

# Using CourseEval™ to Maximize Institutional Engagement

CourseEval™ results are often judged by response rates. Indeed, this is almost always the first question that is raised when an institution is considering a move to on-line course evaluation. Although Academic Management Systems (AMS) has some evidence that modestly lower response rates are often just as reliable as higher ones, there is comfort in knowing that an institution's response rates are as high as possible.

However, rather than focusing exclusively on response rates, AMS would like to discuss the overall level of institutional engagement in the evaluation process. This can also be described as the institution's 'climate for course evaluation' or "culture of evidence." We discuss this here in four broad categories, using the time of initial survey deployment as a way of organizing various activities that will promote engagement in the course evaluation process: 1) the weeks ahead of an evaluation cycle, 2) the days immediately prior to the evaluation cycle, 3) the days when surveys are 'live', and 4) the weeks following the evaluation cycle.

## 1) Weeks Ahead

- a) Create a culture of assessment. Key members of the administration (e.g., President, Provost, Dean, Director) should make clear positive statements about the evaluation process, specifically clarifying how the results of course and instructor evaluations will be used for both personnel decisions.
- b) Discuss the importance of the evaluation process during faculty meetings.
- c) Review and critique the survey instrument(s) to be used for length and question quality.
- d) Engage various "media" outlets on campus to advertise the importance of the evaluation process:
  - i) Put an ad in the campus newspaper or the School / Department newsletter.
  - ii) Put information about the surveys on the school's website.
  - iii) Use campus and student portals to remind students that it is almost time for Semester Surveys.
  - iv) Create posters to announce the evaluation period.
  - v) Hand out post cards or memos to the students.
  - vi) Advertise on campus transportation – place signs on the buses just prior to going 'live'.
  - vii) Advertise on the campus radio or television stations.
- e) Communicate the results. Faculty and students should know about and have confidence in the process that will be used by the administration to consider and convey the results of the evaluations.

## 2) Days Ahead

- a) Create emails to be sent to Department Chairs, Faculty Members and Teaching Assistants. Remind them when the evaluations will be released and ask them to mention the process to their students in class.
- b) Suggest to Department Chairs that they communicate with their faculty members regarding the value the responses provide with regard to improving curricula.
- c) Use MyCourseEval on school or campus-wide student portals, and with course management systems such as Blackboard, WebCT, Moodle, Sakai, etc. to alert students about their pending evaluations.
- d) Send an advance group e-mail to students the week before the surveys are scheduled to be released, remind them of the importance of their feedback.

### 3) **While the Survey is ‘Live’**

- a) Send group e-mail messages to Course Directors and Teaching Assistants on the day the evaluation surveys are released. Ask them to remind students to complete the surveys. (When a faculty member reminds students of the importance of course evaluations, to them as teachers, response rates will improve.)
- b) Send automated follow-up reminders to those students who have not yet submitted their surveys. Later reminders, when the surveys are about to close, might include a clear statement outlining any consequences that might accrue such as withholding of electronic grades, withdrawal of access to the campus-wide results web site, etc.
- c) Send periodic email to faculty letting them know the submitted and pending totals for their course evaluations, and remind them to encourage student participation if they are still meeting with their classes. (Consider giving them some ‘talking points’ to use when speaking with the students.)
- d) Inform Course Directors and Teaching Assistants as to when the survey will close and when they will be able to see the results.
- e) Send a thank-you email to students when they submit a given survey or to send a ‘collective’ thank-you note to those students who submitted their surveys when the survey has closed.

### 4) **Weeks After**

- a) Reward students for their course evaluation submissions such as the early web posting of grades or their immediate access to a campus-wide portal that summarizes the results to questions such as ‘Would you recommend this course to another student?’ or ‘Would you recommend this instructor to another student?’.
- b) Collect a list of important results (e.g., adding / dropping courses, adding / dropping sections, rescheduling courses, adjusting teaching assignments, adding new programs, etc.) that can be directly or indirectly linked to the evaluation process. Post the list on a web-site devoted to such results or publish the list in the campus newspaper.
- c) Collect report feedback by adding ‘reflective’ questions in all reports. Ask Course Directors and Teaching Assistants to comment on what they learned from the students and how they might adapt their course the next time it is taught, and / or to prepare a similar statement that could be posted back to a ‘Faculty Response’ web site where students could see some evidence that their comments were duly noted.

AMS Sales and Product Support staff are prepared to assist current and potential CoursEval users in developing a sound “roll-out strategy” that will optimize the benefits of this technology.

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