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AN EXPERIMENTAL EXAMINATION OF GROUP SIZE EFFECTS: IMPLICATIONS FOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

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Some of our early research indicated that the size of experiential learning labs in the first course in Management had a profound effect on 1) levels of student satisfaction and 2) levels of student performance on cognitive exams. To test the hypotheses derived from the earlier study, we assigned 400 students in the first course of Management to two types of experiential labs. One type of lab involving 200 student subjects, contained 15 or fewer members, while the other always contained 20 or more members. The experiment attempted to differentiate levels of student satisfaction and cognitive exam performance.

The results of this experiment did not verify the predicted outcomes. While levels of student satisfaction remained significantly higher for the smaller labs, it was not demonstrated that this type of environment 'was more conducive to cognitive exam performance. While there were many factors interacted with the results of this experiment, including teaching assistant effectiveness, time of day of the labs, etc., the experiment none the less has profound implications for the practice and extension of experiential learning techniques.

The implication to be drawn from this study is that even a large experiential lab, where numbers would appear to be "unmanageable" is significantly more prone to produce high levels of student satisfaction without sacrificing student cognitive exam performance - when compared to cognitive rather than experiential lab- experiences. While lab size, in an experiential mode, does not produce significant differences, our research has indicated that experiential labs, regardless of size, produce significantly higher levels of student satisfaction without sacrificing cognitive exam performance.