

CCOE Committee for Online Education (COE)

White Paper:

Recommendations for CCOE Policies and Recommended Practices per Online SAI Completion

Rationale:

Student Assessments of Instruction (SAIs) are currently used as a primary method at ETSU of assessing faculty members' instruction in their classes. Although SAIs should not be the sole method of instructional assessment, students' perspectives can provide valuable information to inform and, as appropriate, adapt instruction toward increasing efficacy. However, return rates for SAIs, particularly when administered online, nationally trend toward lower rates than hard-copy, in-class evaluations (Berk, 2012).

Low rates of return on SAIs are problematic because a small sample of student feedback may not be representative of the full spectrum of student experience. That is, a small group may disproportionately represent low-performing or disgruntled students, or conversely, the high-performing and satisfied students. Return rates of 80% or above, therefore, are desirable and advised for both small and large classes (Berk, 2012).

The purpose of this white paper, then, is to propose:

- a. Policies to be adopted by the CCOE for the purposes of increasing SAI return rates. For proposed policies, only those actions which are least invasive will be forwarded.
- b. Strongly encouraged practices to be endorsed by the CCOE.
- c. Additional suggestions for faculty, to be forwarded by the CCOE, as well as suggestions for steps to be taken by the CCOE's Dean's Office. These suggestions may have researched support for increasing return rates, but may also influence responses or may interfere with instructors' preferences or practices, and so should be used as preferred by instructional faculty.
- d. Suggestions or requests to be forwarded to other parties from the CCOE. Some strategies for increasing return rates may not be within the College's purview to address, but could be addressed by other parties on campus.

Proposed CCOE Policies

- **CCOE SAI Statement within all syllabi.**

According to research, one reason that students do not complete course ratings is because they

do not perceive that their input is valued. Another is that they cannot easily locate the rating system (Berk, 2012; Donmeyer et al., 2004). Therefore, a standard CCOE statement explaining the value of SAI completion as well as where the SAIs are located (and when: which weeks of the term) can address both of these factors with positive impact.

- **Inclusion of SAI within all course schedules.**

Although it cannot be a graded item, we propose a College policy that all course schedules include the course's SAI completion as a line item, including start and end dates. A scheduled reminder may assist students with remembering to complete this important task, and research indicates that even without attaching point values, response rates can be raised by 7% using this method (Johnson, 2003). Should this policy be adopted, the COE recommends including in the policy the standard weeks during which SAIs are open for student ratings (see Appendix A), so that instructors can easily incorporate this information without having to locate it.

Strongly Encouraged Instructor Practices for the CCOE

- **Communicate about SAIs: Their importance and reminders.**

- a. **Communicate, via e-mail or a D2L News message, about the importance of SAIs.**

Just as a College statement in the syllabus can be powerful for assuring students that their ratings are valued as input for improvement of the course and instruction, so can an instructor's personalized e-mail message and posted News statement to students stating the same. This message about the importance of SAIs can be included in reminders (b) below, so as to keep students from receiving too many e-mails or instructor messages.

- b. **Send regular reminders during the SAI period.**

One factor for low completion rates of online course ratings is that students simply forget (Anderson, Brown, & Spaeth, 2006). Regular reminders to students during the SAI window, sent from the instructor, will assist students with remembering to complete the survey. Besides sending e-mailed reminders, instructors can also post eye-catching reminders on the "News" homepage of their D2L course website (posting pictures or images can help get students' attention). In order to keep students from being too overwhelmed by instructor messages, the COE recommends a once-weekly reminder during the SAI period.

- **For on-ground classes: Complete SAIs during class time.**

Just as was done when paper SAIs were completed, on-ground instructors are encouraged to set aside approximately 15 minutes of class time to encourage students to complete the SAIs on their mobile devices, tablets, or laptops. Students lacking such a device can be encouraged to complete SAIs at a later time when they can gain access, but this method should ensure most

students complete the SAI during the allotted class time. Lack of time for completion of course ratings is one of the leading factors related to low completion rates (Berk, 2012).

- **Embed a video message from the Dean.**

A brief video message from the Dean, impressing upon students the importance of completing the SAIs, will be requested (see #10 below). Should this be agreed to and provided, instructors are encouraged to embed the video in the “News” section of their D2L course website, preferably within a week of SAIs opening. This approach will again inform students of the value of their input for instructional improvement.

Additional Suggestions for Increasing SAI Response Rates: Instructor and College Level

Items included in this section are to be considered by instructors a “menu” of strategies that may help them to achieve higher SAI completion rates. Instructors may or may not choose to use them. As with those that are Strongly Encouraged, *these are not compulsory*. The COE recommends that instructors apply these ideas judiciously in order to avoid overwhelming students.

- **Instructors: Consider giving entire class an incentive if they reach a desired completion rate.**

Although offering extra credit is optional and can rightly raise concerns about consequential bias in student ratings, offering students a *small* incentive may significantly increase return rates while impacting only a fraction of the student grades. Examples of incentives could be a very small amount of extra credit, rounding up a final grade by 1/10th of a percent, or dropping the lowest quiz grade from a set. Because we cannot track individual students’ completion of the SAIs, one method is to award the entire class the incentive if they reach a stated return rate (e.g., 80% or above). Instructors can determine this completion rate while SAI collection is in process by clicking on the SAI link for instructors.

- **Instructors: Conduct (and respond to) mid-semester evaluations.**

One way instructors can impress upon their students the value they (instructors) place on student feedback is to conduct a simple mid-semester evaluation of the course and instruction. Recommendations are to request from students that any stated problems with the course be accompanied by suggestions for improvement that align with course objectives. In order for this to be effective, instructors should acknowledge the input, making adjustments where possible or explaining why adjustments cannot be made if applicable.

- **CCOE: Consider creating a video message from the Dean.**

A brief video message from the Dean of the CCOE can assist with ensuring students that their input is valued and useful as one source of instructor and course evaluation and improvement.

Suggestions to Other ETSU Entities

- **Encourage SAI completion across campus with yard signs.**

As a method of communicating the importance the university places on student feedback, as well as reminding students of this responsibility, ETSU is encouraged to place reminder signs for students to complete SAIs, preferably outside high-traffic areas for students, such as the library, Culp Center, and Quad. The Center for Teaching Excellence may be the proper ETSU entity to which this request is made. Should the CCOE Dean's Cabinet accept this set of proposals, the COE can take responsibility for following up on this recommendation.

- **Request a pop-up reminder on D2L.**

As possible, forward a request to Academic Technology Support (which houses the SAI process) to include a pop-up message to students whenever they log in to D2L. Even more desirable would be to have the message show up for each course individually, and for the message to include a quick-click link to the course's SAI. It is important that this message *not* pop up once SAIs are completed. Frequent reminders help to increase response rates (Guder & Malliaris, 2013).

- **Include SAI window on ETSU's Academic Calendar.**

Inclusion of SAI start and end dates on the Academic Calendar can (a) serve as one more notification to attentive students, and (b) include a consistent location where campus faculty can find these dates for inclusion on their course schedules.

- **Request combining 4000-5000 small-enrollment sections into one SAI survey.**

Currently, courses which enroll fewer than 5 students result in instructors' inability to see SAI responses, due to FERPA regulations regarding concerns about student identification from the remarks. Instructors may see results if they first notify students prior to SAI completion that the results will not be anonymous; however, this may lower completion rates or student honesty. For split courses which combine undergraduate and graduate sections with low enrollments in each, the COE will pursue the possibility with SAI administrators to combine those sections into a single SAI survey, thus growing the number of responses and the possibility of instructors to view responses, while preserving student anonymity.

Measurement for Efficacy

In order for the CCOE to determine which methods are most effective, it would be useful to establish baseline methodology and return rates, and then to collect information about instructor methodology and return rates once policies and recommendations are forwarded.

The COE will pursue collecting data from SAI administrators on SAI completion rates for AY 2017-2018 in order to establish baseline rates, as well as rates for subsequent years. Based on early conversations with SAI administrators, this may or may not be feasible.

Further, once annually, a member of the COE will request completion of a brief checklist and survey from instructors during departmental meeting time, and request qualitative feedback on how the

methods appear to be working. (Electronic versions of these surveys can be sent to adjunct instructors or those not present for the meeting.)

References

Anderson, J., Brown, G., & Spaeth, S. (2006). Online student evaluations and response rates reconsidered. *Innovate*, 2(6). Retrieved from: <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1124&context=innovate> December 7, 2017.

Berk, R. A. (2012). Top 20 strategies to increase the online response rates of student rating scales. *International Journal of Technology in Teaching and Learning*, 8(2), 98-107.

Donmeyer, 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.

Guder, F., & Malliaris, M. (2013). Online course evaluations response rates. *American Journal of Business Education*, 6(3), 333-338.

Johnson, T. D. (2003). Online student ratings: Will students respond? In D. L. Sorenson & T. D. Johnson (Eds.), *Online student ratings of instruction* (New Directions for Teaching and Learning, No. 96; pp. 49-60). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Appendix A: Standard Schedule for SAI Open and Close Dates

Fall and Spring:

- SAs are open during the last 3 weeks of the session before Finals Week.

Summer Sessions:

- SAs are open for the final 2 weeks of each session. For combined sessions, the SAs open for the final 2 weeks at the end of the combined term.