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Designing Large Class Teaching for Inclusiveness: Introducing Universal Instructional Design to teaching Strategies, Learning Resources and Student Resources

DR JOHN CULLEN
john.g.cullen@nuim.ie

This project aims to address the development of strategies supportive of teaching and learning and the development of curricula and resources that encourage student engagement by addressing diversity and inclusiveness.

This project emerges from a longstanding concern of mine that large class sizes unintentionally discriminate against students on the basis of hidden learning problems (such as dyslexia and dyspraxia), physical disabilities, social challenges (such as feeling isolated in third level environments on the basis of one's class etc.) and cultural challenges (such as receiving instruction in a language other than one's first language, or in environments with unfamiliar instructional norms). Since 2008 I have taught increasingly large classes. In recent years, numbers taking these modules have approached 400. Due to the early stage of growth of my department and recruitment moratoria, it is unlikely that class sizes will reduce in the near future.

One of the key findings of the action research project undertaken for my PGDHE in 2010 was that large classes did not present a problem in themselves; rather it was the diversity which is found in such large groups that creates difficulties for students.

Business students, like students in every discipline, have many rationales for pursuing study in a particular career, but most modules continue be designed, resourced, taught and assessed without reference to the diversity which is found in the student body. Often we unintentionally assume that the majority of our students are not at a disadvantage, or that they all aspire to same career goals as their lecturers. We then design, deliver and assess our courses with these assumptions in mind, which results in students being unfairly assessed or unintentionally penalized.

This project proposes to address this through a practice known as Universal Instructional Design (or Universal Design for Learning) which works from the premise that "barriers to learning are not inherent in the capacities of learners, but instead arise in learners' interactions with inflexible educational materials and methods" (Rose & Meyer, 2002, p.vi).

Rather than applying UID to one large class scenario, an action research project will be conducted with a view to developing knowledge and resources to enable lecturers in other disciplines to mainstream UID across university departments.

The project will be implemented in three distinct stages:

1. Instructional Design – An existing introductory module with typically has a large number of students will be selected. A systematic literature review on UID will be undertaken to identify best practice. The module's existing design will 'audited' to identify which areas need to be addressed in line with the following key UID elements
 - a. Learning resources and modes of engagement (It is generally recommended that these be made as multi-modal as possible)
 - b. Assessment (It is recommended that the mode of assessment be made as open and fair as possible to students).
2. Implementation of Design in Practice.
3. Evaluation of Design (at a mid-point and final stage with facilitated focus groups of students).



John Cullen currently teaches modules on organisational behaviour, leadership, management and business ethics at the School of Business, NUI Maynooth. He is interested in researching approaches to developing critical practice amongst students, large group teaching and engaging with diverse student populations.