Large Class Splitting to Reduce Class Size

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Large Class Splitting to Reduce Class Size

It is well recognized that smaller classes lead to improved student outcomes. However, instructor resources are limited, particularly for first year introductory classes.

**Issues Being Addressed:**
- Large class sizes (~100).
- Overly Large lecture halls (seating ~200 students).
- Limited Student-Instructor Interaction due to the student count and lecture hall sizes.

**Approach**
To address this, for Fall 2016 we tried a split class approach which splits the class (~100) into two sections (~50 each). Each section still meets twice a week, however the instructor provides a lecture to one section and the other section is provided an in-class exercise lead by a Teaching Assistant (TA). Each section received the same lecture, same handouts, and same in-class exercises (on different days). The goal is to reduce students feeling "lost in the heard" due to large classes in overly large lecture halls and limited instructor-student interaction.

**Trade-Offs**
The trade-offs include reduced face-to-face instructor time vs higher quality interaction. This also allows the use of regular class rooms, instead of the overly large lecture halls (with many empty seats and a very distant 'back-row') which helps increase room scheduling options.

**Results & Benefits**
Results were generally positive and monitored in two areas, objective and subjective.
Objectively, test scores for test1, test2, and the final exam were slightly higher (~5%). Overall class results, as compared to previous fall semester:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Passing</th>
<th>Non-Passing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Split</td>
<td>73.19%</td>
<td>26.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Split</td>
<td>81.44%</td>
<td>18.55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Passing includes A, B, and C. Non-passing includes C-, D, F, & W.

Subjective results include positive feedback from multiple guest lectures regarding a preference for the smaller classes sizes, even though that meant doing the guest lecture twice.

**Required Resources**

**Teaching Assistant**
The practice requires a dedicated, knowledgeable TA support person who is able to independently lead in-class exercises. No other external resources are required.

**Instructor Oversight of TA**
There are additional instructor impacts regarding logistical coordination of TA, development of meaningful in-class activities, and scheduling for guest lectures (each performing two lectures instead of one).

**Application**
The practice is applicable and repeatable for other instructors and other disciplines with large classes, meeting twice a week, that could support in-class activity sessions.

**Potential Challenges**
- Requires dedicated, highly reliable, and effective TA support.
- Logistical coordination for TA and guest lecturers.
- Development of meaningful in-class activities with the potential added burden of scoring the in-class exercises.