

COMMON CHALLENGES FOR INSTRUCTORS IN LARGE ONLINE COURSES: STRATEGIES TO MITIGATE STUDENT AND INSTRUCTOR FRUSTRATION

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ABSTRACT

Teaching in the online classroom is becoming commonplace for instructors as universities seek to grow enrollments and tap into unexplored markets. Many instructors, however, are often unprepared for the nuances of distance education and apprehensive about making the transition to online learning. This article aims to discuss common challenges for instructors of high-enrollment online courses (70+ students). Course design and instructional effectiveness are some of the most significant challenges facing instructors tasked with managing large online courses and those challenges align with the areas students commonly consider as necessary for successful online delivery. Using examples from large online classes and the existing research on best practices in online education, ways to minimize those challenges will be discussed. These suggestions include recommendations for assignment construction, including the use of group work, collaborative assignments, e-portfolios, as well as for planning course design, including consistent deadlines and course structure. These suggestions are aimed at mitigating student and instructor frustration with high enrollment online classes.

Keywords: high-enrollment online, undergraduate education, instructor challenges, online teaching

INTRODUCTION

It would not be surprising to learn that the number of students enrolling in online courses has grown substantially in recent years. In fall 2002, when Babson Survey Research began to track the number of students enrolled in distance education, just over 1.6 million students were taking at least one online course, representing 9.6 percent of overall enrollment in American universities. Five years later, that number had grown to just under 3.5 million, representing almost 20 percent of campus enrollments. In 2012, the number had jumped to over 7.1 million students, or 33.5 percent of all enrollments (Allen & Seaman, 2013). In the decade since 2002, total online enrollment has more than

quadrupled, representing a substantial portion of many universities' student body. Recognizing it as an area of potential growth, many public and private institutions have entered the online learning game, hoping to capture a portion of the students previously enrolled at online for-profit institutions. While an increase in students is certainly good for the financial health and sustainability of a university, it introduces a number of challenges for instructors tasked with managing the rapid growth of online courses. This article explores one of those challenges—managing large enrollment online courses—and introduces issues of increased student contact hours, messages and email, questions, grading, and changes the day-to-day

business of managing an online course. Managing online courses with 70 or more students has led to a number of useful tips for mitigating the increased workload.

Online Versus Traditional Courses

Perhaps it is easiest to think of online and face-to-face (f2f) courses with the analogy of setting out on a road trip using two very different forms of travel. Teaching traditional, f2f courses is like departing for a road trip via a car. One would begin the road trip with the GPS programmed to the end destination, but if all passengers want to take the scenic route, it is easy to divert from the planned route. While most instructors start the semester with a syllabus that lays out a clear plan of where they are going and what they want to accomplish, it is easy to divert attention to other topics if the need arises. Student comprehension of a concept might falter, leading to reviewing or rehashing course materials, or interest in a tangential topic may spark a meaningful and vibrant course discussion on something that was not on the day's schedule.

Teaching online is comparable to leaving for a trip on an Amtrak train. Once the train leaves the station, it is clear when and where it will stop and its path follows the prescribed tracks. In an online course, once the class begins, both student and instructor are on a path from which they cannot easily divert their attention or interests. Best practices in online course design urge instructors to make available substantial portions of the course before the semester starts (Zsohar & Smith, 2008) and emphasize it is highly problematic for instructors to ad lib an online course (Kelly, 2013). This means the map decided upon weeks in advance of the semester is the map maintained throughout the semester. Ensuring that design is clear and properly aligned to the goals of the course becomes even more essential.

Clear course design and a well-thought-out plan for the semester becomes even more important as the total number of students enrolled in a class grows. Fielding dozens of emails about issues with course design, grading, or assignments significantly affects both instructor and student success in the course. Instructors may have a difficult time managing grading and course maintenance if they spend the bulk of their time "putting out fires." Recognizing potential challenges and solutions before a semester begins can save substantial

headaches later on. Similarly, if an instructor accepts a high-enrollment online course, pre-semester planning becomes even more critical.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature examining the impact of online course size is relatively limited, which is surprising given that adding additional enrollment to online courses is seen by many as a low cost, high financial reward proposition. The existing research has largely looked at the impact of online education on instructor workload. Using calculations based upon the number of hours of instructor time devoted to teaching (over service and research), Tomei (2006) argues that a class of just 12 students will absorb all of the designated instructor time, indicating that the ideal online class size is relatively small. This is in comparison to the same amount of time allocated to 17 f2f students (Tomei, 2006). Other authors have tried to quantify the increased effort that arises as enrollment caps creep above the ideal size. For instance, one other study found each student added to his online course added an additional six hours and 46 minutes of instruction time to his workload (Cavanaugh, 2005).

Work on best practices for large online classes is in shorter supply. This may be because of the large gulf between normal online course enrollments (in the range of 20–25) and MOOCs, which informally enroll thousands. One study suggested courses with online enrollments larger than 45 were considered "large enrollments" and were difficult to compare with f2f courses (Freeman, 2015). Another study found three highly rated MOOCs shared several common factors: problem-centered learning with clear explanations, instructor presence and passion, peer-to-peer interaction, active learning, and varied course resources (Hew, 2016). These factors relate to both the best practices in f2f learning as well as best practices in smaller online courses, but courses with 75 or more students remain largely unexplored.

This article explores the middle ground between the ideal online course (of less than 20) and MOOCs and discusses two commonly-faced challenges in managing online courses of between 70 to 125 students. In addition, several solutions that should be utilized before or during the semester will be explored. These challenges and solutions build upon existing work by both

Chickering and Ehrmann's (1996) and Grant and Thornton's (2007) on best practices in technology-facilitated instruction. In particular, course design and instructional effectiveness are especially challenging in the framework of large online classes, but they are the exact themes students identify as being important to their success (Grant & Thornton, 2007).

CHALLENGE #1: COURSE DESIGN

Organization and class structure are important components in any college classroom. However, creating a class structure within the online classroom can be one of the most challenging aspects of online teaching. Authors have suggested that meticulous organization and planning is the first step to teaching a good online course (Dykman & Davis, 2008) and establishing a pattern to course activities ranks highly on principles of effective online teaching (Ragan, 2007). As the size of the class increases, clear course design becomes increasingly important. Students report that quality course design involves facilitated discussions, a variety of activities, consistent structure and clear deadlines, and immediate feedback (Grant & Thornton, 2007). Although it may seem superfluous, the course content should be visually stimulating, just as a lecture in a f2f classroom would be visually and verbally stimulating. Many of these student requests become difficult for large classes without careful planning and course management.

There is a wide variation in who is responsible for course design—the faculty member or an instructional designer—from campus to campus. At some institutions, faculty create the online content within a learning management system (LMS) with little, if any, support from instructional designers, whereas other institutions have more involved web designers and instructional assistants. Several models of how to successfully create online course structure have been proposed. One academic unit assigned faculty members as Lead Faculty in Online Education and compensated them for engaging in the necessary training and supported them with necessary resources to create course shells that could then be passed along as consistent courses for all adjunct instructors to teach from (Alexander, 2015). Another model recognized the importance of shifting the instructor's approach

to students when transitioning from f2f teaching to online teaching. In doing so, Baran and Correia (2014) proposed a professional development model to help support instructors in that transition. Specifically, they proposed a multitiered model of support that included organization, community, and teaching to develop instructors to be successful in the online classroom. Another author emphasized the importance of gaining faculty buy in for online education by developing faculty incentives for teaching online (Herman, 2013). As is evident, there are many ways that institutions handle the challenge of and necessity for quality online course structure. This article aims to give instructors manageable solutions, regardless of the institutional framework at their university, that will be applicable to nearly all online courses where the enrollment is higher (70–125 students) than the ideal course size (20–30 students).

A common practice in online education is to develop standardized curricula, or course shells, within an LMS. This practice increases consistency of both design and content, easing the burden for instructors, but it also minimizes confusion for the students (Borgemenke, Hold, & Fish, 2013). An instructor may need to create a shell within the LMS that includes consistent learning outcomes, modules, exams, and assignments that is then taught across the department for any instructor teaching that course. From there, the course shell is then tweaked by the primary instructor from semester to semester to ensure quality and academic rigor are intact (Miller, 2012). The suggestions presented here are appropriate additions to a course shell that could be shared across instructors or adjuncts.

Encouraging facilitated discussions.

Encouraging peer-to-peer interaction will help manage an instructor's workload in a large class while also meeting student's preferences. Instructors in all online classes must work to increase "social presence," or a student's connectedness or sense of belonging in the course (Picciano, 2002). This sense of belonging to a group is natural in a f2f setting because of the physical proximity of the students' peers. However, in an online class, students need to feel connected to both the instructor and their peers. When enrollments soar above 70 students in an online course, creating a sense of connectedness needs careful planning.

There are numerous ways to get students interacting with one another in the online classroom, with forums and discussion boards being among the most ubiquitous tools to encourage interaction. However, it can be challenging to make the contact within the forum genuine, or at least mimic that which would occur in a f2f setting. For instance, many students may have overly positive or generally vague comments (e.g., “Great post!” or “I really like what you said here.”). It is also unreasonable to believe students (and instructors) will read the comments of each of the other 90 students in their classroom, as it becomes unwieldy to follow. Furthermore, it is challenging for instructors to know how much or how little to actually participate in the forum to maximize student engagement. Instructors need to ensure content is not being misunderstood, but too great an instructor presence in the forum may foster dependency on the instructor and inadvertently decrease student participation (Paloff & Pratt, 2001). A review of how to effectively engage online discussions highlights the importance of designing a strong prompt for discussion, as well as practical suggestions for instructor facilitation (Rovai, 2007). Instructors should describe clear ground rules for forum behavior at the outset and design group forums—rather than class-wide forums—for particularly large classes (Ravai, 2007). In addition, it is important that instructors refrain from being the center of attention or mass-posting in the forum space (Mazzolini & Maddison, 2007). Rather, the instructor should aim to encourage discussion between students, perhaps by reframing questions posed by students and soliciting participation from quiet members of the group. Finally, it is important to consider how to assess forums. One study found discussion participation should account for approximately 10 to 20 % of the students’ final grade to maximize student participation (Ravai, 2003). Furthermore, Meyer (2006) reviewed numerous methods for creating rubrics, frameworks, and scoring criteria for forum assignments. He highlighted the importance of determining the purpose of the assessment—interaction, critical thinking, or content knowledge—before creating an evaluation method (2006). This maximizes the chances that students receive effective feedback and the instructor will have good assessment data for the course.

Create a variety of activities.

From the student perspective, having a wide variety of learning activities keeps the course interesting (Grant & Thornton, 2007). In addition to effectively facilitated forums, it is recommended that instructors teaching large online courses introduce group work to encourage students to interact with one another. Many instructors require group work in the f2f classroom but are more hesitant to assign group work in the online classroom. Although the logistics of getting students connected may seem daunting, it really can be easy for students to coordinate phone meetings, video conferences, and email chains to be just as connected as those who meet f2f. In fact, most students who do group work in a f2f setting do much of their communication online anyway. Therefore, creating group work in the online classroom may be an innovative way to get students connected and to cut down on the number of assignments instructors need to grade.

We have found, however, that online group work does require different organization than f2f group work. First, creating groups with similar working styles and availability is more complex, as students live in different cities, states, and even countries, not to mention time zones. The use of the free online CATME (Comprehensive Assessment of Team-Member Effectiveness) Project can help to create cohesive groups that will work together (Layton, Loughry, Ohland, & Ricco, 2010). Instructors using the CATME system can build teams based upon their preferences and groups are automatically generated using student survey responses. In addition, CATME includes peer evaluation tools to also improve students’ ability to give peer feedback, increasing connections with others students in the online classroom. One recent study outlined the process by which instructors could incorporate CATME into their course, including examples of learning goals with criterion markers for ease of implementation (Loughry, Ohland, & Woehr, 2014).

Second, it is recommended that instructors create larger than normal groups. Optimal group size is dependent on the complexity and nature of the task (Rothwell, 2004). However, the risks of shirking, course withdrawal, or simple absences seems to be higher in many large online classes, warranting slightly larger than typical groups. Again, depending on the complexity

of the assignment, creating groups of six to ten students ensures that work is divided equitably. It also prevents the burden of work from being disproportionately shared by only one or two students while still allowing for the online drifter or social loafer. To prevent under-contributing students from reaping unfair benefits, it is also important to create an opportunity for peer review and to build in a “circuit breaker” for students who fail to meet a minimum threshold of participation. One of the authors includes the following language in the group assignments to prohibit free riding:

Students who are evaluated by their peers as having failed to satisfactorily participate in the group’s work (rated at 67 percent or below) will not receive the group’s grade. Instead, you will receive a grade comprised of my and your group’s evaluation of your work. This means, while a group may receive an A on the project, the free rider could receive a D or below.

Creating collaborative assignments, rather than simply cooperative assignments, is crucial. Collaborative assignments require the students work together to develop ideas together and create a cohesive piece of work, whereas cooperative assignments simply allow each student to work on his or her part and then piece them all together at the end (Curtis & Lawson, 2001). One example is raising a virtual child as a means to apply personality theories to a growing “individual.” Students are placed in a team for the semester whereby they raise their virtual child together and each have opportunities to share their “parenting” advice to best raise the virtual child. Although the primary goal is for students to work together to see theories in “real life,” this project also opens the students’ eyes to the diversity of other students’ perspective on parenting. This latter goal has been the topic of positive comments from students about the value of working with other students on this project, something that would have otherwise not occurred naturally in the online setting.

Another increasingly popular course assignment in the online classroom is an e-portfolio. Included as a high-impact practice, e-portfolios are great additions to large online classrooms (Kuh, 2008; Hubert, Pickavance, & Hyberger, 2015). In addition to allowing flexibility and variety for students, an

e-portfolio can minimize weekly grading and still keep students engaged throughout the semester. For instance, instructors could use e-portfolios by requiring students develop an artifact for each chapter or module. This requires the student to do something “outside of the classroom” to apply the material they are learning. Logistically, students describe what they did and why they did it and then reflect on how it is meaningful to what they have learned. For example, to further apply the concepts of positive reinforcement, the students could watch YouTube videos and reflect on how they connected the material from the text and YouTube videos in their reflection papers. Alternatively, they could apply the principles of positive reinforcement to their pet and reflect on how positive or negative reinforcement worked. This allows for generalization of the concepts and integration of the material throughout the semester, which is a positive indicator for students (Mason, Pegler, & Weller, 2004).

Maintain Consistency and Clear Deadlines to Decrease Student Confusion

In f2f teaching, instructors may prepare lectures or classroom activities, but the immediate, live interaction in the classroom may shift the original lecture or activity. In other words, the fluidity of the f2f classroom is such that based on specific interaction with students, the instructor may alter his or her plan for teaching on any given day (the day trip highlighted in the road trip metaphor above). In the online classroom, this fluidity is less realistic (the train tracks are set when the semester begins). Students expect consistency from week to week in the structure of the online classroom and if that is altered, it becomes confusing for the students (Dykman & Davis, 2008). As a result, instructors are challenged with creating the entire semester’s structure, if not the entirety of the material, at the onset of the semester. This is particularly challenging for instructors preparing a new course they have never taught before and/or instructors who have only taught f2f classes.

Although the upfront planning is critical for decreasing student confusion (Li & Irby, 2008), it can be very time-consuming for the instructor. Anecdotally, it is one of the most common concerns of instructors who are resistant to transitioning to online teaching (Matsom, 2006). One recent calculation estimated it takes approximately 650 hours of the instructor’s time to transition a course

from f2f instruction to online instruction (not including the learning curve of technologically inexperienced instructors) (Crews, Wilkinson, Hemby, McCannon, & Wiedmaier, 2008). Another preliminary study found 47 percent of instructors estimated needing more than 100 hours to prepare an online course for the first time (Freeman, 2015). As is evident, it may be impossible to really hone in on how much time it takes to develop an online course well. What is clear is the necessity for this development period, which is clearly a large chunk of time, to happen prior to the start of the course.

Structure the Course to Decrease Student Emails and Increase Positive Interaction

Instructors can easily explain expectations and clarify any confusion within the f2f classroom immediately. Similarly, students can ask questions of one another before or after class. This is arguably quite difficult in the online classroom. Instructors rarely get the opportunity to clarify possible misunderstandings in the moment they occur (Conaway, Easton, & Schmidt, 2005) due to the asynchronous nature of online courses. It is also less common for students to email one another about a question they may have (as opposed to the aforementioned discussion between one another before or after class). As the level of confusion for the students increases, the number of emails to the instructor increases. One of the most common complaints for instructors teaching online is the high number of emails received from students—particularly emails that ask similar questions—as well as the added time required to respond to those emails in a comprehensive and thorough manner (Cavanaugh, 2005; Everson, 2009; Sellani & Harrington, 2002). A well-developed syllabus with very clear expectations for the students is a crucial part to decreasing student emails. In addition, having a “frequently asked questions” page or discussion board can also be helpful to decrease student confusion and emails. By creating a “space” for them to ask general questions in a discussion board or chat room, you allow students to ask questions in a similar manner to raising their hand in the f2f classroom setting. Again, the number of emails and the importance of minimizing confusion grows exponentially as class size grows.

Explain the Importance of Netiquette

Along this line, the instructor is responsible for

educating students about appropriate interaction (i.e., “netiquette”) within the online classroom, which is unique to online learning. In the f2f classroom, the instructor can use modeling and nonverbal cues to help students understand the expectations of classroom behavior and peer-to-peer interaction. While it could be argued that instructors can also model appropriate netiquette in the online classroom, students often feel a greater sense of anonymity in the online classroom versus the f2f classroom. As such, students often make different types of comments, often more inappropriate (e.g., offensive or aggressive comments to peers or instructors), within the online classroom that they likely would not make in a room full of peers. When students are paired into small groups and tasked with collaborative group assignments, or when an instructor is simply overwhelmed by the number of weekly discussion posts made, it is easier for these inappropriate comments to be missed in a large class. This suggests students need explicit instructions about the expectations of how to behave in the online classroom. Netiquette is a term that implies courtesy in interpersonal communication to encourage positive online interactions between students and the instructor (Mintu-Wimsatt, Kernek, & Losada, 2010; Scheuermann & Taylor, 1997). Some examples of guidelines for appropriate netiquette should be a part of the syllabus to clarify expectations for students in advance. Some examples of good netiquette include using appropriate professional language, proper grammar and spelling, being honest and truthful, thinking and proofreading before you send, and respecting the opinions of others (Berk, 2011).

Although it is argued here that including guidelines for netiquette is an important part of online learning, it is also important to help students understand how to respectfully disagree with one another in the online milieu. Otherwise, as noted above, forum discussions typically end up being overly positive (e.g., “nice work!” or “I agree with everything you said. Well done!”) and lack genuine character. Clouder and colleagues (2011) suggest student learning can actually be enhanced by allowing and encouraging disagreement. When disagreement occurs, the students are challenged to expand their viewpoint. This can be a tremendous opportunity for learning and connecting with

other peers within the online learning community. However, students may need explicit instructions about how to be professional in disagreeing with others, and instructors may need to engage in forum discussions with the students and model how to challenge a student's way of thinking. In addition, specific instructions for how to respond to a peer's email or forum post are important (e.g., "Your response must be at least 3 sentences and cannot simply say "good job" or "I agree with you!").

CHALLENGE #2: INSTRUCTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

It goes without saying that much of instructional effectiveness is related to course design. However, from the student perspective, instructional effectiveness is also related to instructor presence, availability, and organization. It can be challenging to determine how present an instructor needs to be in the online classroom, especially when other responsibilities and classes also demand attention. Further, when there is no set class time and students engage in material at any hour of the day, it can be difficult to set boundaries with regard to when and how long the instructor is "available." With a high-enrollment online classroom, managing these expectations in advance is an important part of teaching.

Instructor presence and availability.

Swan and Shih (2005) noted that social presence is an important component to online success but that perceived connection to the instructor is even more important than peer connections. Student satisfaction with online courses is significantly correlated with knowing the instructor (Thurmond, Wambach, Connors, & Frey, 2002), yet many students express dissatisfaction with a lack of contact with their instructor (Offir, Lev, & Bezalel, 2007). This dissatisfaction is particularly acute in large-scale classes, especially MOOCs (Warren, Rixner, Greiner, & Wong, 2014). It is easy for instructors to appear removed from an online course or for their perceived presence to suffer. As noted above, constantly being in the forums or discussions may not be possible and instructors will see an increase in the amount of grading and messages they receive regardless of course structure. We have found that providing introductory videos and including instructor's voices and faces in other lecture videos throughout the semester increases student respect

for the instructor and their sense of connectedness to the course and university. Instructors who are uncomfortable with filming can prepare podcasts or other voice recordings discussing course concepts or providing general feedback for all students on a particular assignment. It may also be as simple as sending frequent messages and reminders throughout the semester to keep students on track with deadlines and connected to the course. This type of presence may contribute not only to satisfaction with the course but also retention and persistence (Morris & Finnegan, 2008).

Immediate feedback to increase student effectiveness.

In large online classrooms, it can be challenging to include grading-heavy assignments (i.e., something other than a multiple choice exam or assignment that is self-graded). However, rubrics, when carefully crafted, can streamline grading assignments while still providing specific feedback for students. As is true with any assignment, it is critical that expectations for that assignment are laid out clearly for the students. As has been described, clearly outlining these expectations in advance is even more critical to minimizing confusion and frustration in the online classroom. Generally speaking, most rubrics have three main components: criteria to be evaluated, descriptive statement(s) of each criterion, and a scoring strategy (Popham, 1997). Reddy and Andrade (2010) include an example of a rubric that includes very specific information that provides students with detailed feedback about their performance.

Organization to increase learning and retention.

When students need to spend less time trying to figure out the structure of the course, they can spend more time and energy learning the course content. When students experience a high level of instructional design and organization within their online course, they report higher levels of satisfaction and learning (Shea, Pickett, & Pelz, 2003). Estimates of the dropout rate in the online classroom suggest they are 10–40 % higher than in f2f classrooms (Angelina, Williams, & Natvig, 2007; Carr, 2000). These numbers are especially alarming at a time when all universities are trying to increase student retention. The structure of the course must immediately engage the students in a way that entices them to want to learn more. Just as

the f2f instructor may come in on the first day of classes with a strong sense of enthusiasm or a fun icebreaker activity to try to get students engaged, a similar “get excited about the course” activity is warranted in the online classroom. The first way to get students engaged is for instructors to include a welcoming and enthusiastic introductory video. This video will allow you to share a bit of your personality and enthusiasm for teaching. In addition, instructors can also require students do their own welcome video to introduce themselves to the course. This immediately helps students feel more connected to one another and can be a simple task for them to complete.

The organization of the course comes through consistency with the presentation of content. This can be conceptualized by a simple question: What do you really want students to learn? Although this question is important as a semester-long question (i.e., what do you want the students to learn by the time they leave this class?), it is also a critical question for each learning unit that is developed in the online classroom. Just as the f2f instructor should have a goal for each classroom lecture, the online instructor needs to consider unit-level objectives and the means by which the students will achieve those objectives. Typically, instructors expect students to read a textbook or article about the topic for each unit and to engage in some type of learning activity (e.g., watching a lecture, video, podcast, or PowerPoint) that is created by the instructor for each unit. Finally, for each unit the instructor may expect the students to explore the topic in more detail or apply their knowledge of the material to a new situation through an assignment (e.g., quiz, short paper, or assignment.). To help students attain these goals, create a structure within each learning unit or chapter that is consistent from week to week under subheadings such as READ, LEARN, EXPLORE or WATCH, and APPLY. By creating this consistent structure, students will know exactly what they need to do from week to week. They will always expect to read in their textbook, learn by watching a narrated PowerPoint, watch provided videos or explore websites, and apply what they have learned in various methods. This structure also allows instructors to front load some of the work of teaching a large online course. Students are still engaging with the materials in various ways without adding significantly to the

number of assignments graded per week.

Another suggestion is to have those unit-level objectives posted at the outset of the unit and again at the end of the unit to encourage the students to check for understanding and to guide their review of the material in preparation of weekly or unit quizzes or exams. It is also important to set specific deadlines that recur each week and to include those assignment deadlines with the unit learning outcomes (Zsohar & Smith, 2008). Managing communications in larger classes can become overwhelming. Ensuring students have access to the assignment deadlines within the module or unit will help limit student confusion and emails. Having assignments submitted on the same date and at the same time does the same.

CONCLUSION

When instructors are faced with the challenge of teaching a high-enrollment online course, setting the stage for success well in advance is crucial to both student and instructor success. As the field continues to study and cultivate best practices in online education, it is likely that additional strategies for instructors will emerge. The challenge for instructors is having the pedagogical knowledge to decipher how to actually implement such strategies in a large online class effectively.

This article has highlighted several strategies for managing large online courses and minimizing instructor and student frustration in the process. Building upon the work of Chickering and Ehrmann (1996) and Grant and Thornton (2007), this paper argues that course design and instructional effectiveness are two of the most significant challenges for instructors teaching large online courses. For instructors designing a high-enrollment online course, it is recommended that instructors use small group discussions, collaborative assignments, and e-portfolios to minimize the grading workload, and keep students engaged and connected to the course. Up front planning and clear and consistent deadlines minimize confusion and limit the number of incoming emails and phone calls. In a large online course, instructional effectiveness is increased by improving instructor presence, setting appropriate boundaries, implementing rubrics for grading and evaluation, and developing an organizational structure that supports your pedagogical goals.

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