

60-Second SoTL

Episode 59 – Class Size and Students’ Perceptions of Instructor Presence

(Music)

0:12

Jessie L. Moore:

Is class size predictive of students’ perceptions of instructor presence in online courses? That’s the focus of this week’s 60-second SoTL from Elon University’s Center for Engaged Learning. I’m Jessie Moore.

(Music)

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In “Large Online Courses: A Constraint on Instructor Presence and Higher-Level Thinking,” Linda Carozza and Hilary Davis explore how class size informs students’ perceptions of instructor presence indicators like quality of feedback, timeliness to student queries, and contact between the instructor and student. Their article appears in the open access journal, *Teaching and Learning Inquiry*.

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The researchers collected data in 10 sections of three different online philosophy courses from September 2020 through August 2021. All courses were remote due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and Carozza and Davis focused on courses in which instructors implemented multiple online learning delivery strategies, such as *a combination* of lecture notes, pre-recorded videos, and live webinars.

Class sizes ranged from 25 to 200, with six sections enrolling 50 students at the beginning of the term, and three sections enrolling 90 or more students.

398 students participated in the study, completing an online questionnaire with multiple-choice and Likert scale questions. Questions focused on participants’ demographics, their experiences with e-learning, and their perceptions of instructor presence, measured via indicators such as providing prompt feedback, responding to emails, creating a welcoming and inclusive environment, and demonstrating care about students.

1:45

Survey responses showed that the number of students enrolled in a course impacted students’ perceptions of instructor presence. Students rated their instructor as less successful in facilitating overall instructor presence as the class size increased. For example, students in

larger classes were less likely to agree that they could get course help when needed or receive responses to emails. Perceptions of instructors' care about their students and creation of welcoming learning environments also dropped in larger classes.

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As a result, Carozza and Davis recommend lowering class sizes to improve learning environments and teacher presence, especially in courses with learning objectives that align with upper levels of Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive skills.

In addition to sharing their findings, the authors offer a helpful literature review on prior studies about class size.

To learn more about this study, visit our show notes for a link to the open access article.

2:37

(Music)

2:42

Jessie Moore:

Join us next week for another snapshot of recent scholarship of teaching and learning on **60-second SoTL from Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning**. Learn more about the Center at www.CenterForEngagedLearning.org.

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