



# Online Course Evaluation Literature Review and Findings

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## SUMMARY OF SCHOLARLY RESEARCH ON STUDENT COURSE EVALUATIONS

### The validity and reliability of course evaluations

- Researchers generally consider student evaluations of instructors to be highly reliable and at least moderately valid.<sup>1,2,3</sup>
- Other methods of evaluation (such as evaluations by colleagues or trained observers) have not been found to be reliable and therefore not valid.<sup>1</sup>
- Student ratings of instructors have been found to be related to ratings of instructor's skills in course organization, rapport with students, and fair grading; variance in organizational skill (having an organized course plan and clearly identifying what students need to do) explained most variance in student evaluations.<sup>4</sup>
- Alumni rarely change their opinions of former teachers.<sup>1,3</sup>
- When instructors collect mid-term feedback from students and have an honest discussion about it with someone, it leads to higher evaluations at the end of the semester as well as higher final exam scores, providing evidence that good evaluations *can* lead to better teaching.<sup>5</sup>
- Although grades do have some effect on how students rate instructors,<sup>6</sup> its effect is fairly low<sup>7</sup> and can be statistically adjusted for.<sup>8</sup> Grades do not have as large of an effect as do how much students feel they've learned,<sup>9</sup> how much they felt stimulated by the class,<sup>10</sup> and whether the class was appropriately difficult (courses are rated lower for being too easy or too difficult).<sup>11</sup>
- Contrary to the "retaliation" theory, students who do poorly in a class are equally or less likely than those who do well to complete course evaluations.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Centra, John. 1993. *Reflective faculty evaluation: enhancing teaching and determining faculty effectiveness* (Jossey Bass higher and adult education series). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc Pub.

<sup>2</sup> Hobson, Suzanne M., and Donna M. Talbot. "Understanding Student Evaluations: What All Faculty Should Know." *College Teaching* 49, no. 1 (2001): 26-31.

<sup>3</sup> Aleamoni, Lawrence M. "Student Rating Myths Versus Research Facts from 1924 to 1998." *Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education* 13, no. 2 (1999): 153-166.

<sup>4</sup> Jirovec, Ronald L., Chathapuram S. Ramanathan, and Ann Rosegrant-Alvarez. "Course Evaluations: What are Social Work Students Telling Us About Teaching Effectiveness?" *Journal of Social Work Education* 34, no. 2 (1998): 229-236.

<sup>5</sup> Overall, J.U., and Herbert W. Marsh. "Midterm Feedback from Students: Its Relationship to Instructional Improvement and Students' Cognitive and Affective Outcomes." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 71, no. 6 (1979): 856-865.

<sup>6</sup> Johnson, Valen E. "Teacher Course Evaluations and Student Grades: An Academic Tango." *Chance* 15, no. 3 (2002): 9-16.

<sup>7</sup> Gigliotti, Richard J., and Foster S. Buchtel. "Attributional Bias and Course Evaluations." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 82, no. 2 (1990): 341-351.

<sup>8</sup> Greenwald, Anthony G., and Gerald M. Gillmore. "Grading leniency is a removable contaminant of student ratings." *American Psychologist* 52, no. 11 (1997): 1209-1217.

<sup>9</sup> Bard, John S. "Perceived learning in relation to student evaluation of university instruction." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 79, no. 1 (1987): 90-91.

<sup>10</sup> Remedios, Richard, and David A. Lieberman. "I liked your course because you taught me well: the influence of grades, workload, expectations and goals on students' evaluations of teaching." *British Educational Research Journal* 34, no. 1 (2008): 91-115.

<sup>11</sup> Centra, John A. "Will Teachers Receive Higher Student Evaluations by Giving Higher Grades and Less Course Work?" *Research in Higher Education* 44, no. 5 (2003): 495-518.

<sup>12</sup> Liegle, J O and D S McDonald. Lessons Learned From Online vs. Paper-based Computer Information Students' Evaluation System. In *The Proceedings of the Information Systems Education Conference 2004*, v 21 (Newport): §2214. ISSN: 1542-7382.

### Online vs. paper course evaluations

- The one consistent disadvantage to online course evaluations is their low response rate<sup>13,14</sup>; using reminder e-mails from instructors and messages posted on online class discussions can significantly increase response rates.<sup>15</sup>
- Evaluation scores do not change when evaluations are completed online rather than on paper.<sup>14,16</sup>
- Students leave more (and often more useful) comments on online evaluations compared to paper evaluations.<sup>13,16,17</sup>
- Students, faculty, and staff generally view online evaluations more positively than paper evaluations.<sup>13,16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Anderson, Heidi M., Jeff Cain, and Eleanora Bird. "Online Student Course Evaluations: Review of Literature and a Pilot Study." *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education* 69, no. 1, article 5 (2005).

<sup>14</sup> Avery, Rosemary J., W. Keith Bryant, Alan Mathios, Hyojin Kang, and Duncan Bell. "Electronic Course Evaluations: Does an Online Delivery System Influence Student Evaluations?." *Journal of Economic Education* 37, no. 1 (2006): 21-37.

<sup>15</sup> Norris, John, and Cynthia Conn. "Investigating Strategies for Increasing Student Response Rates to Online-Delivered Course Evaluations." *Quarterly Review of Distance Education* 6, no. 1 (2005): 13-29.

<sup>16</sup> Donovan, Judy, Cynthia E. Mader, and John Shinsky. "Constructive Student Feedback: Online vs. Traditional Course Evaluations." *Journal of Interactive Online Learning* 5, no. 3 (2006): 283-296.

<sup>17</sup> Kasiar, Jennifer B., Sara L. Schroeder, and Sheldon G. Holstad. "Comparison of Traditional and Web-Based Course Evaluation Processes in a Required, Team-Taught Pharmacotherapy Course." *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education* 66 (2002): 268-270.

## Student perceptions of course evaluations

- Students tend to feel that evaluations have no effect on teacher performance, and they don't seem to know if anyone other than the instructor sees the evaluations.<sup>18</sup>
- Surveys of students typically indicate that students believe faculty and administrators don't take their evaluations seriously.<sup>19</sup> This may be justified, as some studies have found that instructors do not view student evaluations as valuable for improving instruction<sup>20</sup> and very few report making changes to their courses as a result of course evaluations.<sup>21</sup>
- Students are more likely to complete course evaluations if they see value in them (e.g., understand how they are being used, believe that their opinions have an effect).<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Marlin, James W., Jr. "Student Perceptions of End-of-Course Evaluations." *The Journal of Higher Education* 58, no. 6 (1987): 704-716.

<sup>19</sup> Spencer, Karin J., and Liora Pedhazur Schmelkin. "Student Perspectives on Teaching and its Evaluation." *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 27, no. 5 (2002): 397-409.

<sup>20</sup> Nasser, Fadia, and Barbara Fresko. "Faculty Views of Student Evaluation of College Teaching." *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 27.2 (2002): 187-198.

<sup>21</sup> Beran, Tanya N., and Jennifer L. Rokosh. "Instructors' perspectives on the utility of student ratings of instruction." *Instructional Science* 37.2 (2009): 171-184.

<sup>22</sup> Gaillard, Franklin D., Sonja P. Mitchell, and Vahwere Kavota. "Students, Faculty, And Administrators' Perception Of Students' Evaluations Of Faculty In Higher Education Business Schools." *Journal of College Teaching & Learning* 3, no. 8 (2006): 77-90.

### Effects of allowing students access to course evaluation data

- Students who do not have access to course evaluating ratings rate course evaluations as more important to making a course selection than those who *do* have access.<sup>23</sup> This may indicate that students think course evaluation data will be more helpful than it actually is.
- If all else is equal, a student is twice as likely to choose an instructor with “excellent” ratings over an instructor with “good” ratings; however, students are willing to select a “poor” instructor if they believe they will learn a lot from the class.<sup>24</sup>
- Students will choose a highly rated course over less highly rated courses even if the workload is greater for that course than the others.<sup>25</sup>
- Results are mixed on whether receiving evaluation information influences how students consequently rate the instructor.<sup>24</sup> Some studies have indicated that students who receive information that an instructor was rated highly will rate that instructor highly, and vice versa.<sup>26,27</sup>
- Rulings involving the University of Wisconsin and University of Idaho found that students had a right to view the results of student evaluations of faculty.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Wilhelm, Wendy Bryce, and Charles Comegys. "Course Selection Decisions by Students on Campuses With and Without Published Teaching Evaluations." *Practical assessment, research & evaluation* 9, no. 16 (2004). <http://PAREonline.net/getvn.asp?v=9&n=16> (accessed February 15, 2010).

<sup>24</sup> Wilhelm, Wendy Bryce. "The Relative Influence of Published Teaching Evaluations and Other Instructor Attributes on Course Choice." *Journal of Marketing Education* 26, no. 1 (2004): 17-30.

<sup>25</sup> Coleman, Jeffrey, and W.J. McKeachie. "Effects of Instructor/Course Evaluations on Student Course Selection." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 73, no. 2 (1981): 224-226.

<sup>26</sup> Perry, Raymond P., R. Ronald Niemi, and Keith Jones. "Effect of prior teaching evaluations and lecture presentation on ratings of teaching performance." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 66, no. 6 (1974): 851-856.

<sup>27</sup> Griffin, B.W. "Instructor Reputation and Student Ratings of Instruction." *Contemporary Educational Psychology* 26.4 (2001): 534-552.

<sup>28</sup> Haskell, R.E.. "Administrative Use of Student Evaluation of Faculty." *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 5, no. 6 (1997). <http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/article/view/622/744> (accessed February 22, 2010).

## ADDITIONAL READING: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

*Note: This literature review is based on the bibliography of Collings, D. & Ballantyne, C. S. (2004, November 24-25). Online student survey comments: A qualitative improvement?*

Anderson, H., Cain, J., Bird, E. (2005) "Online Student Course Evaluations: Review of Literature and a Pilot Study." *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education* 2005; 69 (1) Article 5.

The literature review revealed several studies that found **no statistically significant differences between delivery modes**. Two also noted that **students provided more comments in the online forms**. Response rates varied widely. The University of Kentucky College of Pharmacy, driven by the faculty's desire for more timely return of results (3-4 months typically), launched a pilot study of online evaluations in 3 courses. The response rates for the 3 courses were 85%, 89%, and 75%. The 9 courses using the paper forms averaged an 80% response rate (consistent with the 2 previous years also about 80%). **The comments on the online forms were more frequent and longer than the paper forms**. Students liked the online form better than the paper form and thought they could provide more effective and constructive feedback online.

Anderson, J., G. Brown, and S. Spaeth. (2006) "Online Student Evaluations and Response Rates Reconsidered." *Innovate* 2 (6). <http://www.innovateonline.info/index.php?view=article&id=301>

Synopsis from Innovate: "Many administrators are moving toward using online student evaluations to assess courses and instructors, but critics of the practice fear that the online format will only result in lower levels of student participation. Joan Anderson, Gary Brown, and Stephen Spaeth claim that such a concern often fails to acknowledge how **the evaluation process already suffers from substantial lack of engagement on the part of students as well as instructors; the online format, they assert, merely inherits the fundamental problem of perceived irrelevance in the process itself**. After addressing the reasons behind this problem and discussing how well-designed online evaluations can still make a positive difference, the authors describe the development and implementation of a comprehensive, college-wide online evaluation survey at Washington State University's College of Agricultural, Human, and Natural Resources. In reviewing the survey results, they found that class size, academic discipline, and distribution method played a negligible role in student response rates. However, they found that variances in response rate were significantly influenced by the relative level of participation among faculty members and department heads in the original development of the survey. The authors maintain that online surveys can make the process more relevant and meaningful to students, but they conclude that **eliciting greater response rates will still require sustained support, involvement, and advocacy by faculty members and administrators**."

Ardalan, A., Ardalan, R., Coppage, S., and Crouch, W. (2007) "A comparison of student feedback obtained through paper-based and web-based surveys of faculty teaching." *British Journal of Educational Technology*. Volume 38 Number 6 2007.

This paper provides a summary of the current research in online vs. paper evaluations as well as results from a student to compare the feedback results. The same form was given to 46 section pairings – one paper and one online. **The online response rate was 31% (392 out of 1276 possible responses) and the paper was 69% (972 out of 1415). No significant difference was found in the quantitative ratings between the two methods**. They examined the differences on an "overall effectiveness" question in rating for faculty who were above the college average and then for faculty who were below the college average. Faculty who were above the average were scored slightly lower online and the faculty who were below the college average were scored higher online. There was no significant difference in the number of students giving open-ended feedback online; however, **there was a significant increase in the length of open-ended feedback online**.

Avery, Rosemary J., Bryant W.K., Mathios, A., Kang, H., and Bell, D. (2006). "Electronic Course Evaluations: Does an Online Delivery System Influence Student Evaluations?" *Journal of Economic Education*. Washington: Winter 2006. Vol. 37, Iss. 1 p21-38 (ProQuest document ID 973267691).

The Department of Policy Analysis and Management at Cornell University did a study of course evaluation data from 1998-2001. Using the same form, data was analyzed from 29 courses (20 using the paper version, 9 using the online version). The study examined response rates and mean scores between the methods. **While specific response rates varied, online was typically lower than the paper form.** For example, in fall 2000 paper was 69% compared with 47% online. Using a 5-point scale on their 13 questions, 4 questions had a significant difference in mean scores between methods. This was a greater than 0.10 difference with the web having the higher mean score. The other 9 questions had a less than 0.10 difference in mean scores again with web having the higher means.

Ballantyne, C.S. (2003). *Online evaluations of teaching: An examination of current practice and considerations for the future*. In Sorenson, D.L & Johnson, T.D (Eds) *Online Student Ratings of Instruction, New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, No. 96, Winter 2003, Jossey-Bass

This article summarizes some of the known issues related to online surveys, using Murdoch University's implementation of an online course evaluation system as a case study. **Response rates are often lower than desired but can be increased with strategies such as providing computer access, having faculty support for the system, and letting students know how their feedback is used.** Online systems need to be designed to prevent multiple ratings of a course by the same student while still protecting students' anonymity. Quantitative ratings are similar to those completed on paper, while comments are more plentiful and more thoughtful. Online rating systems are significantly less expensive than paper evaluation systems.

Ballantyne, C.S. (2004). *Online or on paper: An examination of the differences in response and respondents to a survey administered in two modes*. Paper presented to the Australasian Evaluation Society Annual Conference, Adelaide, South Australia, 13-15 October, 2004. <http://www.aes.asn.au/conference2004/index.htm#fri>

In 2003 Murdoch University carried out a satisfaction survey of all students. Initial contact was via email asking students to respond online. Follow-ups of nonrespondents used the more traditional mailout/paper format. A response rate of fifty percent was achieved with sixty-three percent of responses coming via the online mode. **Male students, younger students, undergraduates and full-time students were more likely to respond online. Students responding online were less likely to comment, but online comments were lengthier than paper comments.**

Bothell, T.W & Henderson, T. 2003 "Do online ratings of instruction make \$ense?" In Sorenson, D.L & Johnson, T.D (Eds) *Online Student Ratings of Instruction, New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, No. 96, Winter 2003, Jossey-Bass

Researchers compared the cost of an online evaluation system compared to paper evaluations. They found that **when Brigham Young University switched to online evaluations, it saved them \$235,000 a year.** The estimated cost at BYU for paper evaluations is \$1.06 per student rating-form, compared with \$0.47 per online student rating-form. The savings come from a reduction in printing costs, a decreased need for personnel help with collection, processing, and reporting, and fewer time taken away from instructors in the classroom.

Brigham Young University Student ratings: Frequently asked questions. Retrieved 15th April 2010 from <https://studentratings.byu.edu/info/students/faq.asp>

Provides information to students about the BYU online course evaluations. Students cannot rate courses after final examinations begin. Students are assured of anonymity but given the option to provide their name to the instructor if, for example, the instructor offers extra credit for completing evaluations (the name is not associated with results, and is only visible to the instructor if at least 5 students complete evaluations for that class). **Students can see the results for only four items, which are associated with student learning, and only if they complete evaluations for all their classes.**

Carini, R.M, Hayek, J.C., Kuh, G.D. & Ouimet, J.A. (2003). "College student responses to web and paper surveys: Does mode matter?", *Research in Higher Education*, 2003, 44, (1), P1-19  
Retrieved 13th September 2004 from <http://www.kluweronline.com/issn/0361-0365/contents>

We examined the responses of 58,288 college students to 8 scales involving 53 items from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to gauge whether individuals respond differently to surveys administered via the Web and paper. Our findings suggest that **mode effects for first-year and senior college students generally tend to be small**. A notable exception involves items related to computing and information technology, which exhibit more favorable responses when answered via the Web. However, our data do not allow us to discern whether this is a true mode effect or whether those most engaged in computing and information technology are also those who gravitate toward the Web-based modes.

Cates, W. M. (1993). A small-scale comparison of the equivalence of paper-and-pencil and computerized versions of student end-of-course evaluations. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 9, 401-409.

This study compared responses to two versions of an end-of-course evaluation instrument completed by graduate students: the traditional printed form completed using pencil and paper, and a microcomputer-based form that presented equivalent items and accepted student responses. A finding of no significant difference in favorableness of composite ratings between the two versions prompted the researcher to perform item-by-item analyses of the two instruments. These analyses revealed that ratings of the individual items on one instrument were highly correlated with the ratings of their matched corresponding items on the other instrument. **The paper-and-pencil and computerized evaluation instruments were found to be of almost identically high reliability.**

Chen, Y. & Hoshower, L. B. (2003). "Student evaluation of teaching effectiveness: an assessment of student perception and motivation." *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 28, (1) 72-88.

Over the past century, student ratings have steadily continued to take precedence in faculty evaluation systems in North America and Australia, are increasingly reported in Asia and Europe and are attracting considerable attention in the Far East. Since student ratings are the most, if not the only, influential measure of teaching effectiveness, active participation by and meaningful input from students can be critical in the success of such teaching evaluation systems. Nevertheless, very few studies have looked into students' perception of the teaching evaluation systems and their motivation to participate. This study employs expectancy theory to evaluate some key factors that motivate students to participate in the teaching evaluation process. The results show that **students generally consider an improvement in teaching to be the most attractive outcome of a teaching evaluation system**. The second most attractive outcome was using teaching evaluations to improve course content and format. **Using teaching evaluations for a professor's tenure, promotion and salary rise decisions and making the results of evaluations available for students' decisions on course and instructor**

**selection were less important from the students' standpoint. Students' motivation to participate in teaching evaluations is also impacted significantly by their expectation that they will be able to provide meaningful feedback.** Since quality student input is an essential antecedent of meaningful student evaluations of teaching effectiveness, the results of this study should be considered thoughtfully as the evaluation system is designed, implemented, and operated.

Collings, D. & Ballantyne, C. S. (2004, November 24-25). *Online student survey comments: A qualitative improvement?* Paper presented at the 2004 Evaluation Forum, Melbourne, Victoria. [http://www.tlc.murdoch.edu.au/pubs/docs/Eval\\_forum\\_paper.pdf](http://www.tlc.murdoch.edu.au/pubs/docs/Eval_forum_paper.pdf)

Given that online evaluations tend to have a decrease in response rate but an increase in comments compared to paper evaluations, these researchers questioned whether an increased response rate online would lead to less valuable comments. This would be likely if the students most eager to participate were also most likely to comment. However, **they found that regardless of when students responded to the survey, the percent commenting and the length of comments were nearly the same, with a slight decrease for those responding near the end of the time period.** They suggest that qualitative feedback may be more valuable than quantitative feedback, and increasing response rates isn't necessary for quality feedback.

Cummings, R. and Ballatyne, C. (1999). "Student feedback on teaching: Online! On target?" Paper presented at the Australasian Society Annual Conference, October, 1999.

Murdoch University School of Engineering ran a pilot in 1999 of online course evaluations using the same form online as on paper. **Students found the online form easier, faster, and felt it offered greater anonymity.** The school has a 50% mandate for response rate in course evaluations. **Typically paper evaluations had a 65% response rate. The online pilot averaged 31%** with 4 of the 18 courses over the 50% mandate. The response rate range was a wide 3% to 100%. Because the pilot was inadequately promoted, some faculty didn't know they were using online forms and didn't adequately prepare students. Students noted that they felt no pressure to fill out the online evaluations. The investigators concluded that the quality of responses was the same because **they received the same amount of comments online, which is what is used most from the evaluation form.**

Dommeyer, CJ., Baum, P., Chapman, KS., and Hanna, RW. (2003). "An experimental investigation of student response rates to faculty evaluations: The effect of the online method and online treatments." Paper presented at Decision Sciences Institute; Nov. 22-25, 2003; Washington, DC.

The College of Business And Economics at California State University, Northridge did a study with 16 professors to see how the method of evaluation affects response rate and if online treatments (incentives) affect the response rate. Each professor taught 2 sections of the same undergraduate business course. The same form was used in both methods. **Instructors were randomly assigned into 1 of 4 groups using different incentives: 0.25% grade incentive for completion of an online evaluation (4 courses), in-class demonstration on how to do the online evaluation (2 courses), if 2/3 of the class submitted online evaluations students would receive their final grades early (2 courses), or a control group (8 courses).** The online evaluations averaged a 43% response rate and the paper evaluations averaged 75%. Looking at just the control group, their average response rate was 29%. In the individual cases **the incentives had the effect of increasing response rate (grade incentive 87% response rate, demonstration 53%, and early final grade 51%).**

Dommeier, C. J., Baum, P. Hanna, R. W., & Chapman, K. S. (2004) "Gathering faculty teaching evaluations by in-class and online surveys: their effects on response rates and evaluations" *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 29, (5) 611-623.

This study compares student evaluations of faculty teaching that were completed in-class with those collected online. The two methods of evaluation were compared on response rates and on evaluation scores. In addition, this study investigates whether treatments or incentives can affect the response to online evaluations. It was found that **the response rate to the online survey was generally lower than that to the in-class survey.** Additionally, **the study found that online evaluations do not produce significantly different mean evaluation scores than traditional in-class evaluations, even when different incentives are offered to students who are asked to complete online evaluations.**

Donovan, J., Mader, C., and Shinsky, J., (2006) "Constructive student feedback: Online vs. traditional course evaluations." *Journal of Interactive Online Learning*. Volume 5, Number 3, Winter 2006.

Abstract: Substantial efforts have been made recently to compare the effectiveness of traditional course formats to alternative formats (most often, online delivery compared to traditional on-site delivery). This study examines, not the delivery format but rather the evaluation format. It compares traditional paper and pencil methods for course evaluation with electronic methods. Eleven instructors took part in the study. Each instructor taught two sections of the same course; at the end, one course received an online course evaluation, the other a traditional pencil and paper evaluation. Enrollment in these 22 sections was 519 students. Researchers analyzed open-ended comments as well as quantitative rankings for the course evaluations. **Researchers found no significant differences in numerical rankings between the two evaluation formats.** However, differences were found in number and length of comments, the ratio of positive to negative comments, and the ratio of formative to summative comments. **Students completing faculty evaluations online wrote more comments, and the comments were more often formative (defined as a comment that gave specific reasons for judgment so that the instructor knew what the student was suggesting be kept or changed) in nature.**

Emery, L., Head, T., Zeckoski, A., and Yu Borkowski, E. (2008) "Deploying an Open Source, Online Evaluation System: Multiple Experiences." Presentation at Educause 2008, October 31, Orlando, FL.

Four institutions, University of Michigan Ann Arbor, Virginia Tech, University of Cambridge and University of Maryland, collaborated on an open source online evaluation system within Sakai. **Response rates in the various pilots ranged from 32% to 79%. They found the key benefits of online evaluations to be security, validity, efficiency, cost savings, rapid results turnaround and higher quality student comments.**

Ernst, D. (2006) "Student Evaluations: A Comparison of Online vs. Paper Data Collection." Presentation at Educause 2006, October 10, Dallas, TX.

The College of Education and Human Development at the University of Minnesota did a study on 314 class pairs (14,154 student evaluations) from fall 2002 to fall 2004. The goals were to see if there is a difference in response rate, a difference in response distributions, a difference in average ratings between the two methods and what are the common perceptions of each method. **In the study group the online form averaged a 56% response rate whereas the paper version averaged 77%.** Slightly more students responded on the high and low ends of the 7-point scale than did in the middle. **There was no significant difference in the mean rating on 4 required questions.**

eXplorance Inc., "A Fresh Look at Response Rates." White Paper.

<http://www.explorance.com/Education/brochures/A%20Fresh%20Look%20at%20Response%20Rates.pdf>

This white paper outlines 9 best practices for moving to online course evaluations. **Key benefits to moving online are listed as well as strategies to build response rates.**

Fraze, S., Hardin, K., Brashears, T., Smith, J., Lockaby, J. (2002) "The Effects Of Delivery Mode Upon Survey Response Rate And Perceived Attitudes Of Texas Agri-Science Teachers." Paper presented at the National Agricultural Education Research Conference, December 11-13, Las Vegas, NV,

Texas Tech University studied 3 modes of surveying a random group of Texas Agri-Science teachers. The 3 modes were e-mail, web, and paper. **No significant difference in the reliability of the responses was found.** However, the response rates were 60%, 43% and 27% for paper, web and e-mail respectively.

Handwerk, P., Carson, C., and Blackwell, K. (2000). "On-line vs. paper-and-pencil surveying of students: A case study." Paper presented at the 40th Annual Meeting of the Association of Institutional Research, May 2000 (ERIC document ED446512).

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro did a study of using an online version of a feedback survey for determining why students selected or did not select Greensboro. They found **the online version generated more comments though had a lower (26%) response rate than the paper version (33%).** No significant difference was found in the response content between the two methods.

Hardy, N. 2003 "Online ratings: Fact and fiction." In Sorenson, D.L & Johnson, T.D (Eds) *Online Student Ratings of Instruction, New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, No. 96, Winter 2003, Jossey-Bass

This study used data from Northwestern University's implementation of an online evaluation system to refute myths surrounding online course evaluations. Contrary to the fears of some faculty members, **online ratings were not more likely than paper evaluations to produce negative ratings or comments, and students wrote substantially more comments on the online evaluations.** Additionally, any given class may have a higher, lower, or similar response rate when switching from paper to online.

Hmieleski, K. and Champagne, M. 2000 "Plugging in to course evaluation." *Assessment*, September/October 2000.

The IDEA Laboratory surveyed the nation's 200 most wired colleges as identified by ZDNet. Surprisingly, 98% of the "most wired" schools use primarily paper-based evaluation forms. Of the schools requiring some form of course or faculty evaluation, all currently administer the evaluation forms solely at the end of the term (the "autopsy approach"). Sixty-seven percent of schools reported return rates of 70% or higher for paper-based evaluation. **Schools using or pilot-testing a Web-based evaluation system reported return rates ranging from 20% to greater than 90%.** Only 28% of respondents rated their faculty as very supportive of their school's current evaluation system. **Ninety-five percent of schools reported that their faculty members are involved in the development of course evaluations, typically through participation in the faculty senate or by developing evaluation questions.** Thirty-one percent of schools reported that students are involved in the development of their college's course evaluation system, typically through participation in the student senate, and **36% of schools allow their students to view the results of course evaluations, typically via the Internet and student**

**publications.** They suggest a “feedback-and-refinement” by which students can provide feedback throughout the course to allow instructors to make rapid changes to the course, and found that **when using a feedback-and-refinement system, comments tend to be more plentiful and insightful.** Additionally, they note that **when responses are required, response rates approach 100% but valuable comments drop dramatically.**

Hoffman, K.M. 2003 “Online student ratings: Will students respond?” In Sorenson, D.L & Johnson, T.D (Eds) *Online Student Ratings of Instruction, New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, No. 96, Winter 2003, Jossey-Bass

This investigation was intended as an update to Hmielski and Champagne (2000)’s article on colleges using paper or online evaluation forms. **Of the institutions surveyed, 90% were still using a primarily paper-based evaluation process, and 12% were using nonscannable paper forms.** However, 56% were using the Internet for the evaluation of online courses or were planning to implement an online ratings system for online courses in 2003. More schools used the Internet to report evaluation results to faculty than used the Internet to collect ratings from students; additionally, **12% of institutions allowed students to view evaluation results.**

Johnson, T.D. 2003 “Online student ratings: Will students respond?” In Sorenson, D.L & Johnson, T.D (Eds) *Online Student Ratings of Instruction, New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, No. 96, Winter 2003, Jossey-Bass

Brigham Young University experimented with different strategies for increasing response rates to online course evaluations. **When instructors assigned students to complete course evaluations, whether or not they gave points for the assignment, there was a large jump in response rates. Additionally, when the evaluation form was short, students took the time to write more open-ended comments.** Students who did not respond most often did not know about the online evaluations. In focus groups, students’ top suggestion for increasing response rates was to allow early access to grades for those who completed the evaluations.

Kasiar, J. B., Schroeder, S. L. & Holstad, S. G. (2002). Comparison of traditional and web-based course evaluation processes in a required, team-taught pharmacotherapy course. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 66(3), 268-70.

In a team-taught course (enrollment = 169), students were randomly assigned to complete evaluations online (n = 50) or by traditional, paper-based methods (n = 119). Web-based and traditional evaluations were compared for Likert score, quantity and quality of student comments, student satisfaction, and consumption of staff and faculty time. Of 252 questions asked of each student, 72 (29 percent) had a significantly different Likert score. In all but two questions, however, the median and/or range was different by only one point and in most cases did not change the overall meaning of the response (e.g., a median response of “Strongly Agree” rather than “Agree.”) **The number of comments was significantly higher in the web-based group compared to the traditional group. Students, faculty and staff all rated the web process as more convenient and less time-consuming than the traditional method.** A web-based evaluation system using subsets of students to complete each evaluation can be employed to obtain representative feedback. The web-based process yields quantitatively and qualitatively superior student comments, enhanced student satisfaction, and more efficient use of faculty and staff time.

Laubsch, P. (2006). "Online and in-person evaluations: A literature review and exploratory comparison." *Journal of Online Learning and Teaching*, 2(2).  
[http://jolt.merlot.org/Vol2\\_No2\\_Laubsch.htm](http://jolt.merlot.org/Vol2_No2_Laubsch.htm)

The Master of Administrative Science program at Fairleigh Dickinson University performed a study on courses taught by adjunct faculty. **The online evaluations received a 61% response rate and the in-class evaluations received a 82.1% response rate.** They found that **the online evaluations received twice as many comments (counting total words) as the in-class evaluations.** On the question about "materials being clearly presented" (focused on the faculty member) the variation in mean scores in online and in-class was 0.33 on a 5-point scale with online having a less-positive rating. This is a statistically significant difference. Administrators noted that both means were better than the "agree" and were not considered poor ratings.

Layne B.H., DeCristofor J.R., McGinty D (1999). "Electronic versus traditional student ratings of instruction." *Res Higher Educ.* 1999; 40:221-32.

At a southeastern university 66 courses made up of 2453 students did a comparison of response effects between paper-and-pencil and online using the same form. Half did online and half did paper-and-pencil forms. **The online response rate was 47% and the traditional group was 60%. Also, 76% of the online forms provided comments compared to 50% of the traditional forms. No significant difference was found in methods.**

Liegle, J O and D S McDonald. Lessons Learned From Online vs. Paper-based Computer Information Students' Evaluation System. In *The Proceedings of the Information Systems Education Conference 2004*, v 21 (Newport): §2214. ISSN: 1542-7382. (A later version appears in *Information Systems Education Journal* 3(37). ISSN: 1545-679X.)  
<http://proc.isecon.org/2004/2214/index.html>

Georgia State University College of Business ran a voluntary pilot from 2002 to 2003 using an identical online version of their paper course evaluation form in the Department of Computer Information Systems. Faculty feared an online form would yield lower scores and lower response rates. In particular, the fear was that few students would submit online evaluations, poor students would "take revenge" on the faculty and good students wouldn't bother. **The paper form had a 67% response rate and the online form had an 82% response rate.** This likely due to the fact that the CIS department had easy access to computer labs for students to take the evaluations online. Using a question on teacher effectiveness, **the study found no significant difference between the methods. Good students participated in the same numbers and weaker students did fewer online evaluations.**

Lovric, M. (2006). Traditional and web-based course evaluations-comparison of their response rates and efficiency. Paper presented at 1st Balkan Summer School on Survey Methodology.  
[http://www.balkanprojectoffice.scb.se/Paper%20Miodrag%20Lovrich\\_University%20of%20Belgrade.pdf](http://www.balkanprojectoffice.scb.se/Paper%20Miodrag%20Lovrich_University%20of%20Belgrade.pdf)

The paper presents a short literature review comparing online evaluations with paper. The Economics department at University of Belgrade, Serbia conducted a small pilot in a course of 800 students in May of 2006. Half the students received paper evaluations in class and half were directed to complete an identical online evaluation. **The paper evaluation received a 92.5% response rate and the online received a 52% response rate after an incentive was introduced. They found that nearly twice as many students filled out the open-ended question online when compared to the paper group.** On the instructor-related questions they found a variation of 0.09 to 0.22 on a 10-point scale. No statistical analysis was done for significance.

Matz, C. (1999). "Administration of web versus paper surveys: Mode effects and response rates." Masters Research Paper, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. (ERIC document ED439694).

In a survey of academic reference librarians in North Carolina, Matz found **no significant difference in response contents between the methods used**. The online form had a 33% response rate and the paper form had a 43% response rate.

Monsen, S., Woo, W., Mahan, C. Miller, G. & W (2005). "Online Course Evaluations: Lessons Learned." Presentation at The CALI Conference for Law School Computing 2005.

**Yale Law** started online course evaluations in 2001 with a less than 20% response rate. The current 8-question form is run by student representatives and **has a 90% response rate. Students cannot see their grades until they fill out the evaluation.** **Northwestern University School of Law** started online course evaluations in 2004. So far they **have a 68% response rate** which compares to a 70-80% paper response rate. Northwestern is against using any penalties (withholding information from a student until they fill out an evaluation). **The University of Denver Sturm College** started online course evaluations in 2002 with a pilot of 10 courses. The pilot had an 83% response rate. Continuing into 2003 the pilot expanded to 80 courses (with an 81% response rate) and then expanded to all of their offerings (with a 64% response rate). Currently they **maintain a response rate around 70%.** **Duke Law** started online course evaluations in 2003 when their scantron machine broke and the expense of replacing was too great. They proposed a goal of 70% response rate and used the same form online. The first term averaged a 66% response rate (with 29% of the 82 courses reaching the 70% goal). In spring 2004 the average was 60% (with 30% of the 119 courses reaching the 70% goal). In fall 2004 the average was 52% (with 8% of the 93 courses reaching the 70% goal). In spring 2005, **after dropping non-law students from the pool, the average was 67%** (with 41% of the 117 courses reaching the 70% goal). **The school is considering several penalties for failure to fill out an evaluation** – withholding registration, withholding grades, or withholding free printing.

Norris, J., Conn, C. (2005). "Investigating strategies for increasing student response rates to on line delivered course evaluations." Quarterly Review of Distance Education 2005; 6 (1) p13-32 (ProQuest document ID 975834871).

This paper reports the findings of 2 studies done at Northern Arizona State University. The first study looked at historic data from 2000-2002 to examine student responses to online course evaluations in 1108 course sections. **This group had an average response rate of 31%.** A follow-up questionnaire was sent to 50 faculty in the group to explore what strategies improved response rate. These results informed the second study on 39 online course sections and 21 sections of a required freshman face-to-face course. **The second study used some basic strategies (no penalty strategies) in the implementation of the online course evaluations:** 2 weeks before the end of the course the URL to evaluation was posted in the course management system, an announcement containing a statement of course evaluation value and due date was sent in a method appropriate to the class (email, online syllabus or discussion board), and a reminder email was sent 1 week before the class ended containing the URL and due date. **The 39 online course sections averaged a 74% response rate and the 21 face-to-face courses averaged a 67% response rate.** In addition, 11 sections of the face-to-face course used paper evaluations and received a 83% response rate. These suggestions are very similar to the emerging findings from the TLT Group's BeTA project.

Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, Marquette University, "On-line Course Evaluation Pilot Project at Marquette University." Spring 2008.  
<http://www.marquette.edu/oira/ceval/>

Marquette University moved from a copyrighted instrument, IAS, to their own instrument, MOCES. Because of the copyright concerns the new instrument has re-worded items that maintain the intent of the IAS items. In spring semester of 2008 a pilot was conducted in 124 course sections with 3837 students. They evaluated the effectiveness of an online approach versus paper and pencil and the software used to deliver the evaluations. **Response rates online were lower in 3 of the 5 pilot departments, comparable in 1 and higher in 1 when compared to 3 semester averages of paper and pencil forms.** A "power analysis" of the response rates revealed the rates were high enough of 95% confidence in the results. **There was no significant difference in the mean ratings for the 4 core questions** between the old IAS form and the MOCES online form.

Online CTE Project Team. (2005). Online course and teaching evaluation: Report on a trial run with recommendations. Teaching and Learning Center, Lingnan University.  
<http://www.ln.edu.hk/tlc/level2/pdf/online%20cte%20report%20050411.pdf>

A pilot of 18 classes used an online course and teaching evaluation (CTE) at Lingnan University. For most classes, a member of the project team went to a scheduled class during the evaluation period and explained to students the nature and purpose of the online CTE trial. The average response rate for the 18 classes was 69.7%. Classes with low response rates corresponded to those that had a large number of undeliverable e-mail or had not received a briefing from a project team member. **No significant differences were found in mean scores between online evaluations and previous paper evaluations for the same instructor and course.** Only 3 CTEs recorded more comments by students than in the previous paper-based CTEs; however, **the online CTEs contained more elaborate comments.** Student feedback indicated that **students generally preferred the online CTE**; concerns were primarily about the anonymity of their responses because they were required to log in to the evaluation system.

Sax, L., Gilmartin, S., Keup, J., Bryant, A., and Plecha, M. (2002). Findings from the 2001 pilot administration of Your First College Year (YFCY): National norms. Higher Education Research Institute, University of California.

The YFCY distributed its survey that assesses student development during the first year in college using 3 methods: online, online or paper, and paper. In a pool of 57 schools, 16 used the alternative methods of distribution. **The study found no significant difference in responses between the methods.** The response rate overall was 21%. **The online only method response rate was 17% and the online or paper group had a 24% response rate.**

Schawitch, M. (2005) "Online Course Evaluations: One Institute's Success in Transitioning from a Paper Process to a Completely Electronic Process!" Presentation at the Association for Institutional Research Forum, June 2005.

The Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology piloted an online course evaluation in 2002 with a small group of faculty. Over the academic year the pilot had a 70% response rate. **77% of students preferred the online mode and faculty reacted positively to the pilot.** In 2003 the entire campus adopted the online form. **Over the 3 terms, the online evaluations had response rates of 86%, 78% and 67%.** In 2004 the 3 terms had 75%, 71% and 67%. Historically paper evaluations had an 85-87% response rate. They are investigating various incentive possibilities.

Spencer, K. & Schmelkin, L. P. (2002) "Student Perspectives on Teaching and its Evaluation." *Assessment & Evaluation in higher Education*, 27 (5) 397-409.

The research on student ratings of instruction, while voluminous, has had minimal focus on the perceptions of the students who do the ratings. The current study explored student perspectives on course and teacher ratings as well as some issues related to teaching effectiveness and faculty roles. It was found that **students are generally willing to do evaluations and to provide feedback, and have no particular fear of repercussions.**

Thorpe, S.W. (2002). *Online student evaluation of instruction: An investigation of non-response bias*. Paper presented at the 42nd Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research in Toronto Canada. Retrieved 9th November 2004, from <http://www.airweb.org/forum02/550.pdf>

Drexel University studied whether significant differences exist in student responses to course evaluations given on paper and online in 3 courses. **Response rates in the 3 classes for paper and online (respectively) were 37% and 45%, 44% and 50%, 70% and 37%.** In comparing students who responded to the evaluations across the 3 courses the study found that women were more likely than men to respond, **students who earned higher grades were more likely to respond, and students with a higher overall GPA were more likely to respond.** For two courses the online evaluations had a slightly higher average item rating. For the other course 2 significant differences were found: students doing the online evaluation were less likely to participate actively and contribute thoughtfully during class and to attend class when compared to the paper evaluation group. But the responses overall were not significantly different.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING RESPONSE RATES

The literature suggest that there are three primary methods to improve response rates on end-of-course evaluations:

- 1) Make evaluation a part of the course (*most effective*)
- 2) Send reminder notices
- 2) Offer a small incentive

### **1. Make Evaluation Part of the Course**

The most effective method to maintain high-quality response rates is to make evaluation part of your course. Simply administering a mid-semester course evaluation and providing the results and your plan of action based on their feedback to the class will dramatically improve response rates at the end of the year.

This is because it addresses students' primary complaint about course evaluation: No one looks or even cares about what I have to say about the course. Surveys and information suggest that students have little confidence that faculty or administrators pay attention to the results. **If you show them that their feedback is important, studies show that they will provide that feedback to you.**

### **2. Send Reminder Notices**

At Columbia, as part of the centrally administered option, three email reminders are sent to the students through their university email accounts each week the evaluation is open.

There is also a pop-up reminder each time a student logs into OASIS.

Instructors are encouraged to remind their own students of the importance of the evaluations and encourage their participation through whatever communication channel you have established for your course.

### **3. Offer a Small Incentive**

The literature stated that small incentives will boost the response rates from students. Examples that were provided were one-half of one percent grade enhancement or contests for prizes like an iPod.