

5-20-1971

## Report of Teaching Effectiveness and Facilities Committee - (Approval of Recommendations)

University of Rhode Island Faculty Senate

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Serial Number #70-71-57

UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND

FACULTY SENATE

BILL

Adopted by the Faculty Senate

RECEIVED  
UNIVERSITY OF R. I.

MAY 24 1971

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

TO: President Werner A. Baum

FROM: Chairman of the Faculty Senate

1. The Attached BILL, titled Report of Teaching Effectiveness and Facilities  
Committee - (Approval of Recommendations)

is forwarded for your consideration.

2. The original and two copies for your use are included.
3. This BILL was adopted by vote of the Faculty Senate on 71-5-20  
(date)
4. After considering this bill, will you please indicate your approval or disapproval. Return the original or forward it to the Board of Trustees, completing the appropriate endorsement below.
5. In accordance with Section 8, paragraph 2 of the Senate's By-Laws, this bill will become effective on 71-6-10 (date), three weeks after Senate approval, unless: (1) specific dates for implementation are written into the bill; (2) you return it disapproved; (3) you forward it to the Board of Trustees for their approval; or (4) the University Faculty petitions for a referendum. If the bill is forwarded to the Board of Trustees, it will not become effective until approved by the Board.

71-5-21

(date)

Stephen D. Schwarz /s/  
Chairman of the Faculty Senate  
STEPHEN D. SCHWARZ

ENDORSEMENT 1.

TO: Chairman of the Faculty Senate

FROM: President of the University

1. Returned.
2. Approved ✓. Disapproved \_\_\_\_\_.
3. (If approved) In my opinion, transmittal to the Board of Trustees is not necessary.

5/31/71  
(date)

Werner A. Baum /s/  
President

ALTERNATE ENDORSEMENT 1.

TO: Chairman of the Board of Trustees.

FROM: The University President

1. Forwarded.

2. Approved.

\_\_\_\_\_/s/  
(date) President

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ENDORSEMENT 2.

TO: Chairman of the Faculty Senate

FROM: Chairman of the Board of Trustees, via the University President.

1. Forwarded.

\_\_\_\_\_/s/  
(date) \_\_\_\_\_  
(Office)

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ENDORSEMENT 3.

TO: Chairman of the Faculty Senate

FROM: The University President

1. Forwarded from the Chairman of the Board of Trustees.

\_\_\_\_\_/s/  
(date) President

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Original received and forwarded to the Secretary of the Senate and Registrar for filing in the Archives of the University.

\_\_\_\_\_/s/  
(date) Chairman of the Faculty Senate

# STUDY OF STUDENT ATTITUDES TOWARD LARGE LECTURE SECTIONS

## TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS AND FACILITIES COMMITTEE

May 1971

### INTRODUCTION

The 1969-70 Educational Procedures and Facilities Committee was asked by Dr. E. James Archer, Vice-President for Academic Affairs, to determine the attitude of students toward large lecture sections (100 or more students). A preliminary questionnaire was formulated and several large lecture sections were surveyed just prior to the Christmas vacation 1969. As a result of this experience, the questionnaire was revised and the format was modified to facilitate conversion to computer punched-card for extraction of statistical data. The two-page questionnaire is reproduced as Appendix A. Eight large lecture sections were surveyed during the Spring 1970 semester using this questionnaire. The results and interpretation of the replies for these eight surveys are presented below. The correspondence between the survey section number, room and number of replies processed is given in Table I.

| <u>SECTION</u> | <u>ROOM</u>             | <u>REPLIES</u> |
|----------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| 1              | Edwards Auditorium      | 355            |
| 2              | Fine Arts Auditorium    | 208            |
| 3              | East Auditorium         | 120            |
| 4              | Independence Auditorium | 112            |
| 5              | Ranger 103              | 97             |
| 6              | Green Auditorium        | 89             |
| 7              | Quinn Auditorium        | 56             |
| 8              | Pastore 124             | 37             |

TABLE I

# REPORT OF TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS AND FACILITIES COMMITTEE

May 1971

## STUDY OF STUDENT ATTITUDES TOWARD LARGE LECTURE SECTIONS

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee recommends:

- (1) That large lectures be given only in lecture halls which have suitable lighting, sound, heating and ventilation, and audio-visual facilities.
- (2) That the Teaching Effectiveness and Facilities Committee be empowered to make a professional study of the lecture halls on campus with the aim of bringing them up to acceptable standards for large lecture use.
- (3) That top priority in physical plant and capital expenditures be given to bringing all lecture halls up to acceptable standards.

Comments: These recommendations are an outgrowth of a study of student attitudes toward large lecture sections. The first recommendation constitutes a policy statement. Namely, large lectures should be given only under conditions which are suitable to the delivery and to the receipt of such material. Once this policy is established, some mechanism is necessary to accomplish the goal of having every lecture hall suitable to the task. The second recommendation gives the faculty (through the TEF Committee) the responsibility and authority for determining the acceptable standards for lecture halls. Finally, the third recommendation punctuates the serious nature of having unsuitable lecture halls. By placing such matters at the top of the list, these most easily eliminated negative aspects of the large lecture environment can be removed. The human portion of the problem is discussed in the report attached.



## RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

The information on the questionnaires was analyzed in three classes:

- (1) individual question replies
- (2) selected multiple-question response comparisons
- (3) specific written comments.

The statistical summary of replies, by section, to the individual questions is reproduced in Appendix B and to selected multiple-question comparisons in Appendix C. Because of the volume and the nature of the data, these appendices are not being distributed with this report. However, they are included with the copy on file in the Faculty Senate office.

INDIVIDUAL QUESTION REPLIES AND RESPONSE COMPARISONS. Some of the questions are related and, therefore, will be discussed as a group. The response to selected question pairs was computed for the students' reaction to questions 3 and 4, 3 and 11, 9 and 10, and 12 and 13. Because the table entries were made for the responses for each questionnaire, these comparisons provide more correlated data than that provided by the study of the individual questions in isolation.

QUESTION 1: (a) Do you feel anonymous?

(b) Is it helpful to feel anonymous?

(c) Is it hurtful to feel anonymous?

The overwhelming majority of students replied that they felt "anonymous" and that sometimes it is "helpful" and sometimes it is "hurtful" to feel anonymous. This series of answers seems to support our preconceived notions regarding large lectures and anonymity.

QUESTION 2: Do you feel distracted by, or do you have difficulty concentrating because of, the large numbers?

The majority of replies was about evenly divided between "SELDOM" and "SOMETIMES" having difficulty concentrating or being distracted. This would seem to indicate that a learning environment exists or could exist in large lecture sections.

QUESTION 3

and 4: What is your attitude toward this large lecture section?

What is your attitude toward large lecture sections in general?

With the exception of two sections, the majority responded with either a FAVORABLE or INDIFFERENT attitude toward the particular large lecture in which the survey was taken. However, the majority attitude toward large lectures in general was consistently UNFAVORABLE. Large lectures are regarded as a negative experience but the individual large lecture can be a positive one.

QUESTION 3

versus 4: This pair was consistent with the individual responses.

That is, the majority of responses indicated an unfavorable attitude to large lectures in general but that some had a favorable attitude toward that particular lecture.

QUESTION 5

6  
and 7: What type of course is this?

Does the lecturer conduct the discussion or lab sections?

If someone other than the lecturer conducts your discussion or lab section, how does this affect the course?

Straight lecture seems to result in a more FAVORABLE specific attitude. (Could that be due to the nature of the requirements placed on students in straight lecture courses?) For lecture and discussion and/or laboratory formats, the overall course attitude seems to be independent of the use of other staff in addition to or in place of the lecturer.

QUESTION 8: If you seldom or only sometimes ask questions during the lecture, is it because:

- (a) You seldom ask questions anyway?
- (b) You ask questions during the discussion or lab section?
- (c) The lecturer doesn't entertain questions (either because he refuses to or because he lectures the whole hour)?
- (d) You feel embarrassed by the large numbers?
- (e) You feel intimidated by the large numbers?
- (f) You feel discouraged by the large numbers?
- (g) There is not enough time to ask questions?

The majority of replies indicated that the students either did not usually ask questions or that they held their questions until they meet in the smaller groups. Significantly, the students in the straight lectures reported that questions are not entertained or that the large numbers discourage them from asking questions.

QUESTION 9

and 10: What kind of exams have you had?

Have the exams enabled you to demonstrate your knowledge of the material?

The majority of the examining is done through "objective" tests with the minority done through "essay" tests. There were no mixed formats used.

QUESTION 9

versus 10: The majority of responses seem to indicate that the examinations are fair, that is, they sometimes permit the student to demonstrate his knowledge of the material.

QUESTION 11: Is the subject matter of this course, in your opinion, suitable for large class instruction?

The majority consistently considered the subject matter of these courses suitable for large class instruction.

QUESTION 3

versus 11: There is a highly consistent response of unfavorable attitude toward the particular lecture and the not suitable subject matter for large lecture response. There was also a significant number of responses which indicated the suitability of the subject matter for large lecture presentation and either an indifferent or favorable attitude toward the particular lecture. (This positive-negative dichotomy is consistent.)



QUESTION 12

and 13: Have you observed cheating in this class?

How does the cheating you have observed in this class compare with the cheating you have observed in smaller classes?

Only one section seemed to feel that there was a great deal of cheating in that class. The remainder did not seem to feel that cheating was excessive. The spread of responses regarding the relative amount of cheating in the large class as compared to smaller ones does not allow any definite conclusions to be reached.

QUESTION 12

versus 13: The general response seems to indicate that cheating does not constitute a significant problem peculiar to large lecture sections.

QUESTION 14: Is this room adequate

- (a) for seeing the instructor, board, screen, etc.?
- (b) for hearing the instructor?
- (c) for ventilation?
- (d) for notetaking?

The responses to this question indicate that Pastore 124 is inadequate for about half the class with respect to seeing or hearing the instructor and that comfort is definitely a problem.

About half the class found Green Auditorium to be inadequate for hearing the instructor.

Independence Auditorium has a substantial ventilation/comfort problem.

Quinn Auditorium was rated by about half the students as inadequate in terms of comfort and notetaking.

Both Edwards Auditorium and the Fine Arts Auditorium were found to be inadequate for notetaking by the students.

(These responses probably do not surprise the instructors in those classes.)

WRITTEN COMMENTS. These comments were offered by the students to amplify and, sometimes, punctuate their responses on the questionnaire. Three basic areas seemed to require this extra emphasis: (1) the physical characteristics of the lecture hall, (2) the reasons supporting their attitudes toward large lecture sections, and (3) the human characteristics of the lecturer. The comments will be summarized using this partitioning.

1. PHYSICAL LECTURE HALL CHARACTERISTICS. The most frequent comment was that microphones should be used by the lecturer to ensure his being heard everywhere in the hall. The next most frequent comment made was that the lecture halls were either too hot, too cold, had poor ventilation and so on. In addition the students made specific mention of their dislike of using lap boards, of seats being too small, of poor lighting, of inadequacy of the lecture hall for taking examinations, and of the minimal provision for left-handed people. The other comments dealt with the poor visibility of the screen when overhead projectors were used. It seems clear from these comments that the lecture halls should be provided with lecturer-controlled sound systems, that "creature comforts" should be provided, and that the physical aspects of the lecture hall be matched to its use (and vice versa.)

2. ATTITUDES TOWARD LARGE LECTURES. The most consistent comments in this area were to the effect that if large lecture sections were necessary there should also be smaller discussion sections. This was expressed quite graphically by the remark, "large lecture sections make it difficult to ask small questions." The opportunity for discussion seems to be a prerequisite to suppress the negative effects of being "talked at", as one student commented. Otherwise, the student reels like an automaton ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ and

does not relate to the course, the lecturer, the other students or the university. This requires the student to be self-motivated and to operate <sup>attendant</sup> outside (or in spite) of the system. An ~~XXXXXXXX~~ effect is the undercurrent of distracting student conversation during the lecture. Perhaps these students have discounted the lecture because they feel lost in the crowd and don't have to get involved in the material now.

This kind of outlook was further emphasized by remarks pointing out that cutting is easier (provided a friend takes good notes) and that the "objective" multiple-choice examination does not permit the student to express himself and thereby give the instructor a chance to evaluate the students' potential. Because there is more opportunity, students also believe there is more cheating. This further undermines the student's confidence in his ability to earn a good grade.

There was a comment that large lectures were appropriate only to "general" courses. Another student stated that "the important thing is that small classes are far more effective--not just that large classes are bad." Others remarked that the discussion class was good and interesting and that the lecture was not. Quite consistently there were remarks stating that the course would be more interesting if given in a smaller class. One student volunteered the information that he was transferring to a college which had smaller class sizes because he did not feel he was learning as much as he could.

3. THE LECTURER. The most significant comment was that the lecturer makes the course. The favorable attitude toward the specific large lecture was consistently qualified by such statements. The lecturer, his teaching methods and his "stage personality" are quite important to a favorable

response. The lecturer must put himself in the role of the student to appreciate their interpretation of such things as discouraging interruptions for questions, "putting the student down," not answering the question asked, and the like. On the other hand, the lecturer is forced to organize his material. Perhaps this forces "coverage" to take over and gives rise to the previously mentioned complaints. In addition, the lecturer should be aware of the visibility of his material from the worst seat in the hall.

### CONCLUSIONS

The survey of student attitudes and comments on large lecture sections did not result in any unexpected responses. The significance of this survey is that the attitudes of the students surveyed give support to those anticipated by the designers of the questionnaire.

The idea of a large lecture section is a negative one. A good lecturer can modify that attitude--but not everyone makes a good lecturer! There are certain mechanical aspects of large lectures which are quite unsatisfactory and therefore a better match should be made between the course material to be presented in a lecture and the way in which that material is to be studied. It should go without saying that lecture halls should be suitable for both giving and receiving a lecture--evidently this must be said! Finally, small discussion groups appear to be almost mandated by the students' response. Every effort should be made to allow the student to feel he is part of an educational "happening" and not that he has been thrown into the pond to sink or swim. It is our responsibility to reach each individual student. Otherwise we could just as well be replaced by video taped lectures.

# APPENDIX A

## EDUCATIONAL PROCEDURES AND FACILITIES COMMITTEE

Course and Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Building and Room: \_\_\_\_\_

Foreword: This questionnaire is aimed at discovering student attitudes toward large lecture sections (100 or more students). Check the appropriate box(es).

1. a. Do you feel anonymous?
 

|     |                          |
|-----|--------------------------|
| Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| No  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
  
- b. Is it helpful to feel anonymous?
 

|           |                          |
|-----------|--------------------------|
| Always    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Sometimes | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Never     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
  
- c. Is it hurtful to feel anonymous?
 

|           |                          |
|-----------|--------------------------|
| Always    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Sometimes | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Never     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
  
2. Do you feel distracted by, or do you have difficulty concentrating because of, the large numbers?
 

|              |                          |
|--------------|--------------------------|
| a. Often     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. Sometimes | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Seldom    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
  
3. What is your attitude toward this large lecture section?
 

|                |                          |
|----------------|--------------------------|
| a. Favorable   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. Indifferent | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Unfavorable | <input type="checkbox"/> |
  
4. What is your attitude toward large lecture sections in general?
 

|                |                          |
|----------------|--------------------------|
| a. Favorable   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. Indifferent | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Unfavorable | <input type="checkbox"/> |
  
5. What type of course is this?
 

|                                  |                          |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. Straight lecture              | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. Lecture & Discussion sections | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Lecture & Lab sections        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
  
6. Does the lecturer conduct the discussion or lab sections?
 

|                         |                          |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. One of the sections  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. Some of the sections | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. None of the sections | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. All of the sections  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
  
7. If someone other than the lecturer conducts your discussion or lab section, how does this affect the course?
 

|                  |                          |
|------------------|--------------------------|
| a. Favorably     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. Indifferently | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Unfavorably   | <input type="checkbox"/> |

8. If you seldom or only sometimes ask questions during the lecture, is it because:

- a. You seldom ask questions anyway?
- b. You ask questions during the discussion or lab section?
- c. The lecturer doesn't entertain questions (either because he refuses to or because he lectures the whole hour)?
- d. You feel embarrassed by the large numbers?
- e. You feel intimidated by the large numbers?
- f. You feel discouraged by the large numbers?
- g. There is not enough time to ask questions?

a.  
b.  
c.  
d.  
e.  
f.  
g.

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9. What kind of exams have you had?

- a. Totally objective (fill in the blanks, true or false, multiple choice, etc.)
- b. Totally essay (blue book essays, problems where you have to construct and write out the answer, etc.)
- c. Partly objective and partly essay.

|  |
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|  |

10. Have the exams enabled you to demonstrate your knowledge of the material?

- a. Always
- b. Sometimes
- c. Never

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|  |
|  |

11. Is the subject matter of this course, in your opinion, suitable for large class instruction?

- a. Yes
- b. No

|  |
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|  |
|  |

12. Have you observed cheating in this class?

- a. A great deal
- b. Some
- c. Not much
- d. None

|  |
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|  |

13. How does the cheating you have observed in this class compare with the cheating you have observed in smaller classes?

- a. It is more in this class
- b. It is the same in this class
- c. It is less in this class

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|  |
|  |

14. Is this room adequate

- a. For seeing the instructor, board, screen, etc?

Yes  
No

|  |
|--|
|  |
|  |

- b. For hearing the instructor?

Yes  
No

|  |
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|  |
|  |

- c. For ventilation?

Yes  
No

|  |
|--|
|  |
|  |

- d. For notetaking?

Yes  
No

|  |
|--|
|  |
|  |



Committee members:

Edward H. Pauley (chairman)  
Robert Kelley  
Mary James  
William Kelly  
Robert Haas  
Judith Scarfpin  
Dwayne Quinn (student)  
Dorothy Daly (student)  
Robing Elliott (student)  
Stephen Schwarz