

Chapter 6.19

Methodologies to Determine Class Sizes for Fair Faculty Work Load in Web Courses

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents two modeling approaches that can be used to determine student class sizes for instructors who teach Web-based courses. The methodologies act to provide assurance to faculty that they will not have to compromise quality of instruction when teaching a Web course, nor have to sacrifice time away from research or service activities to develop and manage a Web course. These methodologies will also help department chairs plan student class size limitations to achieve “fairness” in asking instructors to adopt and teach Web courses at their universities. The models are applied to actual Web course

experience at a university to demonstrate their practicality. Results of the application revealed faculty processing efficiencies that are inherent in offering Web-based courses and efficacy of the modeling approach.

INTRODUCTION

Almost all university faculty must balance their workload time over the three basic activities of teaching, research, and service. Each university has its own ideal target allocations of workload, and faculty have their own. New tasks that are perceived by faculty as possibly increasing the

workload in one of these activities are logically viewed as a threat to reducing productivity in the other two.

The introduction of Web-based courses at universities has provided a new format for the delivery of distance education college courses. It also requires faculty to invest considerable time and effort in learning how to use the various technologies necessary to make this format of education a worthwhile experience for students to use. Almost all universities offer Web courses today, but large numbers of faculty within each university have not embraced this format for education, particularly for distance education where the service convenience for students and faculty can be substantial. Much of this resistance to adopting Web-based education is focused faculty perception that Web courses will take an unfair amount of time relative to the more traditional lecture courses.

The case for Web-based courses requiring more faculty time than traditional classroom courses is made by several authors (Case, Bauder and Simmons, 2001; Rockwell, Schauer, Fritz and Marx, 1999; Schneider, 1999; and Visser, 2000) and the National Education Association (2000). Rockwell et al. (1999) identify several obstacles that discourage faculty from developing Web courses; chief among them is the time required to develop and deliver Web courses. Rockwell et al. also note concern among administrators and faculty that distance education expectations reduce the time available for research activities. Case et al. (2001) concur, and point out that while instructors are spending more time on research, distance education appears to require more faculty time than classroom instruction. This additional time requirement can be perceived as time taken away from research activities.

Schneider (1999) also discusses faculty concerns about time requirements when teaching Web courses. She indicates that substantial time and effort are expended in developing Web courses due to the need to provide maximum clarity for

students since face-to-face communication is almost nonexistent. Class size plays a role in the time required to manage a Web course. In traditional classes, class size is limited to the physical capacity of the classroom. This upper bound on class size is erased in Web-based courses. Due to student demand and current economic conditions, class sizes of Web courses are growing. Schneider notes that email communication increases in Web-based courses due to the lack of face-to-face communication, and “instructors must work to keep the communication open but manageable” (p. 23). As class size increases, the quantity of email increases, which in turn increases the amount of faculty time required to manage the class. This link between class size and time requirement deepens faculty reluctance to teach Web courses.

Visser (2000) offers a case study of his personal experiences teaching a distance education course. He found that the ratio of his total work hours was twice as high for distance education as for traditional courses. Visser does note some factors which may have influenced the results, specifically that the distance education course was taught via the Web and via interactive television, and that he had no prior experience in teaching a distance education course. Visser concludes that developing a distance education course requires more faculty time than traditionally-taught courses, but delivering distance education courses takes either “about the same amount of time, or significantly more time, than traditional courses, depending on the availability of institutional support and, especially, technical staff assistance” (p. 30).

The National Education Association (2000) conducted a survey of distance learning that indicates that one of the top five concerns of distance learning faculty is that student/teacher ratios will increase, and the top concern is that faculty will be asked to do more work for the same amount of pay. Further, 53 percent of distance learning faculty surveyed state that they spend more hours per week preparing and delivering

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