Chapter 14
Engaging Students in Large Classes through the Use of Blended Learning Instructional Strategies (BLIS)

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ABSTRACT

It is not enough to be great at sharing information in a large classroom setting. To be an effective teacher you must be able to meaningfully engage your students with their peers and with the content, and you must do this regardless of class size or content. The issues of teaching effectively in large classroom settings have presented ongoing problems with enormous implications for both student learning and faculty performance. Issues about student engagement with the content, peers, and faculty persistently are discussed with little change in practice. However, the effective infusion of technology targeted through strategies for large-class instruction and management have great potential for increasing student performance. In this chapter, Blended Learning Instructional Strategies (BLIS) are highlighted to effectively address common issues related to teaching and student engagement particularly in large classroom settings.

INTRODUCTION

Instruction in large classroom settings provide faculty with a unique challenge in the realm of education. Things that seem simple, or common sense, in the small classroom setting may pose huge problems in the large classroom setting. Add to this the basic premise that the advent of the Internet, hand-held mobile technologies such as iPads, iPods, smart phones, wireless computers and other mobile learning technologies have provided students with greater access to information in the classroom. These same instructional and mobile technologies also create an increased potential

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-4912-5.ch014

for distractions through such avenues as e-mail, Facebook, Yahoo, and Twitter. Simple class size and access to technology can lead to students having a greater opportunity to be off-task and disengaged in the classroom. This type of situation can have an adverse impact on student learning and student performance in the classroom.

"Learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much just sitting in classes listening to teachers, memorizing prepackaged assignments, and spitting out answers. They must talk about what they are learning, write reflectively about it, relate it to past experiences, and apply it to their daily lives. They must make what they learn part of themselves." (Chickering & Gamson, 1987, p.3), and in the current environment of instant access to the Internet and online information, Blended Learning Instructional Strategies (BLIS) have the potential to provide the avenue to remove distractions by moving large classroom setting instruction into the realm of effective and engaging instruction. BLIS consist of a number of effective, research-based strategies available to faculty to help promote student engagement in classroom activities. Through BLIS, particularly those in large classroom settings, instructors are able to make positive uses of commonly available technologies. Key aspects for effective instruction in large classroom settings include engaging students in appropriate activities, and utilizing available technology.

As current literature indicates, student engagement is impacted by several factors. Among those factors are the student's self-intrinsic motivation, connection with the course content, and the student's perception of the faculty member's attitude and engagement (Gasiewski, Eagan, Garcia, Hurtado, & Chang, 2012). This section discusses the importance of setting up students for success in their learning through the use of engaging instruction and the use of technology.

An essential component of effective instruction is engaging students in their own learning. Chickering and Gamson (1987) demonstrated general principles for effective practice in undergraduate education that consistently reflect the need for student engagement for effective learning. Also, many studies indicate the impact student engagement has on learning and the learning process. Dean, Hubbell, Pitler, and Stone (2012) listed nine essential instructional strategies which have potential to increase student performance and impact learning. These strategies were originated with Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2001) and were included as part of the first and second editions of "Classroom Instruction That Works" book Nine Instructional Strategies for Effective Teaching and Learning book (Dean, et al., 2012, p xii), which outlines these strategies:

- Setting objectives and providing feedback.
- Reinforcing effort and providing recognition.
- Cooperative learning.
- Cues, questions, and advance organizers.
- Nonlinguistic representations.
- Summarizing and note taking.
- Assigning homework and providing.
- Identifying similarities and differences.
- Generating and testing hypothesis.

Smith (2001) also contended that large classroom settings provide students with the opportunity to distance themselves from learning and the key to effective teaching and learning is in the instructor-student interaction. Fisher, Reiss, and Young (2005) concluded that active learning is essential to any student learning.

According to Tewksbury and MacDonald (2010), faculty must find ways to make students more actively engaged with material during lecture in order to improve student learning. Additionally, Odera (2011) posited that students are not challenged during passive learning and thus urged teachers to provide opportunities of active learning. Odera suggested that media resources and technology could play a major role in increasing a student's motivation to learn. This poses a challenge to faculty to develop lesson plans that promote active learning for students. One way to