

Teaching Tips for Smaller Online Sections

Smaller online classes can be challenging but there are unique opportunities for students and faculty when the numbers are low. Students can take on a leadership role in the class, and faculty can try new tools or technologies without feeling overwhelmed. Check out the tips below for some ideas to get you started!

Communication

- Use a similar foundational approach to communication regardless of class size. Post weekly announcements, etc.
 - TIP: If you have been hesitant to make the jump to video, try creating your Weekly Announcement with video about important deadlines, to-do's, and any important advice/information they should have to be successful.
- Set expectations about how to use communication channels and expected response time.
- Schedule an optional Zoom on Day 4 to do a "live" Q&A of how the course works and to answer pressing questions. With a smaller class, you may be able to more easily schedule a time to have a class community chat.
- Try something new in your communication like an infographic or video.

Facilitation Strategies

- Smaller classes means you can try different approaches in the classroom. Consider the following options:
 - Create greater connections by posting a student kudos post each week. Use this post to feature a student.
 - Offer guidance on how to engage in a discussion board where there are fewer students. Acknowledge the situation, and then remind students that because they will be taking less time reading peers' posts, they can reply with more detailed questions and connections.
 - Consider modifying discussion forums to be application-based where you could use the concept covered and ask the students to observe and/or apply a skill set and report on their findings in the discussion. Then assign just one peer reply that could offer what surprised them, what excited them, and/or what confused them about it.
 - Consider modifying discussion forums to a longer initial post with fewer peer replies or ask the students to post a video with one reply (essentially moving the seat time to the initial post).
 - To help students build a vocabulary of inquiry, offer question stems that can be used to stimulate discussion.
 - Look for connection points among student ideas and focus on collaborative questions rather than long scripted responses that are dense with content.

- Empower students by assigning discussion roles to the students in a rotating manner (discussion leader, theme generator, resource sharer, etc.) to create agency for students and add to the richness of the discussion. This can also
- Share supplementary resources. Come across a great article or YouTube video that highlights something you are discussing in class? Share!
- Be ready with next level questions to share mid-week in discussion. In smaller sections, discussion may need to be re-energized. Having a question ready to dive deeper can help.
- Commit to humanizing the course to decrease isolation. See the resource section below for more ideas!

Assessment and Feedback

- Try a feedback tool that goes beyond text response. Within D2L you can add video or audio feedback. With fewer students to grade, you have a bit more time to figure out something new.
- As you would in any size class, be sure to offer detailed feedback that aligns to the rubric.

Resources for Further Consideration

One benefit of smaller class sizes is the opportunity to focus on active learning, high quality feedback and community building. The following resources:

How and Why to Humanize your Online course:

<https://onlinenetworkofeducators.org/how-and-why-to-humanize-your-online-course/>

Engaging Asynchronous Discussions: [Engaging Asynchronous Discussions | National Louis University | Chicago, Illinois | Tampa, Florida \(nl.edu\)](#)

Thomas, R.A. (2021, June 22). *5 Considerations for class size in online asynchronous courses*. OLC Insights Blog.

<https://onlinelearningconsortium.org/5-considerations-for-class-size-in-online-asynchronous-courses/>