Exploring What's Possible in Large Courses: A Faculty Learning Community

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Program Goals & Structure

Program Goal
Provide an opportunity for faculty to explore key pedagogical challenges and opportunities present in large courses (defined as those serving 75+ students)

Program Structure
- Attend four learning community meetings
- Complete preparatory work for each meeting (e.g. reading a short article, viewing a podcast, and/or completing a web-based task). These activities give faculty experience with pedagogies that address the science of learning topics explored in the meetings.
- Observe a large class taught by an exemplar U-M professor (chosen from a multidisciplinary list of faculty)
- Workshop a course artifact
- (Optional) Apply for a $2000 Course Development Grant

Session Plans

Session One: What's possible in a large course, considerations of student motivation

Session Two: Some tools, a few lessons from the cognitive sciences

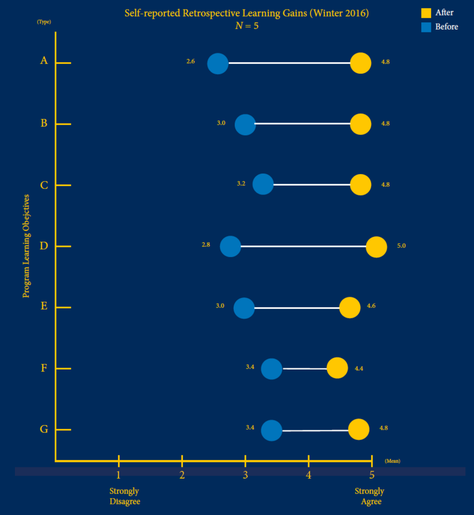
Session Three: Debrief of course visits, managing practice and feedback opportunities in large classes

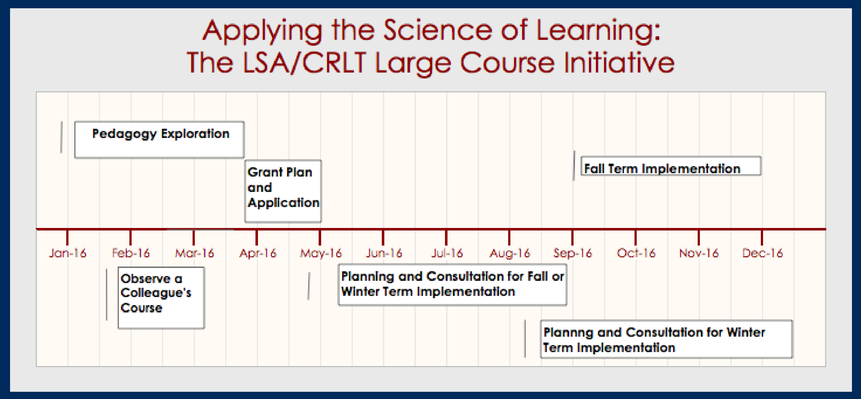
Session Four: Workshopping your courses

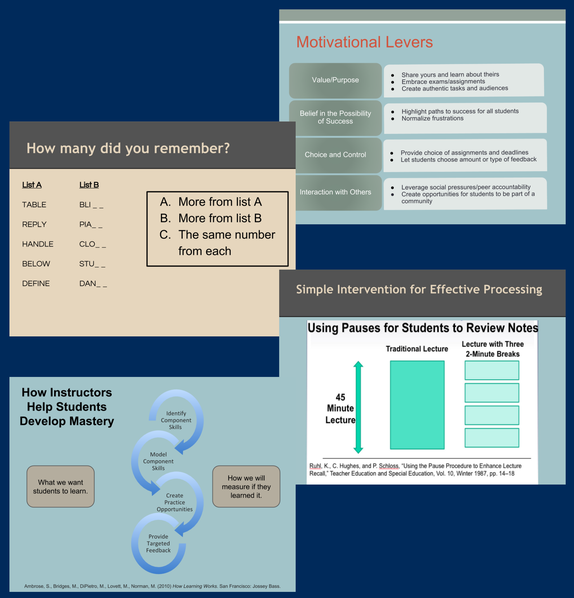
Program Learning Objectives

In this program, faculty gain:

A. The ability to apply key concepts from the science of learning (e.g., retrieval effect, framing, divided attention)
B. Strategies for leveraging student motivation in large courses.
C. Strategies for incorporating active learning in large courses.
D. Strategies for explaining and modeling key component skills they want students to learn in large courses.
E. Strategies for providing students practice and feedback opportunities in large courses.
F. Strategies for supporting the learning of students with a wide range of backgrounds or prior knowledge in large courses.
G. A clear sense of the desired relation between lecture and section for large course.







"The program did a great job of introducing the range of techniques and strategies that can be effective in a lecture course without insisting that a particular set of practices was superior."

"Always thought you could either teach a lecture course or a discussion course. [I have a] new appreciation for the full range of possibilities that exist."

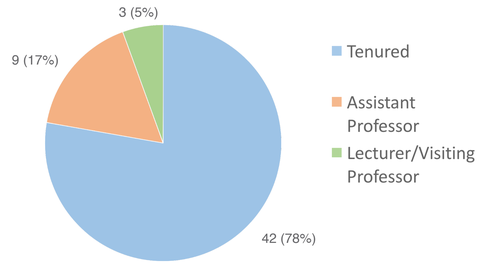
"It is good to be in a seminar with experienced instructors discussing possibilities...I am also impressed with the emphasis that is placed on [students] acquiring both knowledge and skills. The material that has been presented to me on the former (where I had more confidence perhaps than I should have) is particularly illuminating."

"This is the first time in my career that I have been systematically exposed to what is known about learning and how we might use those results in the classroom."

Participants

- Five offerings to date, beginning in Winter 2013
- 54 faculty, the majority associate and full professors:
- 28 departments ranging from Astronomy to Anthropology
- 42 faculty applied for and received $2000 grants from the college to support pedagogical innovations in their large courses

Participants by Rank (*N* = 54)



Faculty Plans

These were the most common practices that faculty planned to incorporate into their large courses after the program.

1. Using technology (e.g., iClickers, google forms, polling applications) to integrate practice and feedback opportunities into class
2. Using collaborative learning activities (small group discussion, think-pair-share activities, group assignments) to enhance student engagement and learning
3. Integrating low-stakes writing assignments that provide practice and feedback
4. Crowdsourcing learning via online tools both in and out of class
5. Creating authentic assignments to increase student engagement

Acknowledgments

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