Large Course Redesign Project Report
To be submitted by Friday, August 8th 2014.
Please e-mail the report to Jaesoon An at jan5@uncc.edu

Course title(s): POLS 1110 American Politics
Primary investigators: Martha Kropf, John Szmer, Beth Whitaker, David Swindell, Eric Heberlig
Project contact information: mekropf@uncc.edu
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1. Project Abstract/Description
(A brief synopsis of reasons you wanted to redesign, what the redesigned format looks like, what the impact is, and how you are going to sustain/expand the new format, etc. Example at http://www.thencat.org/RedesignAlliance/C2R/R3/UNCC_Abstract.htm)

We sought to redesign our large introductory course, POLS 1110 American Politics, for several reasons: to reduce the DFW rate, to recruit more majors, to build a sense of community, and to increase active learning opportunities. We believed this would enhance learning by allowing students to discover the relevance of American politics to their lives, think critically about related topics, and better understand methods of scientific inquiry. Our approach was to replace one large lecture each week with a discussion period, led by a graduate teaching assistant, who facilitated activities such as debates and reflection writing. Students also prepared for class each week with low-stakes online activities. The redesigned course was piloted in Spring 2013 by Dr. Martha Kropf, who conducted extensive research to compare her students’ outcomes with those of students in traditional sections of POLS 1110 offered in the same semester. The DFW rate of the redesigned course was 20 percent compared to 34 percent in the traditional sections. More substantively, using rigorous propensity score matching, we found that students in the traditional sections performed better on overall knowledge using a common battery of 24 questions. However, on questions related to methods of inquiry and critical thinking, the students in the redesigned section performed significantly better. In an online survey, there was no significant difference between the two groups with respect to their attitudes about democracy, American exceptionalism, or future political participation. Interestingly, students in the redesigned section also expressed no greater likelihood of adding political science as a major or minor than students in the traditional sections. Given the limited benefits of the redesigned course and the overwhelming costs, particularly in terms of scheduling classrooms, facilitating registration through Banner (which is not designed to handle breakout sections), and hiring/training graduate teaching assistants, we have not been able to continue offering this particular version of POLS 1110. Instead, we will be offering two 50-percent online sections of POLS 1110 in Fall 2014 and will determine whether that model may be more cost effective.

2. Representative Images of the Project
(Two or three images/screenshots of new course materials or student learning scenes)
We do not have screen shots or pictures, but we do have examples of active learning activities. Please see Appendix A, which contains two activities which the discussion classes did.

3. Impact on Student Learning

1. Improved Learning
(Comparison of student achievement between redesigned format and traditional format, and factors/teaching methods that might have resulted in the difference)
As detailed in the table below, there were mixed results with respect to student learning outcomes. Using rigorous propensity score matching, we found that students in the traditional sections performed better on overall knowledge using a common battery of 24 questions. However, on questions related to methods of inquiry and critical thinking, the students in the redesigned section performed significantly better. In an online survey, there was no significant difference between the two groups with respect to their attitudes about democracy, American exceptionalism, or future political participation. Interestingly, students in the redesigned section also expressed no greater likelihood of adding political science as a major or minor than students in the traditional sections. The redesigned section and the traditional sections were taught by different instructors, and thus some of the variation in student outcomes may be a result of different areas of focus. Dr. Kropf may spend more time on scientific inquiry and critical thinking, while Dr. Shepherd may focus more on core concepts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Propensity Match: Observed Coefficient for redesigned compared to traditional (bootstrapped SE)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of Common Questions</td>
<td>-1.34 (0.60)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of Assessment Questions</td>
<td>+1.39 (0.26)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy Attitudes</td>
<td>-0.27 (0.82)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Exceptionalism</td>
<td>+0.46 (0.30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods of Inquiry Knowledge</td>
<td>+0.72 (0.16)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes Respecting Other Views</td>
<td>+1.75 (0.69)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Political Participation</td>
<td>-0.79 (0.69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood of new minor or major</td>
<td>0.12 (0.31)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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2. Improved Retention
(Comparison of DFW between redesigned format and traditional format, and factors/teaching methods that might have resulted in the difference. Please describe your definition of DFW.)

The DFW rate (i.e. percent of enrolled students who finished the semester with a D, F, or W) in the redesigned section of POLS 1110 was 20 percent compared to 34 percent in the traditional sections. Although we cannot be certain, we speculate that some of this difference has to do with the increased personal interaction that students in the redesigned course had with graduate teaching assistants. In addition, the large number of low-stakes assignments in the redesigned course provided students with more opportunities to improve their grades.

3. Other Impacts on Students
(Student perception on the new format measured through surveys or student evaluations)

See documents attached to email: midterm evaluations of both Experimental and Control sections.

4. Impact on Cost Savings
(How much you saved by redesigning, and kinds of cost saving strategies you used such as changes in the overall time spent by the instructors including faculty, GTAs, and undergraduate assistants, use of instructor time to improve student learning, use of classroom space, etc.)
Counter to expectations, we found that the costs of implementing the large course redesign were higher than offering traditional sections of the same course. On the logistical side, it was time consuming to schedule extra classrooms for the discussion periods. It was also difficult to facilitate registration through Banner as each discussion period had to be given a separate section, even though they all had a common lecture time. Perhaps for this reason, registration numbers for the pilot redesign were extremely low, requiring us to cancel half of the discussion periods before the semester even started. We are not sure but suspect that students may have been reluctant to register for a section that had just 20 students because they could not be as anonymous as they could in a traditional large lecture. The largest cost was financial, though, because of the need to hire graduate teaching assistants to facilitate the discussion periods. Without any sustainable source of funding for such an approach over the long term, we were not able to continue such a version of POLS 1110.

5. Lessons Learned

1. Pedagogical Improvement Techniques
   (Issues you faced to implement new teaching methods)

   Paring down the amount of information covered in lectures was a challenge. Ultimately, the largest challenge was making sure that students did assignments on-line before they came to class so that I would have to cover less material.

   Working with both the Moodle and Pearson course platforms in the same semester. Note that we no longer have access to the Pearson platforms, as UNC Charlotte does not support that platform.

2. Cost Reduction Techniques
   (Issues you faced to implement cost saving strategies)

   The way in which we redesigned our course did not save costs, as discussed previously.

3. Implementation Issues
   (Advice for other people wanting to redesign their course)

   Despite the advantages of having break-out sections for large lecture courses, UNC Charlotte does not currently have the funding to facilitate such an approach. Without a graduate program in political science, for example, we were forced to rely on public policy Ph.D. students, some of whom had limited background in political science. With the additional problems of Banner and the lack of funding for teaching assistants, it seems that the most effective approach to cost reduction is probably offering courses 50 percent online with significant portions of the class conducted through Moodle. This is not ideal for student engagement but does address the shortage of large classrooms.

6. Sustainability
   (How you are going to sustain/expand the new course format, and the kinds of activities you are doing currently to achieve sustainability)

   We will continue to use some of the activities that were developed as part of this large course redesign but will probably not be offering it again in the exact same format. We were unable to obtain funding through Prospecting for Success. There appear to be no other sources.
Instead, we will experiment with 50-percent online versions and other approaches to facilitate active learning within the structure of a large lecture class.
Appendix A:

**Civil rights activity:**

Gun Control Debate  
Ask the students to first reflect on their general feelings about gun control at the very beginning of class. After class, give them about ten more minutes to reflect on whether their opinions have changed. Why or why not?  
Amendment II: A well-regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed.  
*DC v. Heller* (2008): The Court found that the Second Amendment referred to an individual right to keep and bear arms. ([http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/pdf/07-290P.ZO](http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/pdf/07-290P.ZO)). The Court basically said that the common argument that guns are for armed state forces (e.g., National Guard) was not correct. Rather, the individual may keep and bear arms.  
*McDonald v. Chicago* (2010): extended the protection to state and local governments.  
From the Syllabus of the opinion of *McDonald v. Chicago*:  
*Heller* points unmistakably to the answer. Self-defense is a basic right, recognized by many legal systems from ancient times to the present, and the *Heller* Court held that individual self-defense is “the central component” of the Second Amendment right. 554 U. S., at ___, ___. Explaining that “the need for defense of self, family, and property is most acute” in the home, *ibid.*, the Court found that this right applies to handguns because they are “the most preferred firearm in the nation to ‘keep’ and use for protection of one’s home and family,” *id.*, at ___, ___. It thus concluded that citizens must be permitted “to use [handguns] for the core lawful purpose of self-defense.” *Id.*, at ___. *Heller* also clarifies that this right is “deeply rooted in this Nation’s history and traditions.”

Like all freedoms, they can be limited. How much? Who is appropriate to do so? Where is the fulcrum? How important is the liberty of “keeping and bearing arms”?  
Is “keeping and bearing arms” more important than “freedom of speech”?  
Is “keeping and bearing arms” more important than Congress making “no law respecting the establishment of religion and the free exercise thereof”?  
Is it more important than preventing the government from inflicting “cruel and unusual punishment”?  
How are they alike? How are they different?  
When do we limit speech? When do we limit the right again unreasonable searches and seizures? When can we limit the free exercise of religion?  
What about current proposals? Should we make such policies based on current events (e.g., Sandy Hook Elementary School)? (And yes, there is a small conspiracy group out there saying Sandy Hook never existed or happened.)  
Why or why not? Is the Federal Government the appropriate body to make such laws?  
When is it appropriate to limit handgun sales?  
Some people say we have enough laws and they should be enforced. Yet others would say that the system is overwhelmed. The laws can’t be enforced. Are more limits to guns inevitable? How much is too much?
Activity about the Mass Media:

Mass Media Bias
Students: You will divide into groups of four.
Each group will spend approximately 10 minutes creating a coding scheme to analyze whether or not an article is “objectively reported” or not on a scale of one to five. The subject of these articles/news stories is the gay marriage. When you are all done coding articles, you will get together as a large group and your “leader” will report your group results. Be ready to defend your position.
You will listen to one radio story (National Public Radio), read two newspaper articles (provided), read one website story, and listen to one TV news story.
Coding scheme: this is just a fancy way of saying I want you to decide whether the article is “objective” or not. One way of approaching this is to think about the following questions and maybe add your own. In your group of four, try to answer them/decide what questions will help you rate articles on a scale of 1 to 5 where:

1=Conservative bias
2=
3=Neutral/no bias/objective
4=
5=Liberal bias

Suggestions of questions to consider:
Is the article “for” or “against” gay marriage?
What sources would an “objective” article use? How many? Are there more than one views that are key in this debate?
What words would an “objective article” use to refer to the case/gay marriage/main facts in the case/what the case is fundamentally about?
Would the article clearly “cheer” for one perspective or another? Seem like the reporter thought gay marriage is a good thing? What about reporting of public opinion?