

Annual Response Rate Report

2017

Annual Response Rate Report for Student Evaluations of Teaching (SET)

In order to provide the university community with the ability to assess the response rates of student teacher evaluations, the Office of Institutional Effectiveness provides an annual response rate report by College and Department. Data are derived from Class Climate, the software used to manage SET.

Overview (2016-2017)

Academic year 2017 held a decrease in overall response rates for student evaluations of teaching by 3.7% from Fall 2016 (60.1%) to Spring 2017 (56.4%). Persistently, the College of Nursing has held the highest response rate over the course of the academic year with at least a 74.5% response rate (expected due to evaluations being a course requirement). The School of Computing follows with at least a 66% response rate throughout the academic year. The College of Nursing, School of Computing, College of Engineering, Mitchell College of Business, and College of Arts and Sciences have all experienced decreases in their response rates from Fall 2016 to Spring 2017. Pat Capps Covey College of Allied Health Professions and the College of Education and Professional Studies were the only Colleges to see an increase of at least 0.4% over the course of the academic year.

College/School	Fall 2016 Response Rate (%)	Spring 2017 Response Rate (%)	Change Fall 2016 to Spring 2017 (%)
Nursing	84.2	74.5	-9.7
Computing	69.5	66.6	-2.9
Engineering	65.0	53.3	-11.7
Business	63.9	59.9	-4.0
Education	55.8	56.2	0.4
Allied Health Professions	53.0	64.7	11.7
*Arts & Sciences	52.2	49.5	-2.7
Overall	**60.1**	**56.4**	**-3.7**

* Modern and Classical Languages did not scan and are not included in the Fall 2016 numbers.

Fall 2015 to Fall 2016 Comparisons:

Of the seven Colleges, five experienced a decrease of 5% or more in response rates from Fall 2015 to Fall 2016 and the overall response rate decreased over 8%. Response rates from the School of Computing and Pat Capps Covey College of Allied Health Professions Engineering dropped over 10% from Fall 2015 to Fall 2016. The College of Nursing was the only College to experience an increase in response rates when comparing fall semesters.

College/School	Fall 2015 Response Rate (%)	Fall 2016 Response Rate (%)	Change Fall 2015 to Fall 2016 (%)
Nursing	79.5	84.2	4.7
Computing	80.8	69.5	-11.3
Engineering	70.7	65.0	-5.7
Business	67.8	63.9	-3.9
Education	65.1	55.8	-9.3
Allied Health Professions	66.1	53.0	-13.1
Arts & Sciences	60.7	52.2	-8.5
Overall	**68.3**	**60.1**	**-8.2**

Spring 2016 to Spring 2017 Comparisons:

The College of Engineering, Mitchell College of Business, College of Arts and Sciences, and College of Education and Professional Studies experienced decreases of 5% or more in response rates from Spring 2016 to Spring 2017. Pat Capps Covey College of Allied Health Professions was the only College to experience an increase from Spring 2016 to Spring 2017.

College/School	Spring 2016 Response Rate (%)	Spring 2017 Response Rate(%)	Change Spring 2016 to Spring 2017 (%)
Nursing	77.0	74.5	-2.5
Computing	70.1	66.6	-3.5
Engineering	63.2	53.3	-9.9
Business	65.8	59.9	-5.9
Education	61.5	56.2	-5.3
Allied Health Professions	58.0	64.7	6.7
Arts & Sciences	55.4	49.5	-5.9
Overall	**65.3**	**56.4**	**-8.9**

Online versus Paper Surveys:

The response rates for paper evaluations increased 2.7% from Fall 2016 to Spring 2017. Electronic survey response rates decreased by 4% from Fall 2016 to Spring 2017.

Administrative Modality	Enrollment		Participants		Response Rate	
	Fall 2016	Spring 2017	Fall 2016	Spring 2017	Fall 2016	Spring 2017
Paper overall	4,059	3,216	*2,275	1,891	56.1%	58.8%
Electronic overall	56,296	51,675	33,939	29,085	60.3%	56.3%

* Modern and Classical Languages did not scan and are not included in the Fall 2016 numbers.

Departmental Response Rates (Fall 2016)

College	Department	Response Rate	Survey Administration
Allied Health ** These surveys are administered online, in class.	Biomedical Sciences	48.9%	Online
	Cardiorespiratory Care	100%	**Online, in-class
	Emergency Medical Services	50.9%	Online
	Occupational Therapy	51.8%	Online
	Physical Therapy	100%	Online
	Physician Assistant	100%	**Online, in-class
	Radiologic Sciences	98.4%	Online
	Speech Pathology and Audiology	71.1%	Online
Arts & Sciences * Modern and Classical Languages did not scan are not included in the Fall 2016 numbers.	Air Force Studies	47.4%	Online
	Biology	50.5%	Online
	Chemistry--Lab	58.9%	Online
	Chemistry--Lecture	51.5%	*Majority Paper
	Communication	55.8%	Online
	DS Mathematics	69.6%	Online
	Earth Sciences	58.2%	Online
	English	52.1%	Online
	History	45.1%	Online
	Interdisciplinary Programs	50.1%	Online
	Marine Sciences	46.8%	Online
	Mathematics and Statistics	51.9%	Online
	Military Science	47.3%	Online
	Modern and Classical Languages & Literature	*Not included	*Paper
	Music	53.9%	*Paper
	Philosophy	72.4%	*Majority Paper
	Physics	46.9%	Online
	Political Science and Criminal Justice	43.4%	Online
	Psychology	51.9%	Online
	Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work	51.0%	Online
	Theatre & Dance	61.7%	*Paper
	Visual Arts	52.6%	Online
Business	Accounting	84.9%	Online
	Economics and Finance	71.8%	Online
	Management	56.5%	Online
	Marketing & Quantitative Methods	55.2%	Online
Computing	Computer Information Science	51.7%	Online
	Computer Science	85.3%	Online
	Health Informatics	95.1%	Online
	Information Systems	92.2%	Online
	Information Technology	79.0%	Online
Education and Professional Studies *Professional Studies is now Counseling and Professional Studies	Professional Studies	64.9%	Online
	Health, Kinesiology & Sport	41.0%	Online
	Hospitality & Tourism Management	71.5%	Online
	Integrative Studies	64.6%	Online
	Leadership & Teacher Education	76.6%	Online
Engineering	Chemical & Biomolecular Engineering	53.0%	Online
	Civil, Coastal, and Environmental Engineering	77.7%	Online
	Engineering	68.2%	Online
	Electrical & Computer Engineering	67.2%	Online
	Mechanical Engineering	52.9%	Online
Nursing ***Nursing surveys are administered online as a requirement for courses.	Adult Health Nursing	91.7%	***Online
	Community Mental Health Nursing	86.2%	***Online
	Health Sciences	63.4%	***Online
	Maternal Child Health Nursing	86.0%	***Online
	Nursing	82.4%	***Online

*Response Rates over 70% are highlighted.

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	Physical Therapy	93.6%	Online
	Physician Assistant	98.7%	**Online, in-class
	Radiologic Sciences	89.1%	Online
	Speech Pathology and Audiology	64.3%	Online
Arts & Sciences	Air Force Studies	34.4%	Online
	Biology	53.4%	Online
	Chemistry--Lab	55.8%	Online
	Chemistry--Lecture	57.6%	*Majority Paper
	Communication	39.0%	Online
	DS Mathematics	55.2%	Online
	Earth Sciences	63.5%	Online
	English	47.4%	Online
	History	43.3%	Online
	Interdisciplinary Programs	48.9%	Online
	Marine Sciences	43.0%	Online
	Mathematics and Statistics	47.8%	Online
	Military Science	25.0%	Online
	Modern and Classical Languages & Literature	47.6%	Online
	Music	55.9%	*Paper
	Philosophy	64.3%	*Majority Paper
	Physics	43.4%	Online
	Political Science and Criminal Justice	40.1%	Online
	Psychology	45.3%	Online
	Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work	44.7%	Online
	Theatre & Dance	63.7%	*Paper
	Visual Arts	56.9%	Online
Business	Accounting	81.0%	Online
	Economics and Finance	76.8%	Online
	Management	48.2%	Online
	Marketing & Quantitative Methods	50.5%	Online
Computing	Computer Information Science	50.4%	Online
	Computer Science	82.8%	Online
	Health Informatics	93.1%	Online
	Information Systems	94.2%	Online
	Information Technology	78.2%	Online
Education and Professional Studies	Counseling & Instructional Sciences	65.5%	Online
	Health, Kinesiology & Sport	37.4%	Online
	Hospitality & Tourism Management	39.8%	Online
	Integrative Studies	71.4%	Online
	Leadership & Teacher Education	79.8%	Online
Engineering	Chemical & Biomolecular Engineering	51.5%	Online
	Civil, Coastal, and Environmental Engineering	75.9%	Online
	Engineering	59.0%	Online
	Electrical & Computer Engineering	52.1%	Online
	Mechanical Engineering	33.5%	Online
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	Maternal Child Health Nursing	75.5%	***Online
	Nursing	71.2%	***Online

*Response Rates over 70% are highlighted.

Conclusion:
Data reveals response rates declined over the course of the academic year (AY 2017). Response rates also declined when comparing Fall 2015 to Fall 2016 and Spring 2016 to Spring 2017. A thorough review of departmental data reveals that survey administration may impact response rates as in the case of the College of Nursing as well as the Departments of Physician Assistant Studies and Cardiorespiratory Care. Departmental response rates demonstrate it is possible to achieve response rates over 70% for student evaluations of teaching.

OIE:
OIE is responsible for administering the course evaluations. OIE monitors the Class Climate administrator email account throughout the evaluation period and provides assistance (in conjunction with the Computer Services Center) for any problems related to the evaluations. OIE also works with ILC to announce evaluations and manage evaluation links on SAKAI.

OIE has adjusted the default email sent to students to emphasize the fact that responses are anonymous and that reports will not be available to faculty until after final grades are posted in an attempt to encourage participation.

OIE will continue to monitor response rates, keeping Deans and Chairs well-informed of course and department response rates. Those departments with response rates below 70% will be contacted by OIE staff and offered additional support (See Attachments 1 and 2.).

Additionally, OIE provides the following recommendations which can assist Deans and Faculty in an attempt to increase response rates to an acceptable level of 70%.

Recommendations:

What Provost can do:
OIE recommends that Dr. Johnson send an email to faculty and students to encourage participation in student evaluations of teaching. We suggest that this email be sent shortly before the launch of student evaluation of teaching surveys.

What Deans can do:
OIE recommends that Deans echo Dr. Johnson's email with an additional before evaluations to promote additional participation for reluctant students.

Deans and Chairs are encouraged to monitor and utilize the periodic response rate reports sent throughout the evaluation period to target those courses which have not reached the acceptable goal.

What Faculty can do:
Faculty are also encouraged to utilize resources provided by Class Climate such as 1) Participation Tracking Reports (OIE can provide this report at the request of faculty) and 2) Certificates of Completion (sent by email directly to the student).

Faculty are reminded they can make the evaluation part of the course by adding evaluation information to the course syllabus and even requesting "Certificates of Completion" from students.

Faculty are encouraged to send reminders to students via email or SAKAI.

Faculty may offer small incentives (extra points/ drop a low-stakes grade) for course evaluations.

What has worked?
The College of Nursing held the highest response rate over the course of the academic year with at least a 74.5% response rate. The College of Nursing requires a "Certificate of Completion" from each student as part of the assignments in the course syllabus. This is neither a requirement for completion of the course nor can this be a requirement for release of grades; however, it is listed as an assignment in the syllabus and on Sakai where students will receive a checkmark instead of points for the assignment.

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA

Improving Online Response Rates

Class Climate includes two options for tracking participation.

- Participation Tracking Report and/or
- Certificate of Participation as either an email or pdf.

Please note: Survey responses are not tied to the Participation Tracking Report or the Certification of Participation.

- Participation Tracking Report

Participation Tracking Reports can be generated by OIE and sent to the faculty member.

An example of a Participation Tracking Report is presented below. The PSWD is not linked to a student email address in any report or data file.

Course	PSWD	Email	Participated
Course Name and ID	KPFNQ	zzxz1113@jagmail.southalabama.edu	Yes
Course Name and ID	EFXGA	zzxz106@jagmail.southalabama.edu	No
Course Name and ID	9DFUC	zzxz401@jagmail.southalabama.edu	Yes

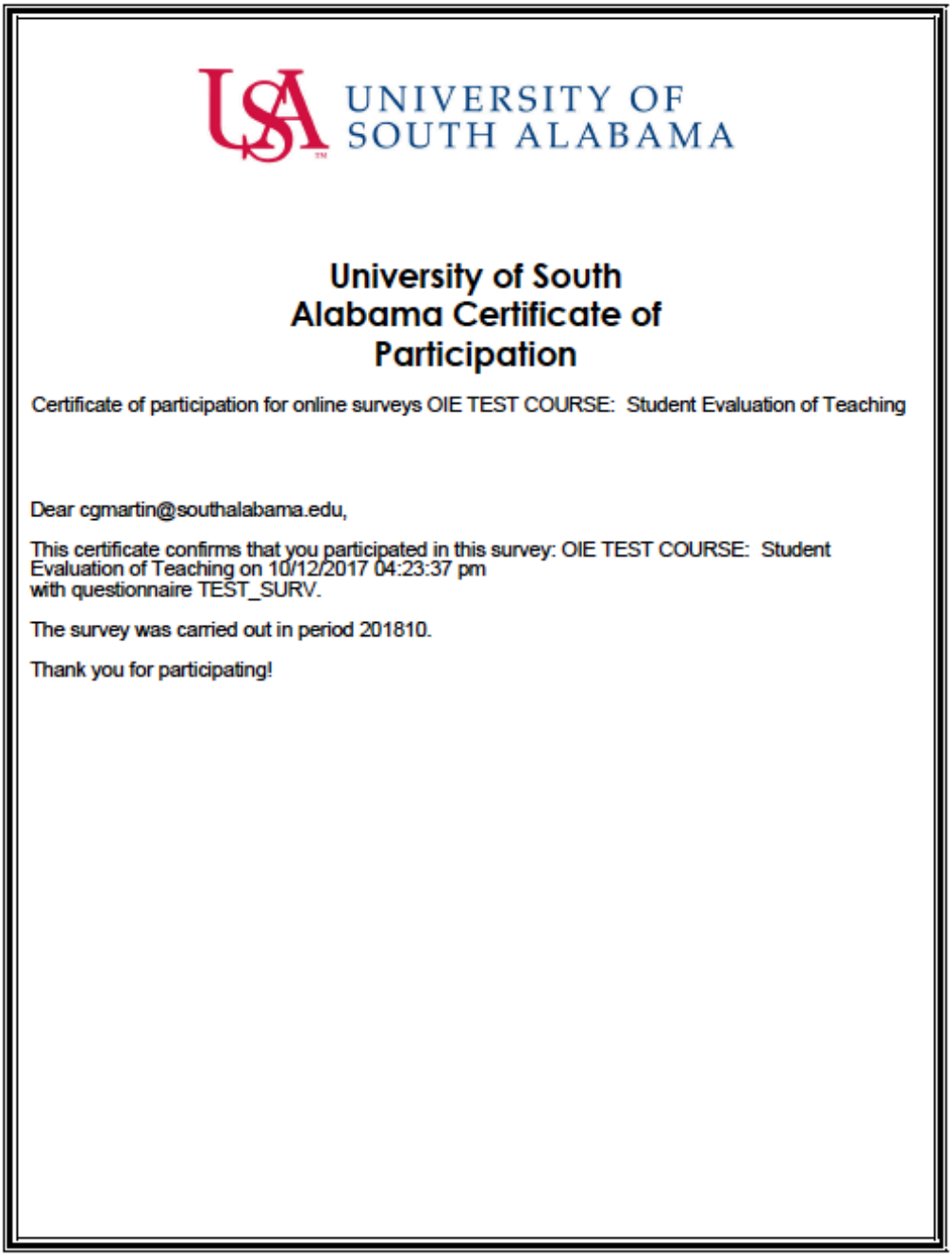
- Certificate of Participation (email)

Students receive an email from Class Climate after completing a survey. See screenshot below.



- Certificate of Participation (pdf document).

Upon completion of a survey, a pdf document (see below) pops-up which can be printed or saved by the student.



UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA

University of South Alabama Certificate of Participation

Certificate of participation for online surveys OIE TEST COURSE: Student Evaluation of Teaching

Dear cgmartin@southalabama.edu,

This certificate confirms that you participated in this survey: OIE TEST COURSE: Student Evaluation of Teaching on 10/12/2017 04:23:37 pm
with questionnaire TEST_SURV.

The survey was carried out in period 201810.

Thank you for participating!

Other Strategies for Increasing Response Rates

1. **Make evaluation a part of the course.**
   - Add information to the course syllabus regarding student evaluation of teaching including:
     - Evaluation dates
     - Information regarding the email
     - A statement describing the importance of student input for course improvement.
   - Provide a "live" demonstration of the evaluation process.
   - Reinforce the message that instructors will not have access to individual student evaluations but would be given summary reports only after the course grades are filed.
   - Direct or accompany students to a computer laboratory to complete their evaluations.
   - Allow students to complete the evaluation in class using their handheld devices, laptops or tablets.

2. **Remind students often.**
   - Faculty may add an announcement to each course site with the dates of the online evaluation.
   - Faculty teaching web-enhanced courses or web-blended course sections should announce the dates of the online evaluation in class and encourage participation.
   - Faculty may send at least 1 email reminder to students.

3. **Offer a small incentive.**
   - Provide course incentives such as:
     - extra credit/points for participating;
     - drop a low-stakes grade;
     - extra credit/points for achieving an overall course response rate.

Berk, R. A. (2012). Top 20 strategies to increase the online response rates of student rating scales. *International Journal of Technology in Teaching and Learning, 8*(2), 98-107.

Top 20 Strategies to Increase the Online Response Rates of Student Rating Scales

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Over the past decade, a conversion from paper-and-pencil to online administration of student rating scales has been taking place at hundreds of institutions world-wide. Probably the most serious problem that has emerged is low response rates compared to the previous in-class administrations. Faculty and administrators have addressed this problem by experimenting with several techniques to increase rates, including a variety of incentives and disincentives for students to complete the forms. This online issue began with face-to-face (F2F) courses, but now is occurring with online and blended/hybrid courses as well. This article is a state-of-the-art review of this problem. The proposed techniques and all of the related issues will be examined in the context of the accumulated research and current practices. This review will culminate in a "Top 20" list of the most promising strategies along with suggestions for assuring high response rates from year to year.

Keywords: student evaluation of teaching (SET), student ratings, online administration, teaching effectiveness, face-to-face courses, blended courses, hybrid courses, Web-based courses, distance learning

INTRODUCTION

The research on student rating scales has been accumulating for 90 years (Freyd, 1923). Over the past decade, the conversion from paper-and-pencil to online administration of these scales has been taking place at hundreds of institutions world-wide. This trend began predominantly with face-to-face (F2F) courses, but has slowly spread to the evaluation of online and blended/hybrid courses. The online administrations have encountered a few problems that challenge the reliability and validity of the results (Berk, 2013). This article examines the most pervasive problem: low response rate.

ONLINE ADMINISTRATION OPTIONS

Online administration of student rating scales has been executed either by an in-house IT system or by an out-house vendor specializing in online administration,

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analysis, and score reporting, such as CollegeNET (*What Do You Think?*), ConnectEDU (*courseval*), Evaluation-KIT (*Online Course Evaluation and Survey System*), and IOTA Solutions (*MyClassEvaluation*). Even the choice of the course management system is crucial in providing the anonymity for students to respond, which could boost response rates (Oliver & Sautter, 2005). All commercially-developed scale packages also provide online administration, along with the scale and other delivery services. Those scales include *Student Instructional Report II (SIR II), Course/Instructor Evaluation Questionnaire (CIEQ), IDEA Student Ratings of Instruction,* and *Student Evaluation of Educational Quality (SEEQ)* (Berk, 2006).

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

The problem is that response rates for online administrations have been consistently lower than their paper-and-pencil predecessor, where the instructor controlled the in-class response rate with a student administrator and collector. In some cases, these rates for F2F courses have dipped to 50% and even lower (Anderson, Cain, & Bird, 2005; Benton, Webster, Gross, & Pallett, 2010; Heath, Lawyer, & Rasmussen, 2007), which render them useless for any decision making. Faculty members at various institutions have used that excuse to resist the online conversion. Experience with the online administration process has yielded a variety of strategies to increase response rates, including incentives and disincentives for students to complete the scales, which have now crept back up to the 70s and even 90s at several institutions.

This article examines the state-of-the-art of response rates. Given its importance in considering online administration of scales and its impact on the psychometric quality and interpretation of results, administrators and faculty have experimented with a wide range of techniques to increase rates. These techniques and several related issues will be reviewed in the context of the accumulated research and current practices in the evaluation of teaching effectiveness. This review will highlight a "Top 20" list of the most promising strategies and then proffer guidelines for their application in any institution. The response rate aftermath will also be examined with suggestions for assuring high response rates from year to year.

LOW RESPONSE RATES

WHAT'S WRONG WITH LOW?

The problem with low response rates is that they provide an *inadequate data base from which to infer teaching effectiveness* from the scores on a student rating scale as well as other measures. If the percentage of responses is too small, the sampling error can be frightfully large and the representativeness of the student responses can be biased. The nonresponse bias also becomes a concern. The error (reliability) and biases (validity) significantly diminish the usefulness of the ratings and make administrators unhappy. Those psychometric deficiencies can undermine the evaluation process.

WHAT ARE THE REASONS?

The research on this topic indicates the following possible reasons students fail to respond to rating scales: *apathy, technical problems, perceived lack of anonymity, lack of importance, inconvenience, inaccessibility, and time for completion* (Adams & Umbach, 2012; Avery, Bryan, Mathios, Kang, & Bell, 2006; Ballantyne, 2002, 2003; Dommeyer, Baum, & Hanna, 2002; Sorenson & Reiner, 2003). When students do not complete the

rating scales for any of those excuses, legitimate or illegitimate, response rates plummet. Recent improvements in the technical design and execution of online delivery systems have reduced and, in some cases, eliminated those perceptions at some institutions, but they still exist at most where comprehensive administration procedures have not been implemented to systematically address those reasons.

Faculty members also have had concerns that dissatisfied students are more likely to respond than other students (Johnson, 2003). This possible *negative response bias* was not supported by Kherfi (2011) and Benton et al.'s (2010) study that found very low correlations between response rate and student ratings.

STATISTICAL ISSUES

Although the minimum response rate based on sampling error for a seminar with 10 students may be different from a class with 50, 100, or larger, rates in the 80–100% range will be adequate for most any class size. Statistical tables of response rates for different errors and confidence intervals are available (Nulty, 2008).

Unfortunately, the *rules of survey sampling do not provide a simple statistical answer* to the response rate question for online rating scales. The class (sample) size that responds in relation to the class (population) size is not the only issue. There are at least two major sources of error (or unreliability) to consider: (1) *standard error of the mean rating* based on sample size and (2) *standard error of measurement* based on the reliability of the item, subscale, or total scale ratings. Confidence intervals can be computed for both.

In typical survey research, inferences about characteristics of the population are drawn from the sample statistics. Only *decisions about groups* are rendered; not about individuals. In contrast, the inferences from sample (class) ratings are used for teaching improvement (formative) and important career (summative) *decisions about individual professors*. The *response rate for one type of decision may not be adequate for other types of decisions* (Berk, 2013).

CURRENT RESPONSE RATES

So what is the current state of practice at many institutions? The response rates for online administration have been reported in the 50s compared to 70s–80s for paper-based administration (Benton et al., 2010). The *online rates have been consistently lower than paper* at several institutions (Anderson et al., 2005; Avery et al., 2006; Mau & Opengart, 2012; Morrison, 2011; Nowell, Gale, & Handley, 2010; Nulty, 2008; Sax, Gilmartin, & Bryant, 2003; Sid Nair, Adams, & Mertova, 2008; Stowell, Addison, & Smith, 2012). These rates can sabotage the teaching evaluation process. The low rates are a frequent objection to online ratings reported in faculty surveys (Crews & Curtis, 2011). Fear of low response rates has been one of the major deterrents why some institutions have not adopted online systems. What can be done to improve these rates?

TOP 20 STRATEGIES TO BOOST RESPONSE RATES

Survey researchers have examined the *use of a variety of incentives* (Toepoel, 2012) in online surveys (Bennett & Sid Nair, 2010; Van Selm & Jankowski, 2006), including vouchers and lottery prizes (Deutskens, de Ruyter, Wetzels, & Oosterveld, 2004; Gajic, Cameron, & Hurley, 2011; Laguilles, Williams, & Saunders, 2011), as pre- and post-incentives (Sánchez- Fernández, Muñoz-Leiva, Montoro-Ríos, & Ibáñez-Zapata, 2010), compared to disincentives and no incentive. Guess what? *Vouchers and a lottery with a*

small number of large prizes or small prizes with a higher chance of winning generate the highest response rates. Although these and other incentives can contribute to raising rates to varying degrees in surveys, they have not been studied with online student rating scales.

Administrators, faculty, and students at several institutions have tested a variety of strategies to increase the response rate of online administrations. Here are *20 of the most effective strategies* (Adams, 2012; Adams & Umbach, 2012; Berk, 2006, 2013; Dommeyer, Baum, Hanna, & Chapman, 2004; Johnson, 2003; Sorenson & Reiner, 2003; The IDEA Center, 2008). They are grouped according to the person responsible for executing the strategy—the coordinator or director of the online system AND faculty and administrators.

COORDINATOR/DIRECTOR OF ONLINE SYSTEM

1. Institution/department/external vendor coordination and management of online system must be independent of faculty to monitor the entire process (Berk, 2006)
2. Specifies purpose(s) of ratings (teaching improvement, salary, promotion, tenure) in the scale's directions (Benton & Cashin, 2012; Berk, 2006), despite the minimal effects on ratings (Centra, 1976; Marsh, 2007)
3. Assures ease of computer access and navigation on campus (Sorenson & Reiner, 2003)
4. Monitors use of technology (PCs/Macs, iPads, etc.) and procedures for in-class administration (The IDEA Center, 2008)
5. Assures anonymity and confidentiality (Adams, 2012; Berk, 2006; Sorenson & Reiner, 2003; The IDEA Center, 2008)
6. Provides instructions on how to use the system (Dommeyer et al., 2004; Johnson, 2003; Norris & Conn, 2005)
7. Maintains a convenient, user-friendly system (Layne, DeCristoforo, & McGinty, 1999; Ravelli, 2000; Sid Nair & Adams, 2009; Sorenson & Reiner, 2003)
8. Sends reminders to all students before window of response opens, then frequent reminders during window to only students who have not responded (Adams, 2012; Cook, Heath, & Thompson, 2000; Dommeyer et al., 2004; Sid Nair et al., 2008)
9. Plans ad campaigns to inform students of process online and in student publications (The IDEA Center, 2008)
10. Provides school-wide incentives, such as a lottery for an iPad, iPhone, or some other iGadget, bookstore items, or food coupons (Ballantyne, 2003; Johnson, 2003)
11. Acknowledges and rewards faculty and/or departments that meet target response rate (The IDEA Center, 2008) (*NOTE:* Make sure this "healthy competition" doesn't affect the integrity of the process.)
12. Promotes donor/alumni contributions of a dollar amount to a charity for every form completed (Ravenscroft & Enyeart, 2009)
13. Communicates the notion that assessment of teaching and the students' formal feedback in that process are part of the campus culture and their responsibility (The IDEA Center, 2008)
14. Permits students' early access to final course grades ASAP after course, usually by online posting (Anderson, Brown, & Spaeth, 2006; Berk, 2006; Dommeyer et al., 2004; Johnson, 2003)

FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATORS

15. Deans, department chairs, and faculty communicate to students the importance of their input (Berk, 2006; Johnson, 2003; Sorenson & Reiner, 2003)
16. Faculty emphasize the intended purpose(s) of the ratings (The IDEA Center, 2008)
17. Faculty strongly encourage students and remind students to complete forms (Adams, 2012; The IDEA Center, 2008)
18. Faculty "assign" students to complete forms as part of course grade (Ravenscroft & Enyeart, 2009)
19. Faculty provide positive incentives, such as extra credit or points or dropping a low grade on an assignment or quiz (Dommeyer et al., 2004; Johnson, 2003; Prunty, 2011), movie or restaurant vouchers, cruise tickets, or vacation package to Rio
20. Faculty set an in-class time to simulate the "captive audience" concept of the paper-and-pencil administration, but this time with laptops, iPads, or iPhones to complete forms; also computer lab or chat-room times can be reserved for this purpose (The IDEA Center, 2008)

APPLICATION OF STRATEGIES

As you process the preceding list, there will be several strategies that may strike your fancy (cruise and trip to Rio) and fit into your online system. However, there are others that may incite you to riot because they may be perceived as unethical ("assign" students or dropping a low grade), somewhat questionable (vouchers and lotteries), or even illegal (bribes and early access to grades).

Which ones should you pick? The next section proffers some concrete guidelines.

COMBINATIONS OF STRATEGIES

There is no evidence-based or best-practices model at present to suggest all 20 strategies or a specific generic combination will solve the response rate problem in every institution. Certainly no one has used all 20, since they were compiled in this article for the first time. However, researchers and administrators have tested a variety of combinations in the context of evaluating teaching effectiveness. Their reports indicate the following guidelines for implementing the 20 strategies:

a. ***Strategies 1–8:*** Administrative and organizational procedures are essential to address most of the aforementioned reasons many students do not respond. These must be considered by every institution to convey the importance of responding and eliminate any technical issues that would hinder students from completing scales quickly and without glitches. Commitment by all faculty stakeholders is crucial.
b. ***Strategies 9–13:*** These system-wide incentives yield variable increases in response rates. Your faculty must decide which incentives should be applied or tested across all courses. The rates may not be consistent in every department. Their procedures, execution, and results should be documented to assess their efficacy and replicability for future semesters.
c. ***Strategy 14:*** Early posting of grades has produced the highest increase of any single strategy. This system-wide incentive has been reported by numerous institutions to be extremely effective. It is contingent upon the registrar's grade-processing schedule. If the registrar posts grades within a week after final exams

and projects at the end of the semester, then the incentive is gone. Intentionally delaying that posting is questionable. There are also legal issues involved in withholding grades which have been raised in countries outside the U.S.

d. ***Strategies 15–17:*** Administrators and faculty should coordinate communication to students on the importance of responding to overcome their apathy. This is highly recommended and one of the reasons students do not bother to respond. They are not convinced their ratings will make any difference to improve teaching. Faculty should also follow-up with reminders in their classes.
e. ***Strategies 18–19:*** These course-specific incentives are the most contentious nationally and internationally. They have been used in individual courses, but not system-wide, with highly variable increases in response rates. Your faculty should discuss the merits of these incentives for their classes. They have ethical and legal implications related to course objectives, content, and grading.
f. ***Strategy 20:*** These in-class administration options can produce response rates comparable to the paper-based version of yesteryear. They are applicable to F2F and blended courses, but not online courses. Many professors are comfortable with this in-class administration because it retains the best of both worlds. To assure standardized administration conditions, your faculty must agree to system-wide administration in-class (or computer lab) OR online, but not a mix of both.

PICK THE "RIGHT" COMBINATION

Overall, it is the right combination of administrative procedures and incentives that can yield response rates in the 70s–90s. The administrator of the online system and faculty must carefully review and discuss all of the preceding options to decide on what is the "right" combination of strategies for their particular program. What is right for your institution may not be right elsewhere. It should receive the *commitment of all stakeholders* involved in the process and be compatible with your campus culture. The system must then be executed properly to assure a high RSOI (rate of student return on the online investment).

RESPONSE RATE AFTERMATH: WHAT'S NEXT?

Once tested, a systematic evaluation of all of the strategies should be conducted to determine what needs to be changed to improve the combination. However, once a defensible response rate has been achieved, the formula that produced it should be replicable. What will be the future rates semester after semester? Two key factors must be considered: (1) students' expectations and (2) system accountability.

STUDENTS' EXPECTATIONS

Once the system is implemented, your job isn't over. I bet you were packing your bags for Rio. Too bad. Instead, *think about how the students will remember their "rating experience."* This applies to all courses—F2F, online, and blended/hybrid. If the experience was positive and meaningful, then they'll probably participate the next semester; if it was negative due to administrative or technical problems, too time-consuming, perceived as a waste of time, or infringed on party activities, then expect response rates to nose-dive, again. The latter reasons for nonresponse can implode the evaluation program. The combination of strategies chosen is intended to eliminate those reasons.

The design and operation of the online administration will be major determinants of whether students will continue to complete the rating scales. Their expectations about how the results will be used are also critical to future response rates. Chen and Hoshower (2003) found that *students' motivation to participate* in the rating system hinged on the following semi-observable outcomes (in order of decreasing importance): (1) improvements in teaching, (2) improvements in course content and format, and (3) faculty personnel decisions (promotion, tenure, salary increase).

SYSTEM ACCOUNTABILITY

How will your system respond to your students' expectations? That response will affect their behaviors and future response rates. The bottom line relates to the instructional changes made as a result of the students' ratings.

Changes. The efforts to make changes and the actual changes that occur based on the results are often referred to as "closing the loop" (Bennett & Sid Nair, 2010). It builds credibility and administrative accountability into the system. The changes convey: "Student ratings are meaningful and important." Students' input or feedback really matters. They are engaged as active participants to provide evidence in the process of evaluating teaching effectiveness.

No changes. Students' iBalls and iPhones will be riveted on the follow-up actions taken by your administrators and faculty. Their texting grapevine is extremely effective. Contrary to the preceding scenario, suppose students do not see any results. Their expectations are explicit because the intended purposes of the ratings were stated in the directions on the scale. Those words need to be backed up with observable actions. If not, why should they bother to complete the scales the next time they're asked? If those purposes are not fulfilled, the response rates can plummet, again! Then you're back to where you started with low response rates.

CONCLUSIONS

Low response rates are a ubiquitous and thorny problem in the online administration of student rating scales and other measures in higher education world-wide. Over the past decade, a track record of research and practices occurring contemporaneously with the conversions from paper-and-pencil to online scale administrations produced a variety of strategies tested at institutions throughout the U.S. This article synthesized those strategies into an organized "Top 20" list with specific guidelines for their application to programs evaluating teaching effectiveness.

From that synthesis, six conclusions can be drawn about how to boost response rates:

1. No single strategy can address all of the reasons students fail to respond to rating scales.
2. There is no evidence-based or best-practices model to provide a generic combination of strategies that will be effective in every institution.
3. Administrators and faculty need to carefully scrutinize the various administrative, organizational, and incentive strategies to determine those that are most appropriate for their specific application, albeit, the "right" combination; that combination should be tested and evaluated.
4. The combination of strategies should significantly decrease or eliminate the students' reasons for not responding.
5. The combination that is adopted should have the commitment of all stakeholders.

6. An evaluation of students' expectations of the instructional changes to be made based on the results should be conducted to assure system accountability and future high response rates.

Overall, the students' role in completing the rating scales online should be viewed as an essential antecedent to the success of your teaching evaluation system. All of the preceding elements are interconnected and must mesh effectively to assure the seamless execution of the online administrations and high student response rates from year to year.

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