

HIGH INTERACTION IN LARGE CLASSROOM FORMATS: TWO PROJECTS TO STIMULATE THE CLASS ENVIRONMENT

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The large classroom format has long been in use in university course scheduling. This trend is expected to continue considering the increasing numbers of new students along with declines in funding sources (Anderson, et.al., 2003). Even institutions priding themselves in more personalized classroom settings with smaller class sizes have had to resort to larger formats for introductory courses.

In a 1980 study, “73-80 percent of college teachers surveyed identified the lecture method as their usual instructional strategy” (Lambert, 2012; Gardiner, 1994). Over the years, instructors have explored different pedagogical methods to reduce the boredom factor of one-way passive communication and stimulate student learning (Khan, 2012; Cooper and Robinson, 2000; Frederick, 1987). The literature contains numerous articles examining the effectiveness of the large classroom format from perspectives of students as well as instructors. “Eliciting student feedback in large university lecture classes is challenging, as a result lectures tend to lack interaction” (Bligh, 2000).

According to Wulff, Nyquist and Abbott (1987) there are advantages and disadvantages to utilizing the large classroom format. These authors identified, 1) lessen individual responsibility 2) impersonal nature and 3) noise and distractions as the cons of employing large class formats. The factors that favored large-class pedagogical methods were listed as: 1) increased chance for student interaction, 2) the low pressure element, students don't feel singled out, 3) increased sense of independence, and 4) variety of attendance options, students could skip without notice. Fredericks's (1987, 1981) historical treatment grouped the instruction of large classes into six different active learning methods:

- Interactive lectures
- Questioning
- Using small groups in large classes
- Critical thinking and problem solving exercises
- Large classroom debates
- Simulations and role playing

The current paper presents two projects which address active learning methods within a large classroom format (N = 120+ students). They both involve small group projects which forces students to interact and get involved. The first project “Marketing a Product” utilizes the strategy of using small groups in large classes while providing students with a critical thinking problem solving exercise. The second project “The Interview” also uses the small group inquiry/reflection approach along with role playing as a strategy to enhance student interaction.

Project 1: Marketing a Product

Students are asked to form groups of 6 to 7 members. Once groups are formed students are asked to select a specific product category. For their selected product category they are asked to identify the target market variables. The assignment requires student groups to market their product utilizing the following activities of marketing:

Product

Creating a product within the product category they selected

Giving their product a name
Assigning their product tangible and/or intangible attributes

Place

Deciding what types of outlets will sell their product
Determining the intensity of distribution
Selecting and giving a rationale for the mode of transportation
Choosing the channel structure

Promotion

Crafting a promotional mix strategy
Designing the specifics of the message

Price

Determining the price
Selecting the type of pricing strategies to be used

To adapt this project to a large classroom format the group papers are ranked and the top ten group papers are given an oral presentation option which replaces their final exam. To achieve a high level of participation during presentations the assignment requires all group members to have a speaking part. During the presentation phase of the assignment there are several other strategies that enhance the classroom experience: 1) Presentations take place over a two week period with increasing stringent grading standards as presentation days progress, and 2) Non-presenting groups receive extra credit points for voting on the best presentation, audio visuals, and product idea which translate into extra credits for the best of group(s) and 3) Groups are given extra credits (by the professor) for stimulating/creative presentations.

Project 2: The Interview

To gain first-hand experience and insights about careers and jobs in marketing, each team is required to identify a marketing professional in a local business, and interview him or her on site (in the office or the work location). The following procedure will give you some guidance in completing this assignment:

Identify Appropriate Interviewee

You can be resourceful in identifying someone within your social network, who works in a sub-area in marketing. These sub-areas can include product design, product research and development, market research, brand management, advertising, public relations, and promotion management, sales, digital media, interactive advertising, direct marketing, retail management and promotions, etc. If you have problems finding someone, you can ask your friends and family to refer you to someone they know who will be willing to be interviewed by you and show you the ins and outs of their business.

Research About the Interviewee's Business

Before you go to interview your chosen marketing professional, you need to do your homework first. Study the background of the business and the general competitive market it is in can help you prepare meaningful and stimulating questions for the interview.

Prepare Interview Questions

You will need to jot down some questions before you go to the interview, and develop an interview scheme, including the logistical issues, with your partner. Some generic questions to get you started: "How did you get to this position?" "What's a typical work day for you like in this company?" "How do you spend your day?" "What part of the job you like most? What least? Why?" "What is the most challenging part of your work? Why?" "What's your advice for

current college students in preparing themselves entering the marketing profession?” “What are some of the most important qualities you will be looking for if you are to hire a successor of your current position?”, etc. More specific questions regarding the position/job and the interviewee need to be developed based on your research of the position and the company.

Conduct the Interview

On the day of interview, you will need to appear professionally, with a note pad, a video camera or voice recorder to bring to the interview. With your interviewee’s permission, you can record what you see, hear and learn from the interview. As a courtesy, always obtain permission beforehand, so your interviewee knows what to expect and will prepare accordingly.

Transcribe the Interview and Summarize Your Findings

Ideally, the interview needs to be transcribed verbatim afterwards and attached to your summary paper. If verbatim transcript is not possible, provide a digital clip of the interview in a CD. Please ask the interviewee for permission. A summary paper of roughly 5 pages is required to summarize what you have learned from the interview project. It will help if you also attach photos of the work site, store or office or market environment. Visuals tend to work more effectively to share with your fellow students what you learned about the profession through this interview.

Turn in Your “Interview Project Report”

This project report (including all supplemental materials such as transcriptions, CDs and photos, etc.), should contain the following sections: 1) a cover page with a title, both interviewers’ names, and date (e.g., An Interview with Mr. Tim Smith, Marketing Director at Company Wonderful in Azusa, CA, By Student A and B, Date); 2) business/company/industry background; 3) interviewee’s background; 4) interview content summary; 5) conclusion (insight you gained through the interview process as a marketing student); and 6) appendix (a typed up verbatim transcript of the interview including both questions and answers, or an audio/video recording clip provided in a CD if you are permitted to record the interview).

The “Interview Project Report” will be graded using the following rubric.

EVALUATION CRITERIA	SCORING				
Research of the company background	1	2	3	4	5
Research of the interviewee’s background	1	2	3	4	5
Relevance and quality of the interview content	1	2	3	4	5
Conclusion: Take away, insight gained	1	2	3	4	5
Complete appendix: Complete transcript or a digital clip in CD	1	2	3	4	5
Writing quality	1	2	3	4	5
TOTAL	_____ out of 15pts				

Students are also required to do presentations. The challenge is time constraints. Since all groups present, the instructor must carefully monitor the time to enable all groups to participate.

This project is a surrogate for role playing. It is based on actual interview experiences and shared with the whole class.

These projects are being implemented in two Principles of Marketing classes in a balanced university in the west coast. The university has a philosophy that combines teaching and professional development which is implemented in the way classes are taught.

References Available upon Request