



Using Moodle to manage large student groups

Acknowledgment: The original source and full credit for these suggestions is Pieter van der Hijden who posted them to the Moodle.org discussion forums.

In the environment of a regular small class, there is more social control, informal contact etc., which helps in keeping the students on board. A key reason for grouping in Moodle is to create a small, safe environment instead of one where students may feel anonymous and lost amongst the massive numbers of a larger group.

To have them active participating is another challenge. A few suggestions:

- **Give the students weekly tasks**
A first task could be to upload their avatar picture and give some personal statements either to their profile, subgroup or to the whole group. This gives students a face, making them less anonymous and improves mutual contacts. Let them earn some points for these tasks.
- **Organize frequent feedback**
Feedback should not overload the teacher; don't rely on e-mail for this. It can be easily organized by subgroup with a discussion forum, workshop activity, choice option or even automatically calculated as the result of a quiz.
- **Watch and track the login statistics**
See if a reasonable amount of students logs in during the week and if not, take measures to discuss it with the chairs of the subgroups.
- **Make the start page attractive and frequently change**
Add a block with the top ten quiz results or a block with a daily changing glossary entry or cartoon.

The key solution is to subdivide the class into subgroups that will exist during the whole course.

1. You can invent a number of groups and give them a name (colours) or a number and the possibility to add a name to them later.
2. Use the Moodle Choice-activity to let the students enroll for a certain group. After this poll is closed you have to copy the results to the group administration manually, but only once.
3. Take time and spend energy to the group development process. Ask the groups to invent a name, to prepare a special web page (wiki), to add the group name to the profile pages of its members, to appoint a representative.
4. Create an additional group for all the representatives and exploit the Moodle functions for subgroups (discussion by subgroup, wiki by subgroup, etc.).
5. Use multi-stage activities where the subgroups prepare some results internally and publish it once finished to the larger audience (e.g. via a plenary forum or wiki).
6. Give feedback at subgroup level. Prepare overviews of the key results by subgroup.