

A distinctive characteristic of teaching at IIT Bombay, compared to most other IITs, is the size of our classes. Worldwide, the ideal class size is considered to be between 30 and 50 students – large enough for variety of discussion, yet small enough for in-person connection. However, soon after joining CSE IITB as a Systems faculty member, I realized that the number 25 that I had in my first course offering was the closest I would ever get to the ideal number!

In classes of 100-250 students, the biggest challenge is not classroom delivery. IITB has high quality classrooms that allow your material to reach easily to all the students. The real challenge is to ensure you are able to reach your students. This is what I refer to as the **CONNECT**.



As instructors, we want students to take meaningful learning from a course, and we want to ourselves remain motivated and steady throughout the semester. I have come to realize that the success of a course is not measured by any numbers, but in whether the students and the teaching team would like to relive its experience. In an era where access to information is no longer scarce, what truly remain with students are the memories of the content, the delivery, and the interaction – that is, the human aspects of a course.

TRUST-BASED CONNECTION



Scaling that human experience to large, diverse classes is not easy, and things go wrong very quickly. A looming paper deadline, a conference travel, a struggling mentee, a TA being unavailable, a spell of viral fever – any of these can cause students to disengage and leave the instructor counting the days until the semester ends.

So what has helped me establish, and maintain, a good connect in large classes?
EXPRESSING MYSELF MORE THAN I EARLIER THOUGHT WAS ESSENTIAL.

PROF. MANAS THAKUR



AS AN INSTRUCTOR, I HAVE ACCEPTED THAT NOT EVERYONE WILL ALWAYS BE HAPPY. BUT IF EVERYONE IS UNHAPPY, THAT IS A SIGNAL. IT CALLS FOR CONVERSATION — WITH STUDENTS, WITH TAs, AND WITH COLLEAGUES. MOREOVER, IT CALLS FOR UTILIZING THE CONNECT TO FIND SOLUTIONS.

Whatever we may feel about 0.5-mark cries or post-evaluation friction, our students look up to us and learn from us. If we clearly articulate the philosophy and logistics of the course at the beginning, including communication channels and expected response times; if we allow students to see modifications in our course plan; if we ensure transparency and fairness in marks and feedback; and of course if we try our best to teach well (no shortcuts to preparation), we lay the foundation for “trust”. That trust is the strongest reinforcement of connection. I know it exists when my students reach out to me, even if it is to complain.



A GLIMPSE AT THE SHEER VASTNESS OF LAS

When such a trust-based connection exists, I feel free to explain my reasoning during difficult situations – whether they are academically essential decisions or circumstances beyond my control. Sometimes, these moments even become learning-plus-bonding opportunities (for instance, students enjoy hearing the experiences from a conference). More often than not, students reciprocate with cooperation – and occasionally, even with help.

In a nutshell

To summarize, the challenge of teaching large classes is not about broadcasting content; it is about creating a frequency that everyone can tune into. When resonance is established through a trust-enforced connection, the semester stops feeling like a solo climb and becomes a collaborative exercise. The best courses aren't taught to students; they are built with them.