

"The Role of Faculty, Student Groups, Teaching Assistants, and the Web in Teaching Large Management Classes" By Steven Cohen and Alison Miller

ABSTRACT

Graduate-level management programs are increasingly unable to accommodate highly participatory seminar classes in the style of traditional PhD programs. At Columbia University, management instruction is principally taught to large classes. This paper describes two approaches to management instruction employed in different courses for two graduate programs at Columbia: the Workshop in Applied Earth Systems Management (Workshop), which is an integrative capstone course for the Master of Public Administration (MPA) in Environmental Science and Policy program, and Sustainability Management, a core course for the Master of Science (MS) in Sustainability Management, which is a mid-career version of the MPA in Environmental Science and Policy. The paper details the similarities between the two programs and highlights how important differences in the programs call for different methods of teaching.

Both programs are environmentally-focused management programs that integrate courses in environmental and natural sciences with traditional management and policy instruction. The MS in Sustainability Management program, however, was designed with working professionals in mind, and as such, has different program requirements and objectives. For example, Sustainability Management meets once a week in the evening and has over 160 registered students in the fall 2011 class. In contrast, the Workshop course has 60 enrolled students and meets formally twice a week during the morning and afternoon in addition to informal meetings held throughout the week. For these reasons, the courses were designed to teach management in differing ways: using management simulation for the Workshop and the case method for Sustainability Management. In the paper, we address how faculty, student group work, teaching assistants, and the internet can be utilized in varying ways to support these different teaching methods.

The paper first describes and analyzes the Workshop course for the MPA in Environmental Science and Policy and its use of management simulation for a class of 60 students. In this course, students are placed into groups of 12-13 and spend two semesters on a single project, focusing on project and team management within the group as well as concepts such as policy analysis, budgeting and performance measurement. With a strict structure and schedule, the Workshop simulates a real-world work experience. The course relies on traditional lecture-style instruction and

group work to develop analytic and management skills. Multiple faculty members support the course, serving both as instructors and project advisors. The paper details the objectives of the course and describes why this method was developed and how it can provide an exceptional learning experience for students.

Next, the paper examines the MS in Sustainability Management and its Sustainability Management course. With a class size of 160 students, most of whom are mid-career professionals working full-time, this course makes use of the case method and short group projects to set up various organizational situations and ask students to address discrete management problems. The course makes use of memo-writing, group work, and lectures to support management theory and develop students' analytic, managerial, and writing skills. The paper describes the motivation for designing the course in this manner and how it can effectively provide instruction to a large class with limited class time.

The goal of these types of management instruction is to use the large class setting as a way to generate interest and excitement. We have found that given the right type of classroom, proper application of online resources, and sufficient faculty and grading assistance, large class settings can be an excellent mode of learning.