AUGSBURG COLLEGE

From Pencils to Pixels:
Course Evaluations Go
from Online Pilot to Production

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Resources

"Student Evaluation of Courses: Kicking and Screaming into the 21st Century."
http://www.augsburg.edu/ctl/stueval.pdf

Augsburg Course Evaluation Working Group site
http://www.augsburg.edu/ctl/evalgroup.html

Annotated bibliography on online course evaluations
http://web.augsburg.edu/~krajewsk/evals/annotated-biblio.pdf

TLT Group's BeTA Project
http://www.tltgroup.org/Beta/studentengage.htm

Resources relating to Chickering and Gamson's "Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education"
http://www.tltgroup.org/Seven/Home.htm

Bolman, Lee G. and Terrence E. Deal. 1991. "Reframing Organizations." San Franciso: Jossey Bass Publishers.

Brookfield, Stephen D. 1995. "Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher." San Fransciso: Jossey Bass Publishers.

Benefits of Online Outweigh Inefficiencies of Paper

Get feedback to faculty while it still matters.
- 3 month turnaround is now nearly instant.
- Faculty can change a course while they still remember the last one.
- Evaluations only help the next class but the feedback has to be received within in time to change the next course.

Problems with paper can be eliminated.
- Forms get lost as they changed hands between faculty, chair, and office of the Dean.
- Not uniform compliance with procedures (leaving room during the evaluation).

Institution starts to build a database of information about its courses.
- Create meaningful comparisons between related courses.
- Augsburg now has a dataset of over 10,000 evaluations that can be compared against the principles that created the foundation of the evaluation form.

Lessons Learned

This project's strength is that it is a collaboration between the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) and Information Technology (IT).
- CTL initiative to improve the course evaluation form.
- The focus was not on the technology, but on the new opportunities for data and feedback on courses.
- IT brings expertise in choosing software.

This is a major institutional change. This is not simply buying a new piece of software.
- Approach it with a plan - for example using Bolman and Deal's 4 frames to view organizational decision making process (structural, political, human resource, cultural).
- Provide many opportunities for feedback and avenues for updates on the project.
- This is a lightning rod issue for faculty. Be prepared for their concerns.
- But do have requirements for the choice of software.

Finding strategies that work is a process that can be grounded in emerging best practices which are then molded to the institution's culture around evaluation.
- Seek out resources to find out what works elsewhere.
- Be aware of institutional expectations and culture.

And yes, response rates are a challenge.
- They will be lower than a captive paper-and-pencil audience.
- Know how to respond to faculty concerns.
- Benefits of online can outweigh problems with paper-based system.

Logistical Lessons Learned

Evaluation Process

Email reminders
- Student logins go up the day of and day after an email reminder.
- Limit the number of emails. Around 3 is reasonable for a 2-3 week window.

Evaluation window
- Augsburg ran evaluations 3 weeks before finals week.
- Based on feedback, now planning on running 3 weeks including finals week.

Faculty Engagement

Run a modest sized pilot
- Get a faculty base used to and positive about the evaluations.

Communication
- Provide multiple opportunities for listening to faculty feedback and for giving updates on the project.
- Consider creating an oversight group that may include faculty opposed to the project.

Expect faculty to have concerns. Plan to address them.
- Pre-tenure worries? Have conversation with the committee on tenure review to make sure they understand the data they will be seeing.
- Dislike of ordinal scales? Worries over comparison of averages? Provide several open-ended questions in the form. Stress the importance of the distribution of responses, not the averaged value.
- Only the unhappy students will respond? This generally does not play out in the literature. Even if there are many unhappy students, their feedback does matter.
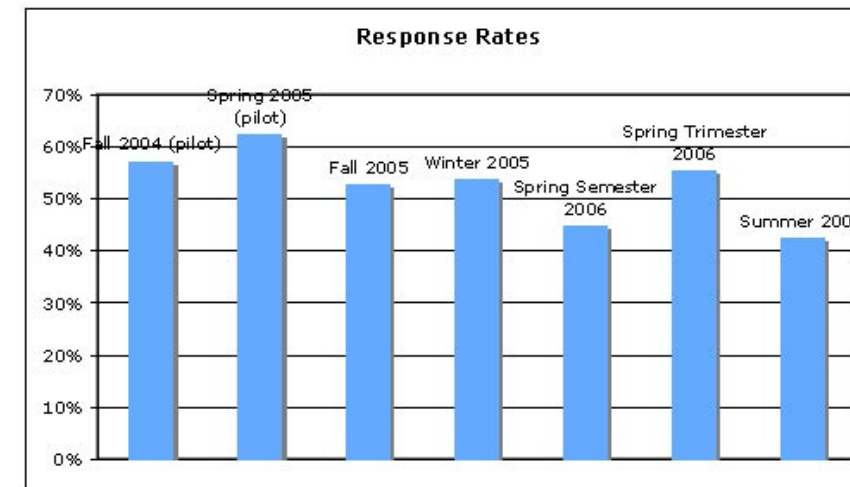
Student Engagement

Team up with student government.

Have students design informational campaigns.

Highlight anonymity benefits and importance of student feedback to the institution.

Have faculty highlight where course evaluations have affected change in their course.

Response Rates

period	number of courses	responses	possible responses	response rate
Fall 2004 (pilot)	89	835	1461	57%
Spring 2005 (pilot)	102	1121	1800	62%
Fall 2005	673	5856	11144	53%
Winter 2005	204	1521	2837	54%
Spring Semester 2006	395	3040	6785	45%
Spring Trimester 2006	188	1531	2771	55%
Summer 2006	89	486	1144	42%

Emerging practices are suggesting that response rates are surely impacted by faculty engagement and student engagement in course evaluations. Students need to see their feedback having an affect and faculty need to show what affect evaluations have.

A multi-faceted plan to use online course evaluations is needed to boost response rates and gather meaningful data.

Trends from the literature and other institutions

Incentives can improve response rates.
- For example, raffles or early access to information (grades).
- Be sensitive to institutional culture.

Penalties are sometimes used as well.
- For example, limiting access to information (grades).
- Be sensitive to institutional culture.

Moderately lower response rates do not have a significant effect on course ratings.