjust on the fly

Tips for TAs

Elizabeth Stone, MSPH
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Adapted from slides by Linda Chyr, Elizabeth Stone, and Jennifer Deal

# Working with Faculty

► Communicate to faculty the responsibilities you have outside of being a TA during the term
  ► E.g., taking courses, dissertation research

► Clarify expectations of the TA role before the start of the course and throughout the course as responsibilities may shift

► Streamline systems for requesting extensions or other accommodation requests before the term starts
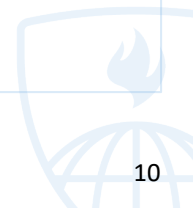
Working with Other TAs

► Delineate the responsibilities of the lead TA versus the non-lead TAs
  ► Administration versus grading

► For larger classes (>100 students), helpful to assign students to TAs to facilitate initial contact person for the course
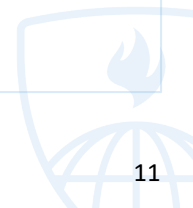
Working with Students

► Introduce yourself as a fellow student who is also taking classes, doing research, etc., at the beginning of the term

► Schedule office hours to help streamline individual questions or concerns over emails

► Use automated features in CoursePlus to track certain metrics as part of assessment
  ► E.g., attendance, participation
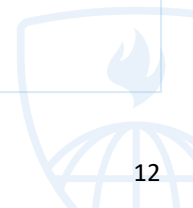
Managing a Larger-than-Usual Class

### M.E. Hughes, PhD
Johns Hopkins University

Two Aspects

1. **Administration:** not just scaling up

2. **Activities:** staff workload and student engagement

▶ General issues to consider, with examples to illustrate

Refine Policies and Procedures

► Anticipate situations and make explicit policies
  ► For example:
    ● Alternate assignment for students who know in advance that they will miss a discussion session
    ● One-late-quiz policy

► Direct students to sources of information beyond course staff
  ► For example:
    ● Links to videos, "how to" documents (e.g., for converting file to PDF)
   ● Reminder about CTL Help for technical CoursePlus issues
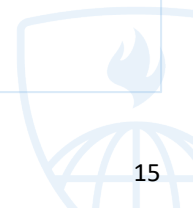
Inform Students about All Policies and Procedures

► Use CoursePlus syllabus page
  ► Many predefined sections
    ● For example, "Definition of Participation," "Group Work Guidelines"
  ► Create custom sections as needed
  ► Add links to documents that have additional details
    ● For example, assignment guidelines

► Show students where to find the information
  ► Tour of CoursePlus site
    ● Faculty use CoursePlus differently
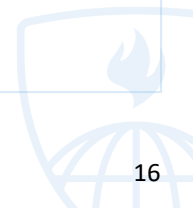
Set Expectations for Communication—1

- ► Provide clear directions about where to ask questions: in class, via email, on Discussion Forum
    - ► Provide details and examples as needed
        - ● For example, email all TAs, what is a "personal question"

- ► Give timeframe in which to expect an answer or format of answer
    - ► For example:
        - ● Respond to Discussion Forum within 24 hours generally, longer on weekends
        - ● Only response to request for quiz extension will be automatic email from CoursePlus
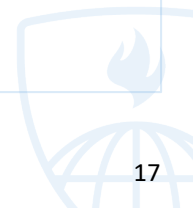
Set Expectations for Communication—2

► Explain what will happen if students do not follow directions
  ► For example, email response, "Please post this question to the Discussion Forum" or "Please see the syllabus"

## Example from a CoursePlus syllabus page

Communication and Questions

General questions about course content or administration should be posted to the appropriate section of the Discussion Forum. Using the Discussion Forum allows all students to benefit from the question and its answer. The Forum will be monitored and questions will usually be answered within 24 hours on weekdays; turnaround on the weekend may be longer. Students should always check the Discussion Forum before posting a question to see if their question has already been asked and answered.

Questions about course policies and procedures that are specific to an individual (e.g., a request for an extension) should be directed to Professor Hughes and the TAs, not to the LiveTalk or Lecture faculty. To ensure they receive a timely response, **a student should send one email, copying Professor Hughes and both TAs. <u>Do not</u> send separate emails to each staff member.**

Time Savers

► Use weekly email to preview content, connect to what has already been covered
 ► Reminders and announcements (reduce time used in class)

► Use CoursePlus Quiz Generator for problem sets or other assignments
 ► Simplifies grading
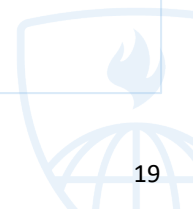
Streamline Behind-the-Scenes Work

► Standardize or automate common tasks
  ► For example:
    ● Preprepared response to quiz extension requests
    ● Tools for scheduled emails and announcements in CoursePlus (use prior year's version as draft)

► Facilitate sharing information among course staff
  ► For example:
    ● Document on OneDrive to record extensions (and other information as needed)
    ● Tag emails when TAs forward to faculty (e.g., "decision needed" or "FYI")
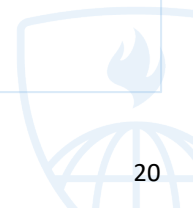
# Concluding Thoughts

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Classroom Management

► Faculty clearly setting expectations at the beginning of term
  ► Communication
  ► Grading
  ► Accommodation and flexibility

► Weekly faculty emails to students of what is happening this week in the course

► Prepare for accessibility needs and accommodations

► Consider the intention and equity of language and processes

► How can students support each other?

Assessments

- ▶ Set clear expectations for any group work

- ▶ Utilize formative (non-graded) assessments when possible
  - ▶ E.g., lecture self-assessments

- ▶ Make use of CoursePlus tools
  - ▶ Promote academic integrity
  - ▶ Grading in Quiz Generator
  - ▶ Peer assessment/wiki
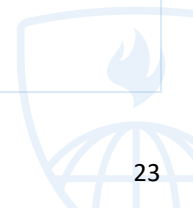
Supporting TAs

► Before class starts, set clear expectations for the position, including workflow and time
  ► Put in writing if possible

► During class, put a process in place for frequent TA check-ins
  ► Ensure fair division of labor
  ► Reminders of upcoming schedule

► Protect TA time