

## **Online Course Evaluation: Executive Summary**

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The transition to an online course evaluation system is not without pitfall. The research points toward several best practices to increase student response rates. Among these are: professor buy-in, a feedback driven culture, and student awareness and incentives.

The most common complaint of online course evaluations is the decrease in response rates (Crews and Curtis, 2011; Knight, Naidu, & Kinash, 2012;). However, there is considerable literature on methods to combat this reduction. The University of Oregon (2012) suggests the burden of increasing response rate lies with the professors. Many students surveyed believe that faculty do not take evaluations seriously, and do not make changes as a result of the students' reviews (Marlin, 1987; Nasser & Fresco, 2002; Spencer & Schmelkin, 2002). Literature published from the University of British Columbia (2010) shows increasing student's awareness on the purpose and impact of evaluations increases their response rates. Simply put, people do not want to take the time to fill out something that they believe does not matter (University of Oregon, 2012).

The University of Oregon (UO) uses a grade-hold system to uphold strong response rates, in which grades are released early based on the completion or declining of course evaluations. This university's response rates exist at around 65% including students who declined evaluations. UO also makes several suggestions for its faculty to aide in this process including, showing students exactly where and how they can access their evaluations, explaining that tenure and other promotable features utilize these evaluations for consideration, and making the evaluations assignments for credit (University of Oregon, 2012).

A study conducted by (Johnson, 2002) showed an increase in response rates from 40% to 62% with the use of incentives. Additional student comments also made an impressive jump from 10% to 63% in terms of paper versus online evaluations. The study showed the length of the survey was not a significant factor in response rates. This literature also makes suggestions for other universities considering the switch to the online evaluation process:

### **Best Practices**

1. Ensure that the system works properly. Students will be less likely to complete current or future evaluations if there are technical difficulties (Crew & Curtis, 2011).
2. Preparedness is key to the transition. Begin discussing it with faculty and students well beforehand (Crew & Curtis, 2011).
3. Strategies and tips on increasing student response rates should be made available for faculty before the transition takes place (Crew & Curtis, 2011).
4. The instructors should discuss improvements to the course since the last evaluation (Johnson, 2003; Chen & Hoshower, 2003).

5. Reserve class time for completion of the course evaluation (reserve a computer lab, have students bring laptop/tablets to class) (Johnson, 2003).
6. Foster a culture of feedback within the course (Nulty, 2008).
7. Extend the evaluation period for a recommended 4 weeks prior to finals (Nulty, 2008).
8. Continuously monitor and refine the course evaluation process (University of British Columbia, 2010).
9. Linking course evaluations to CougarView (D2L) (University of Oregon, 2012).
10. Have a pop-up reminder whenever students login to CougarView or CougarNet (Knight, Naidu, & Kinash, 2012).
11. Have a pop-up with a skip option, and require to students to provide rationale if choosing to decline evaluation (Knight, Naidu, & Kinash, 2012).
12. Create group sections to evaluate multiple instructors for a single course (Knight, Naidu, & Kinash, 2012).

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