1. Project Abstract/Description

Over the past several years, class size has increased markedly in Sociology 1101 and the passing rate has fallen. The DFW rate has increased, indicating that we are wasting seats in this course. The previous format was large lecture sections. We noticed a lack of student engagement in these sections.

In the previous format, most students never had the opportunity to interact with instructors/TAs or other students in meaningful ways. The course has an average of 96 students/section (and this average includes a couple of small online sections each term). In the new format, we allow students to interact in two ways: online in small group and individual activities, and in small discussion sessions led by undergraduate teaching assistants. The new format will be blended / hybrid instruction. Each section will have two class meetings (50 minutes each) in large lecture (approximately 120 students) per week plus additional activities online in small groups (30 students or less) every week.

Tasks we needed to accomplish included the identification of course content, the development of the materials for the online activities, and identification of methods and training materials for personnel to supervise small group discussions.

2. Representative Images of the Project
3. Impact on Student Learning

1. Improved Learning

In Fall 2013, Dr. Rosemary Hopcroft piloted the new design in two sections; in Spring 2014, Ms. Kendra Jason piloted the new design in two sections. For each term, we compared the Course Grades for the pilot sections against all others (below).

Fall 13:
Avg. Course Grades for Hopcroft: 3.37 – 99 students, & 3.21 – 137 students
Avg. Course Grades for rest of sections: 3.21

Spring 14:
Avg. Course Grades for Jason: 3.06 – 135 students, & 3.33 – 132 students
Avg. Course Grades for rest of sections: 3.25

2. Improved Retention

In Fall 2013, Dr. Rosemary Hopcroft piloted the new design in two sections; in Spring 2014, Ms. Kendra Jason piloted the new design in two sections. For each term, we compared the DFW rates for the pilot sections against all others (below). Our overall DFW rate went down from previous semesters, in part because instructors from the redesign team had access to the new materials even if they were not piloting. Even so, the pilot sections show clear improvement in the DFW rate. (Note: “D” is considered passing, but Sociology majors must earn at least a “C” in this course.)

DFW %:
08-09: 16.0%
09-10: 20.2%
10-11: 22.2%
11-12: 18.1%

Fall 2013: Total All Courses: 978 students: 101 DFW at 10.3%
Hopcroft: 139 students – 8 DFW at 5.7%
Total minus Hopcroft: 839 students: 93 DFW at 11.1%

Spring 2014: Total All Courses: 914 students: 115 DFW at 12.6%
Jason: 139 students – 14 DFW at 10.1%
Total minus Jason: 775 students: 101 DFW at 13%

3. Other Impacts on Students

Feedback from Dr. Hopcroft:

“What worked well - I do use the course development site we created (I incorporate things from that site when I set up the moodle page for each intro class). Some of the activities, videos, etc. are very useful. I think the flexible way we set that up works well for us sociologists.

I now have a "blended" intro class that I think works well.

Just brain storming intro with colleagues was useful, also.
Having undergrad (TAs) preceptors also worked well. I have one right now!"

Feedback from Ms. Jason (paraphrased):
Training for the Undergraduate preceptors is very important. We need to be sure to have a strong GA supervisor for them.

4. Impact on Cost Savings
The reduction in DFW rate will mean fewer repeat students, saving on the total number of seats needed over time.

5. Lessons Learned

1. Pedagogical Improvement Techniques
   We spend a lot of time in conversation within the team and with other instructors of the course. We developed a set of core topics that will now be covered in all sections of the course. We further identified additional topics from which instructors can choose a subset to round out their course. We created a Moodle site with learning objectives and resources for each of the topics. We see this as a tool kit which will improve instruction in the course. Each section will now also have an breakout component to allow for more interactive learning.

2. Cost Reduction Techniques
   We are now assigning a graduate teaching assistant to oversee the preceptors, which is a cost the department has agreed to support. The savings will come in the decrease of repeat registrations for the course.

3. Implementation Issues
   We spent a lot of time “getting on the same page” with regards to content, which we did not expect, before moving on the issues of format and administration.

6. Sustainability

   We are hopeful that we will be able to attract a good group of preceptors, some of whom will stay for more than one semester and can serve as mentors to new ones moving forward. Our current vision for the course is 2 50 minute sessions per week and one online activity completed within small groups. This online activity will be managed by a preceptor. Each course section will have a preceptor and the preceptors will be supervised by a Graduate Teaching Assistant in conjunction with the course instructors. We hope to eventually be able to include rotating group meetings as well; that is, we hope that we will be able to have a different group of 30 meet face-to-face on a rotating basis.