



Enhancing the learning environment in large class, multi-sectional courses:

Key features of a team instructional approach

Cheryl Poth

Department of Educational Psychology

cpoth@ualberta.ca



teaching and learning
enhancement fund

What is a Team Instructional Approach (TIA)?



- ❑ Coordinated efforts of multiple instructors and graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) in course planning and delivery.
- ❑ Aim focused on providing an effective and equitable learning environment for students enrolled in multiple sections of large classes of the same course.

Specific to EDPY 303



- ❑ 1400 students/yr organized in 9 sections:
ave size=150
- ❑ GTAs have little course-specific content knowledge
- ❑ Resource availability: GTA hours & office
- ❑ Assessments: 1200 assignments/yr & 2 exams/term/section
- ❑ Use of LMS to complement 16 face to face lectures



Guiding philosophy for TIA

- Valuing of multiple perspectives
- Together we can support learning greater than what is possible individually
- Learning is supported by low risk opportunities for feedback
- Fair and consistent assessment is a right
- Continual process of reflection & development
- Model high quality assessments

Developmental process for the Team Instructional Approach

- Students raised issues related to inconsistencies across sections
- Instructors reported challenged to meet needs of students
- GTA learning was limited by role

Pressing issues are highlighted

Coordination is increased

- Innovative learning environment
- Consistency across sections yet responsive
- Enhanced access to timely and relevant feedback

- Course planning is a shared responsibility
- Instructional delivery promotes equitable experiences
- Assessment process supports learning

Approach is adapted

Key features are identified

- Embedded meetings
- Collaborative environment
- Progressive learning opportunities
- Decentralized organizational culture

Setting the stage for large class environments

Pressing Issues

- Students raised issues related to inconsistencies across sections
- Instructors reported challenges meeting the individual learning needs of a high number of students
- GTA learning was limited by predetermined role

Desired outcomes

- Effective response to increasing use
- Cost-effective use of existing resources
- Instructors and GTAs who feel valued and are retained
- Equitable (not equal) learning experiences across multiple sections

Developmental process for the Team Instructional Approach

- Students raised issues related to inconsistencies across sections
- Instructors reported challenged to meet needs of students
- GTA learning was limited by role

Pressing issues are highlighted

Coordination is increased

- Innovative learning environment
- Consistency across sections yet responsive
- Enhanced access to timely and relevant feedback

- Course planning is a shared responsibility
- Instructional delivery promotes equitable experiences
- Assessment process supports learning

Approach is adapted

Key features are identified

- Embedded meetings
- Collaborative environment
- Progressive learning opportunities
- Decentralized organizational culture

Effects of enhanced coordination



Innovative learning environment through the use of engaging and authentic instructional strategies and assessments.

Consistency across sections related to instructional delivery and assessment yet responsive to individual student needs & instructor expertise.

Enhanced access to diverse opportunities offering timely and relevant feedback for supporting learning.

Developmental process for the Team Instructional Approach

- Students raised issues related to inconsistencies across sections
- Instructors reported challenged to meet needs of students
- GTA learning was limited by role

Pressing issues are highlighted

Coordination is increased

- Innovative learning environment
- Consistency across sections yet responsive
- Enhanced access to timely and relevant feedback

- Course planning is a shared responsibility
- Instructional delivery promotes equitable experiences
- Assessment process supports learning

Approach is adapted

Key features are identified

- Embedded meetings
- Collaborative environment
- Progressive learning opportunities
- Decentralized organizational culture

Team roles & responsibilities



- ❑ Course planning is shared
 - ❑ Ongoing contributing to materials development
- ❑ Instructional delivery promotes equitable experiences
 - ❑ Support for students offered through office hours, i-clickers, in-class discussions, email, discussion board
- ❑ Fair assessments support learning
 - ❑ Building of marking notes, training, review midterm with students, proctoring

Developmental process for the Team Instructional Approach

- Students raised issues related to inconsistencies across sections
- Instructors reported challenged to meet needs of students
- GTA learning was limited by role

Pressing issues are highlighted

Coordination is increased

- Innovative learning environment
- Consistency across sections yet responsive
- Enhanced access to timely and relevant feedback

- Course planning is a shared responsibility
- Instructional delivery promotes equitable experiences
- Assessment process supports learning

Approach is adapted

Key features are identified

- Embedded meetings
- Collaborative environment
- Progressive learning opportunities
- Decentralized organizational culture



Key Features of the TIA

Meetings, that are embedded, are focused on exchanging information and reflection.

Environment, that is collaborative, features mentoring of new team members.

Learning opportunities that are progressive in terms of roles and responsibilities.

Organizational culture that is characterized by being decentralized and efficient.

What evidence do we have of the TIA impact?



□ Student Perspective

- Overall increase in ratings (and consistency) across sections/terms in course evaluations
- Research study where students' course experiences were triangulated across multiple data sources:
 - in-class observations
 - weekly team meeting summaries
 - post course surveys

What evidence do we have of the TIA impact?

- **GTA Perspective**
 - Part of a learning-oriented team
 - Clear expectations
 - Reasonable workload
 - Contribute instructional ideas
 - Gain leadership skills
 - Additions to CV
 - High retention
- **Instructor Perspective**
 - Decreased email and office hour load
 - Impetus for ongoing course reflection and innovation
 - High student and GTA satisfaction-more likely to continue with the course

Applying the TIA to your instructional contexts



- What are the current major responsibilities of your GTAs?
- What is your current level of retention of GTAs and instructors?
- What opportunities do you see potential for offering your GTAs?
 - What challenges do you foresee?
 - Resources
 - Expertise
 - Motivation