

Off campus e-interviews: Linda Shenk

Results from: U of Minnesota Twin Cities, Michigan State, and Univ of Neb Lincoln.

What classes taught as LECs:

1) We teach general education through "interdisciplinary centers" that have no T-S faculty, but simply coordinate departmental contributions. English is responsible for contributing about 10 courses per semester, 2 of which are "our" course taught with 225 students and 3 GAs. Lecture (3 hours) and recitation (1 hour, sections of 25) each week. Some people are good at this; some are not. Some have been surprised that they actually like it. I taught one (IAH 207) that's on my web page in fall 2005. Inside the department, we've moved to teach Intro to Film and Intro to English Language Studies in lectures of 100, with breakout discussion sections. Next year, we're doing the same for our "survey" courses (ENG 310A/B/C/D/E). Given our limited GAships, we can't do a lot of this, but the fact is that bigger sections in one place lets you keep smaller sections in another.

2. We do both the 3-level British and American surveys in big formats of about 120 students with 4 TAs. There's also that 1-level Shakespeare with about 90 students or so. The 1001 Intro to Literature, and the 1101 Creative Writing intro are also big lectures. The 1101 has a course director, and then several faculty come in for one or two lectures each. There's also a 1-level intro to Am. Lit.

3.) The big classes are usually the lower level surveys and if they're over 70 one would have a grader assigned.

Crediting LECs

In all cases, an LEC counts as one class; class size makes no difference in teaching load.

Assigning LECs

1. I tried very hard as associate chair (responsible for scheduling) to make assignments evenly. EVERYONE has to contribute to the need to teach big classes; those who refused were offered "deals" to pick up the slack in courses that had lots of grading. It's difficult to work creative writers into the mix; some of them can't teach big classes, given the nature of what they do. I worked with them as a group, asking them to come up with a course or two that COULD be taught in large sections and then making them (as a group) responsible for getting one of their own to cover it. The really big lecture course (IAH 207) is basically on a rotation basis now; anyone who wants to see when it's their turn can ask to see the list of who's taught it when...and when it's next likely to be their turn. I try to keep new faculty in their first 2 years out of any large lecture courses....then, they're in the mix with everyone else. Only 2 senior faculty, with chairs, escape this cycle, and then only because it's not worth the battle to make them do it. More

recently-awarded chairs are in it like everyone else.

2. At this institution: LECs are desirable because no grading. More volunteers than there are sections. It is both more and less work than a regular section. You have to do a considerable amount of prep, especially the first two times you do it. But then you don't have to grade the papers. You do have to visit sections, meet with TAs, etc. We have TRIED to get it to count for two courses, but the dept. won't agree to this. History counts things like Western Civ. as two courses, because the TA meetings count as a kind of graduate teaching. I think we should do the same. OK: fairness and equity. Basically, whoever wants to teach one gets to teach one. A lot of people want them, in part because you have TAs to grade the papers. In general, I've always liked doing them, and I usually could. Now, with three medievalists, it has gotten a little tricky, since everyone now wants to the Brit. Survey I. The way we handle that is a kind-of / sort-of rotation. It's not ideal, because if you teach the course only once every 3 or 4 years, it goes out of your head and the prep time goes way up. Some of the people teach it in small sections during off years in the spring. (Big lecture is a fall offering.)

Creative Teaching of LECs / Interdisciplinarity

Our gen ed courses must be interdisciplinary, and of course many English classes are also now interdisciplinary. We have tried team teaching in limited ways, but in fact our most successful team teaching uses 2 folks from ENG, not faculty from 2 different departments. One problem with big classes is limited classroom space for big lectures; another is the need for tech rooms, which are in high demand. We have had some useful pedagogical discussions in recent years about HOW to teach big lectures courses. My IAH 207 made extensive use of paintings, for example, and I've talked with faculty members on 2 occasions about how that played out. (Many thanks to Faye Whitaker, who taught a course on the Baroque in lit and art in 1980 that influenced me a lot.) There's been useful cross-fertilization in the dept in things like using film, photography, anthropology, etc. Most discussions are informal, but some people find formal discussions useful.

University of Kansas: They tried LECs and were not pleased with the results, so as soon as the College backed off on the pressure to offer such courses, they went back to regular-sized sections. At present, they do not offer any large enrollment courses, though they did find that survey courses were the only ones they felt were pedagogically appropriate.