

Multiple Instructors in EOS Courses: Can we do it better?

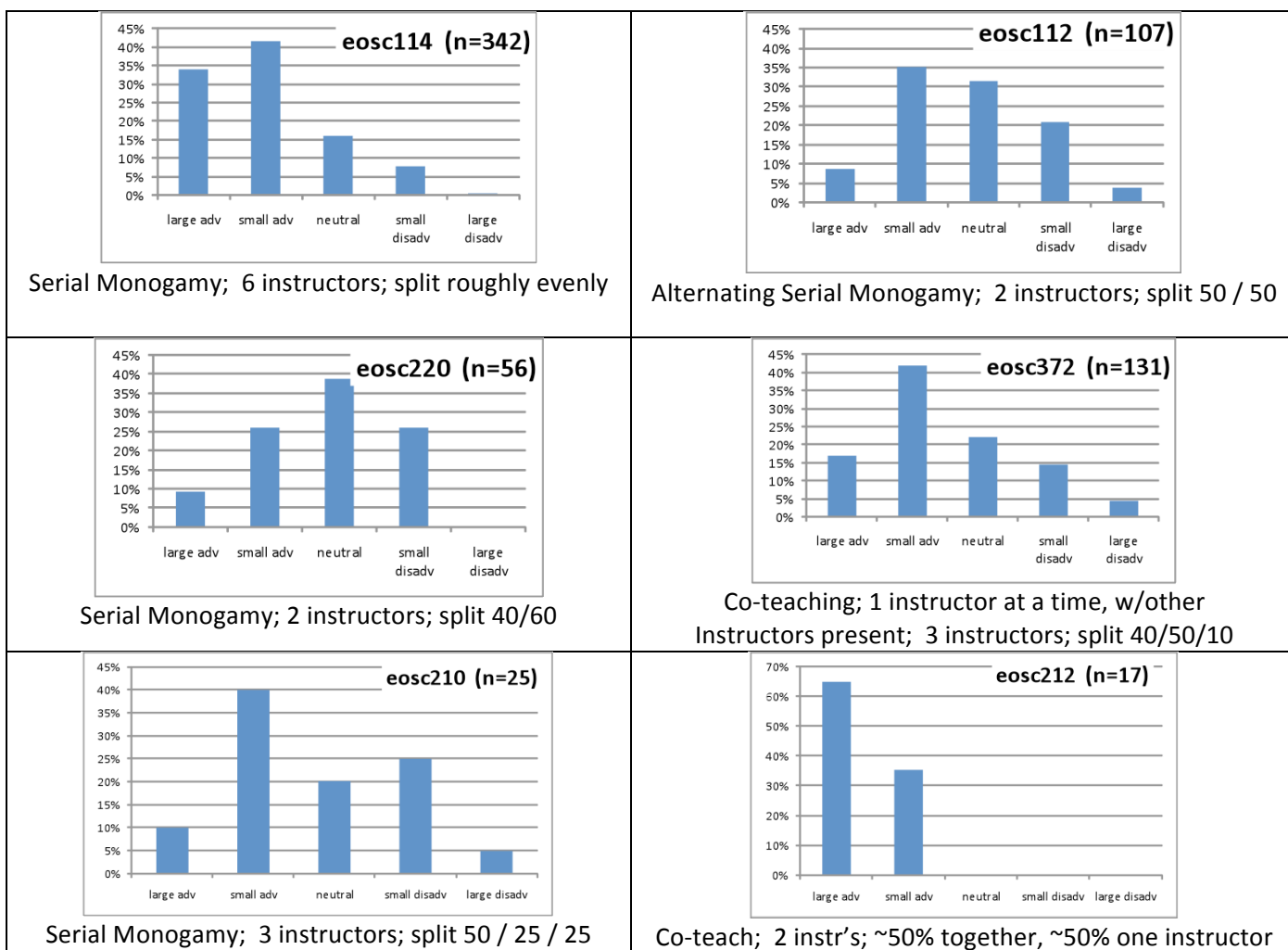
In EOS, we offer many courses with more than one instructor, following a wide range of models for sharing the teaching. What makes having multiple instructors work well? What does it take to make it work well?

This is an initial summary of survey data from several courses, from both students (n=748) and instructors (n=16), regarding the advantages and disadvantages they see in having multiple instructors in a single course.

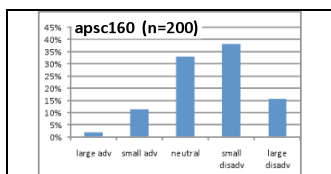
Perhaps the easiest comparison among courses is the blanket question:

“All things considered, how do you think having multiple instructors affected THIS course? It was ...

(A) a large advantage, (B) a small advantage, (C) Neutral, (D) a small disadvantage, (E) a large disadvantage.”



(EOSC 331 and ENVR 200 were also surveyed, but this simple question was not included.)



For comparison, here are the student answers from a non-EOS, cross-faculty split course that was taught in a serial monogamy model with two very different teaching modes.

More detailed information

In addition to the simple question above, students were asked for open-ended comments regarding advantages and disadvantages of multiple instructors in their course. Sixteen instructors were also asked about advantages & disadvantages “to students”, “to instructors”, and “to the department”. We classified all this feedback into broad categories in order to look for consistencies and differences among respondents and for different courses.

1. Advantages and disadvantages FOR STUDENTS:

There is broad agreement on both advantages and disadvantages to students of having multiple instructors. However there are differences in the percentages of each group (students and instructors) who independently identified each of the dominant categories, notably “expertise”.

| | ADVANTAGES | DISADVANTAGES |
|--------------------------|--|--|
| Students said: | Expertise: mentioned by 37% of students Variety (mostly of teaching styles & personalities): mentioned by 67% of students | Challenging to adjust to ... - teaching style (43%) - expectations about assessments (19%) - personalities (10%) |
| Instructors said: | Expertise: mentioned by 75% of instructors Variety: mentioned by 56% of instructors | Challenging to adjust to ... - teaching style (56%) - expectations about assessments (31%) - personalities (19%) |

2. Advantages and disadvantages FOR INSTRUCTORS and for the DEPARTMENT (instructor feedback only):

| ADVANTAGES | DISADVANTAGES |
|---|---|
| Collaboration & mentoring. Builds collegiality. | Management complexity, compatibility issues. |
| Flexibility with time | Takes extra time. Equity issues regarding time spent. |
| Teach in area of expertise | Less freedom regarding what to teach |
| Better reputation for department (if done well) | Worse reputation for department (if done poorly) |

RECOMMENDATIONS to maximize advantages to students and minimize disadvantages:

- Schedule split courses when there’s clear justification based on expertise, collaboration, &/or mentoring opportunities.
- Acknowledge that it takes extra total time to teach a multiple instructor course well, and plan for it.
- Ensure that all parties involved agree to sharing the course and commit to good coordination and consistent pedagogy and assessment.
- Communicate (often!) with students regarding why the course involves multiple instructors.
- Don’t split courses to balance teaching loads over 1 yr. Consider balancing over a longer time period.

When deciding on single or multiple instructors, consider advantages/disadvantages versus “costs”:

| Time, energy, resources=> | Low cost aspects | High cost aspects |
|---|-------------------------|--|
| Clear advantages for students | If this exists, do it. | Decide based on balance of costs & benefits. |
| Clear disadvantages for students | Avoid. | Avoid like the plague. |

FINALLY, a full report with detailed analysis and recommendations based on data and precedent will be available for the Department by April 2010.

Contact EOS-SEI: To talk about your course(s) or teaching and learning in general, visit EOS-South 361, or contact Francis Jones (fjones@eos.ubc.ca), Brett Gilley (bgilley@eos.ubc.ca), Erin Lane (elane@eos.ubc.ca), Josh Caulkins (jcaulkins@eos.ubc.ca) or Sara Harris (sharris@eos.ubc.ca). See also <http://www.eos.ubc.ca/research/cwsei/>.