Electronic Course Evals: Best Practices for Online Response Rates

The biggest concern of having online technology for a course evaluation system is that of response rates. It is documented that the first couple of years when an institution switches to an electronic format, their response rates often decline. Yet, many institutions are becoming creative about strategies and have been able to increase response rates up to 90%. According to the literature (and intensive studies from the IDEA Center), creating a culture on campus about the importance of course evaluation feedback is crucial for boosting response rates. Here are some best practices that have been proven effective by colleges and universities:

Faculty Involvement is the key

1) Creating Value for Student Feedback. The most important factor to elicit good response rates is instructors encouraging student feedback. When students feel that their opinions are valued, the more likely the student is to complete a thoughtful evaluation of the course and instructor. Faculty who incorporate an atmosphere in their courses that student learning is important to them and they inform students during class time that they are interested in how their teaching helps student learn, often get the best response rates using online course evaluations.

2) Completing Evals during Class Time. Course instructors have had good results by allowing time during the last class period for students to complete the online course evaluation. Instructors who ask students to bring laptops or mobile devices to the last class, and give the students 10 minutes to complete the evaluation, often get good response rates.

3) Course Participation Points. Course instructors who have offered to give students extra participation points in the course, if they are willing to complete the course evaluation by the deadline, have received very high response rates. Students seem to appreciate any extra credit and positive incentives for completing the course evaluation. Instructors should always remind students that the individual responses on the course evaluation are separated from their name/email address, and only aggregated summaries are given to them after grades are posted.

4) Faculty Communication with Students. Although the students receive many generic emails from the institution reminding them to complete the course evaluation, course instructors who send a personal reminder to the students, often obtain a higher response rate than those instructors who do not acknowledge or mention the course evaluation at all. In addition, course instructors who add a paragraph in their syllabus about the online course evaluation and the timeline can boost their response rate.

5) Positive Incentives for Students. Campuses who can offer raffle drawings, or offer an immediate reward (i.e. online gift card, food coupons, ticket to campus event, etc) to students who complete all their course evaluations, often boost their overall campus response rates dramatically.