THE EFFECTS OF CLASS SIZE ON STUDENTS IN THE INTRODUCTORY MARKETING COURSE

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ABSTRACT

For the past 30 years, business courses at California State University, Northridge have been taught in rooms that could hold no more than 40 students. In 1995 a new School of Business building was erected with a lecture hall that could comfortably hold 150 students. During the spring semester of 1995, two marketing faculty were scheduled to teach introductory marketing in the lecture hall as well as in smaller classrooms. This teaching schedule presented an opportunity to study how class size affects students' attitudes and performance in an introductory marketing course.

To minimize the effects of teaching methodology, each instructor attempted to maintain identical requirements and teaching styles between the large and small classes. Each professor taught his large and small classes using the same syllabus, text, lecture material, and exams. Moreover, all of the classes were taught during the day, thereby minimizing any "time-of-day" and "student" effects. Other than number of students, the only significant area in which the large and small classes differed was in the physical make-up of the classroom. That is, the lecture hall had cushioned seats arranged in tiered, semi-circular rows that approached a raised stage area. Because of the size of the lecture hall, a microphone was used to deliver the lecture. The lecture hall's video and sound system was state-of-the-art. When viewing a videotape in the lecture hall, students experienced an environment similar to that of a commercial movie theater: the lights were dimmed and an image was projected onto a huge screen while sound was emitted from speakers throughout the auditorium. The small classroom, in contrast, simply had a color TV monitor attached to the ceiling in the front corner of the room.

To measure the students' impressions of the various dimensions of teaching, an instrument was developed that contained the SEEQ (Students' Evaluations of Educational Quality) scale. This scale has been shown to be a reliable and valid measure of multiple teaching dimensions, namely student learning, instructor enthusiasm, instructor organization, group interaction, instructor rapport with students, breadth of coverage, examinations, assignments, and an overall evaluation (see Marsh 1982; Marsh and Bailey 1993). Other questions asked students to indicate their reasons for selecting the class, their attitudes toward class size, their evaluations of the course's difficulty, workload, and pace, their current grade point average, their expected grade in the course, their absentee rate, their "pre-class" interest in marketing, and their demographic characteristics. The questionnaire was administered to the students near the end of the semester.

All of the examinations of class size effects were conducted on a within-instructor basis. The large classes received course and professor evaluations that were comparable to the small ones, and, with minor exceptions, the large classes did not hinder the students' performance on the graded components of the course. The results of this study, for the most part, support the use of large classrooms for teaching introductory marketing.

REFERENCES
