

Best Practices for Encouraging Responses with Online Evaluations

Since first piloted at UCLA in 2010, the online evaluation system continues to be developed and improved over time. Observing the progress of early adopters and conducting our own research have provided great methods of encouraging feedback. Habitually using these tips every quarter has allowed other instructors using online evaluations to achieve participation rates of 70-90%. Let's get to them:

1.) Mention evaluations at the beginning of the quarter:

In the syllabus mention the end of quarter evaluations, and emphasize the importance of student feedback. Although evaluations are not mandatory, mentioning them at the beginning allows them to be revered as a natural part of taking classes.

2.) If you feel comfortable, you can count participation toward the grade:

There is a mechanism of Gradebook Schema, in the Participation section, that allows for a download at the end of the quarter indicating "YES" or "NO" that a student has completed the evaluation for your course. (Note: due to anonymity, no results will ever be traced back to an individual student -- only indication as to their participation or not.)

Some instructors feel better about rewarding the class as a whole and use this incentive to "give" something away that they may have been inclined to give anyways. (e.g. 2 pts extra credit, or last class is a final review day, or dropping the lowest homework score if a 70% response rate is met). This has proven very effective. Participation can be tracked by instructors throughout the evaluation period in the MyUCLA portal. You may contact Undergraduate Education Information Technology (UIT) for help with Gradebook, and with questions about properly setting up and using this feature.

3.) Send an email reminder to your students:

The EIP office sends three emails to students. One to let them know that the evaluation period has begun that also informs them of when it ends. The second is a reminder email. The third is

the last chance reminder. However, students receive a lot of emails, and may overlook EIP information or disregard it. Feedback indicates that emails from instructors themselves tend to be minded more by students. A quick email reminding your students that 1) their feedback is very important, 2) if they haven't gotten a chance to fill out your evaluation to do so, and 3) provide the deadline which will prompt students to complete them.

4.) Continue to give time in class:

As with paper evaluations, it is important to still allot a time in class where you allow students to fill out the evaluation for your course on their computers, smartphones or tablets. (Note: make sure your classroom is equipped with Wi-Fi first) Setting aside this time, and leaving the room, as with the paper evaluation system, definitely helps to increase participation. This also gives one more opportunity to tell students face to face that evaluations are important and their feedback is valued and confidential.

5.) Don't turn in grades before evaluations close:

*Due to a mechanism put in place to protect students and instructors, evaluation results cannot be viewed until after final grades have been submitted. (This way, students don't base their feedback on the perceived fairness of their final grade, and grades can no way be affected by evaluation responses.) However, because of this, **turning in grades before the end of the allotted evaluation period cuts it short and no further responses are allowed.** Therefore, turning in grades earlier than this date may inadvertently cut off possible responses. Unless you can see that all students have filled out the evaluations for your course, do not submit grades early in order that remaining students may participate.*

Additional items worth mentioning:

- Our program does not allow students to "save and return." Unless they complete and submit the online form, they will need to begin again on their next login.
- EIP does not encourage any sort of punishment or "grade blocking" (withholding of grades/privileges until surveys are completed). There is a risk that evaluations could be associated with punishment and the quality of responses is questionable when students feel coerced into completing them.
- As with any major technological change, it may take some time to adjust to a new system. By utilizing these tips, we expect that you will see increased responses in the online evaluation system.