

Online Course Evaluation System: A Pilot Study

Faculty Educational Technology
Committee (FETC)
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History

- In 2005, the FETC was charged with studying the feasibility of implementing an online evaluation system at the CofC.
- In 2006, a number of concerns were raised in the Senate with regard to implementing such a system and with the language of the proposal.
- In 2006-2007, the FETC attempted to address the concerns that were raised and move forward to assess the feasibility of an online course evaluation system.

Overview

- The paper-based course evaluation form / instrument
 - General issues
 - Time
 - Labor
 - Financial considerations
- An online evaluation system
 - Advantages
 - Concerns
 - Challenges
 - Current status

General issues with the current system

- The current procedure relies on a manual multi-step delivery system of paper instruments for dissemination.
- Multiple parties are involved including:
 - Information Technology
 - Accountability, Accreditation, Planning & Assessment (AAPA) Office
 - Individual departments
 - Faculty, staff, and students
 - The Library

General issues with the current system

- Lack of security. Evaluation forms may be lost, misplaced, misused, incorrectly administered (e.g. during the final exam), or never administered.
- Confidentiality and privacy may be compromised given the number of hands that pass these paper instruments.
 - Open-ended (comments) questions are hand written and compromise the student's anonymity.

General issues with the current system

- Data are difficult to analyze.
 - Results are presented in a paper format. This format is difficult for faculty, chairs and administration to use effectively.
 - Data cannot be easily extracted from the paper-based forms.

Issues with the current system - Time

- Slow feedback: Approximately **15 weeks** are required to prepare, deliver, return and tabulate the paper forms.
- Class time is also used for in-class evaluations.

Issues with the current system - Labor

- Pre-evaluation labor (IT):
 - 10 hours to setup forms
 - 63 hours to print the forms
 - 77 hours to sort for delivery to departments
 - 54 hours to deliver to the departments
- **Total: ~ 205 hours + Administrative Assistants time in each department (~8 hrs)**
- And the forms still have to be returned for additional processing/scanning by IT and AAPA once they've been completed. They also have to be copied at the departmental level.

Issues with the current system - Financial considerations

- The process is technically **expensive** (paper and printer)
 - ~ **70,000 evaluation forms per year** not including paper copies issued later to faculty.

Issues with the current system - Financial considerations

- Printing:
 - Purchasing forms: \$3000 / year
 - Printing forms: \$3600 / year
 - Errors in printing: \$800 / year
 - **Total = ~ \$7500**
- Hardware:
 - PC: \$1500
 - Scanner: \$9000
 - **Total = ~ \$10,500**
- **Grand Total = ~ \$18,000 + labor costs (~205 hours ++)**

Issues with the current system -

- Current evaluation rate: 67%
- The current system is static and inflexible
- Potential for fines from the Council on Higher Education (CHE) if we are non-compliant

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Advantages

- Rapid feedback. Student **comments are returned immediately** after the semester ends for formative use before the next semester starts.
- Anonymity. Student comments are typed to better preserve anonymity.
- Analysis. Results are returned electronically in a form more suitable for **analysis and graphing**.

Advantages

- Enhanced security.
 - Data may be encrypted.
 - Faculty do not have to depend on one student to execute the process in class and return the forms.
 - Student's comments will be anonymous.
- More opportunities to evaluate. Faculty will not miss access to student feedback due to student absences.

Advantages

- Less expensive to administer. Business processes are simplified.
- Requires less class time to administer.
 - It is not necessary to remember to take the forms to class, multiple copies need not be made).
- No "double-bubbling" / unusable forms.

Advantages

- Data integrity is increased
 - Enhanced data security and student anonymity.
- Data reliability is increased.
 - Simplified administration.

Additional Features

- The number of days and the hours per day, during which the evaluations are available, can be adapted to alleviate faculty concerns.
- Comment boxes can be adjusted with respect to the amount of text allowed.

Additional Features

- Faculty may add questions to the evaluation specific to a course or section.
- Individual departments and school could **add questions** to the evaluation.
- Program assessment questions can be included for learning/accreditation standards.

Additional Features

- Data are stored electronically allowing instructors and administrators to analyze trends over time.
- A system could remind and encourage students to complete their evaluations.
- A report of the class response rate can be sent to instructors during the evaluation period to allow instructors to encourage student participation.

Concerns with an online system

- Response Rate
 - The literature shows that student response rates may decrease (although response rates of over 80% and in some cases 100% have been reported using online course evaluation systems).
 - The current response rate for paper-and-pencil forms is 67%.
 - Response rates generally recover over a period of time, generally three to four years.
- Response rate can be encouraged with **positive reinforcement** incentives (e.g. extra credit).

Challenges

- The student body must be convinced that their information is of value.
- Incentives must be built into the system to encourage student participation.
- Faculty must “buy” into this system and “sell” this system in their classes.
- The system must be marketed / advertised intensively by the college to make it work.

Current status

- The campus IT department is unable to assist in the full scale implementation of an online system
- The FETC in collaboration with the Accountability, Accreditation, Planning & Assessment (AAPA) office has investigated third party vendors as alternatives to an in house system.

Current status

- Four vendors have been contacted and/or evaluated including:
 - Equation Research
 - OnlineCourseEvaluations.com
 - WebCT / Blackboard
 - Digital Measures
 - CourseEval

Current status

- The FETC has also investigated 30 other institutions to assess whether they are using an online evaluation system and if so, what challenges they have had to deal with during the implementation of this system.
- Many of the institutions surveyed (our competitors) have moved to an online system (correlation with size).

Other Institutions

Institution	Not in use	Partial Implementation	Full Deployment
Univ. South Carolina			X
Clemson University			X
UNC - Chapel Hill			X
Elon University		X	
University of Georgia		X	
Winthrop University	X		
Wake Forest University		X	
James Madison University	X		
Furman University	X		
Tulane University		X	
University of Delaware			X
Presbyterian College	X		
Vanderbilt University			X
Costal Carolina University			X
Davidson College		X	
New York University			X
Miami University Oxford			X
George Washington Univ.			X
Virginia Tech			X
Villanova University	X		

Want to learn more?

- In order to provide faculty with access to all pertinent information, we have created the following website:
 - <http://www.cofc.edu/fetc/>
- This site contains all relevant published literature on implementing an online system as well as all other materials that we have gathered over the past two years of studying this system.

A Pilot Study

- Some departments have volunteered to be involved in a pilot and have some sections of their courses evaluated online:
 - Psychology
 - Biology, Chemistry
 - Art History
 - Spanish, German
 - Physical Education
 - Sociology, Anthropology
 - Theatre

Pilot Study

- Only tenured faculty would be included in the pilot study.
- No untenured faculty would be included in this pilot.

Proposal

- The 2006-2007 FETC makes the following recommendation:
 - The FETC recommends that the Senate support the implementation of a pilot experiment to test online course evaluations at the College of Charleston.
 - Cost of implementation: \$0

Questions / Comments /
Concerns

