Common Concerns/Myths of On-line Evaluations

Concern 1: Online evaluations lead to a lower response rate which may have negative consequences for faculty.¹
- The majority of studies, including one at NC State, confirm lower response rates for online versus paper systems.¹²
- Students often lack the motivation to complete online evaluations. Additionally, online evaluations can be lengthy and students often have a large number of evaluations to complete. On average, students at NC State have to fill out 5.7 class evaluations per semester.
- With paper evaluations, instructor presence as well as peer pressure may lead to bias.

Concern 2: Dissatisfied/less successful students participate in the online method at a higher rate than other students.¹
- Research, including a large study conducted at NC State,² refutes this concern. High-performing students complete course evaluations at a higher rate than less successful students.
- Dissatisfied students do not appear to be more likely to complete online evaluations than paper ones. At NC State, students with GPAs between 1-1.99 had an average response rate of 23% while the response rates for GPAs between 2-2.99 and 3-4.00 were 37% and 48.1% respectively.
- A study at NC State² showed that engaged students have higher response rates (e.g., students complete evaluations for classes in their major at higher rates).

Concern 3: Low response rates coupled with the higher participation rate of dissatisfied students will result in lower instructor ratings online versus in-class paper evaluations.¹
- Online surveys provide students with the ability to respond honestly, free of teacher and peer influence.
- Typically, since better students are more likely to respond, online evaluation ratings are more reflective of the teacher’s true abilities than ratings on paper ones.

Concern 4: The lower response rate coupled with higher participation rate of dissatisfied students will result in fewer and more negative written comments.¹
- Research shows that there is 50-75% increase in the number of written comments on online versus paper evaluations.
- Comments written online are typically longer and provide greater detail than comments on paper evaluations making them more useful for instructional improvement.

Concern 5: Low response rates will make the results from the data unusable or meaningless.
- As with any self-administered surveys, student evaluations of teaching potentially suffer from nonresponse bias. In addition, because of small samples, they often also suffer from sampling error.
- Because of these possible errors in representation, we should be cautious in our interpretation of evaluation results. Relying on results from one class section or even one semester is not advised. Instead it is best to look at patterns across classes in multiple semesters.
- Class evaluation results are one part of the complex issue of the measurement of teaching effectiveness. In order to make this data more meaningful and useful, it should be triangulated with multiple sources including peer evaluations of teaching and students’ qualitative comments, among others.
- Evaluation data can be useful for faculty seeking to improve their courses. In particular, many faculty find that student comments can be used for improving learning.
- Faculty should strive to increase participation by employing methods on the reverse of this sheet, thus reducing nonresponse error.

Works Cited:

Where can I go for more information?
- Office of Faculty of Development
  http://ofd.ncsu.edu/evaluation-of-teaching-at-nc-state/
- Faculty Information about ClassEval
  http://upa.ncsu.edu/eval/clev/faculty-info

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Increasing ClassEval Response Rates

Method 1: Conduct a mid-semester evaluation

- **Time Commitment**: 10-20 minutes in class to administer. The time to review and discuss feedback varies based on size of class.
- Potential to improve ClassEval response rates by 9-16%.1,2,3
- Conducting mid-course evaluations can improve ratings on end of-course evaluations, as students become more able evaluators as well as more engaged in the course.2
- Students respond positively when their comments result in changes to the course, leading to improved student attitudes about the class and/or instructor.3

Method 2: Include phrasing about evaluations in your syllabus

- **Time Commitment**: 5-10 minutes to modify provided verbiage and mention how you have used the feedback.
- Showing students in multiple ways that their feedback is valued can increase response rates. In one instance, average rates rose to over 95% as a result of using this strategy along with several other techniques to demonstrate the importance of evaluations to students.4,5

Method 3: Discuss ClassEval with your students

- **Time Commitment**: Periodic announcements take less than five minutes at the beginning/end of class.
- Faculty discussion of the importance of completing evaluations was associated with an increase in online evaluation rates from 54% to 72% in one study.6
- Write the response rate on the board daily.
- Turn it into a competition with another section or last year’s class. Compete to see which section or class receives the highest response rate.

Method 4: Send personal email reminders/announcements to the class during the ClassEval time period

- **Time Commitment**: Less than five minutes to send an email or announcement.
- Reminders from faculty, including emails and online discussion board postings, have been shown to increase evaluation response rates.7

Method 5: Conduct evaluations synchronously

- **Time Commitment**: 10-20 minutes during one class to administer. Book a computer lab or ask students to bring laptops/tablets-smart phones to class.
- Online evaluations completed in class have a 30% higher response rate than when completed outside of class.8,10 In 2013, a NC State CHASS Pilot saw the same increase with 76% of sections receiving 60% or higher rates as compared to 13% in the same 2012 sections.
- The ability to update/save evaluations will make it easier for students to fill out the scaled questions of the evaluation during class allowing for comments/changes later.

Works Cited: