

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN SENATE
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY

EP.22.145 Response to EP.22.010, Instructor and Course Evaluation System (ICES) for 2021-2022

BACKGROUND

In this proposal the Educational Policy (EP) committee addresses recommendations made in EP.22.010, a proposal recommending the continuation of online student evaluations (ICES online) as we maneuver through the COVID-19 pandemic during the AY22 academic school year, including the upcoming summer. Given that courses at the University of Illinois are being delivered both in-person and online, keeping student evaluations in an online format is essential to maintaining consistent evaluation response data. EP was also asked to address (1) concerns recorded in a 2010 Senate meeting regarding moving from paper to online student evaluations, (2) a recommendation made in EP.20.161 regarding online ICES evaluations, and (3) recommendations regarding student evaluations which appear in a recent Provost Task Force Report on Assessing Teaching Effectiveness.

A subcommittee from EP investigated Senate meeting documents from February 22, 2010 (https://www.senate.illinois.edu/100222_m.pdf) where a Committee of the Whole discussion raised concerns about “lower accuracy and response rates,” “higher standard deviations,” and “easier access to ICES results for Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests” if campus moved from paper to online student evaluations. In addressing the “easier access to FOIA requests,” it was determined that the University of Illinois System does not allow FOIA requests to access student evaluation information. Correspondence with Matt Rogina (Assistant Director, FOIA Administration, Officer for University Relations, University of Illinois System) determined that while his office receives FOIA requests for student surveys/comments, etc., they do not release information. This was not dependent on the modality of the surveys/comments. Rogina responded:

In general, we have withheld them under section 7(1)(f) which exempts “preliminary drafts, notes, recommendations, memoranda and other records in which opinions are expressed, or policies or actions are formulated.” I have attached a recent opinion our office wrote to the Attorney General in response to a request for ICES student evaluations. I think this should answer most of your questions. Let me know if I can be of further assistance.

The opinion letter from Rogina’s office is attached to this proposal (Rogina_FOIA_attachment).

In addition to the February 10, 2010 Senate concerns regarding online evaluations and probable “lower accuracy and response rates” and “higher standard deviations,” EP.20.161 (Partial List of Challenges Arising from COVID-19, page 2) also expressed a need to address online ICES evaluations: “*The Center for Innovation in Teaching and Learning should develop a set of best practices for common evaluation of online courses instead of merely perpetuating the status quo of emergency measures adopted this spring.*”

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Center for Innovation in Teaching and Learning (CITL) successfully

moved all student ICES evaluations fully online. While some instructors saw a decrease in their response rates during this time, CITL found three major advantages of the online system that emerged: students can provide more detailed responses to the open-ended questions; instructors are able to review reports summarizing student feedback weeks earlier compared to the paper-based system; and the reports from the online evaluations are easily available to instructors at any time in a digital format.

During this same time, a Task Force convened by the Office of the Provost was asked to study the assessment of teaching effectiveness. The [Provost's Task Force on Assessing Teaching Effectiveness](#), led by Professor Amy Ando (ACES), a Provost Fellow at the time, created a Report that was shared with EP. The Task Force Report includes establishing a set of criteria that define excellent instruction at the University of Illinois. An essential part of this plan is to "gather concrete and routinized feedback and evaluation from students, peers, and instructors themselves to regularly chart the progress made by course designers and instructors toward accomplishing those standards of excellence." As a result of these recommendations, campus is currently developing a new Student Feedback Survey (SFS) that is "aligned to the Definition of Teaching Excellence." According to the Report, it will use modern best practices in survey design. The Student Feedback Survey will replace ICES, and the Task Force recommends the SFS be conducted "automatically and online for all courses. The SFS should be fielded in a manner that maximizes response rate."

Task Force recommendations include encouraging students to "take the Student Feedback Survey (SFS) during class time on their phones, and the SFS could be embedded directly in the learning management system for courses." If done online, this feedback "should be immediately and automatically available to the instructor." The Committee understands "phones" refers to any mobile device students may have with them at the time, and that all final course evaluation student comments would not be released to instructors until after the grade submission deadline has passed as is current practice.

EP was asked to consult further with Senate members to gather more information on best practices for fielding better response rates with online evaluations. This was done through a survey that was sent to the Senate in April 2022. A sample of the responses are shared below.

1. *Provide a time to do them in-person during normal class time (just like with the old forms, except online).*
2. *I have the students fill out the form at the beginning of a class period so that they don't just leave or shortchange the answers so they can leave earlier.*
3. *I now have them fill these out in my last class.*
4. *I emphasize the pedagogical role of these surveys, rather than frame them as "customer satisfaction surveys." I have found that many students appreciate understanding their role in shaping an educational environment for future students, rather than being treated as one-off customers.*
5. *Providing time in-class for completing the evaluations. Explaining to the class how these evaluations are used, especially how I attempt to interpret and incorporate the qualitative/written responses into my future class planning.*
6. *Explain that evaluations are anonymous.*
7. *Remind students both in class and via email of the deadline to complete the online evaluations.*
8. *Give time in class to complete; frequent reminders; explain how I use the results to continuously improve the course.*

9. *I give them in class and give students time. If done online, I still give time in regular in person or synchronized online class. If asynchronous online, I give a small extra credit to all students.*
10. *I do them--or at least get them started--at the first five to seven minutes of a class. I tell them that they matter for the institution and that I read all the suggestions for improvements as well as things they like. I.e. their work is not in vain.*
11. *Link to them on course materials, introduce them in class. Give students time to do them in class.*
12. *Assure them that I pay particular attention to the "free response" questions, and ask that they complete it to help make the course better for their friends who might be taking it in the future.*
13. *Require every student enrolled to participate in online student evaluations. The grades of students who do not participate should be withheld by the university till they complete the student evaluation. Though this sounds harsh, it would be very difficult to ensure 100% participation without this.*
14. *I give time for them to pull out their phones/laptops DURING CLASS to fill out the online ICES form.*
15. *I offer a small amount of extra credit to everyone in the course in the course if more than 70% of the students fill out the survey.*
16. *Continue to allow in-class time for completion of the survey. Inform students of sources of "survey bias" and the importance that everyone contribute to ensure that any changes based on the feedback is appropriate.*
17. *TAs and I tell the students that their feedback is important in making improvements to the course.*
18. *Primarily departmental follow up emails and discussion in class on the importance of the evaluations.*
19. *Repeatedly mentioning it, and trying to have an overall engaging classroom environment.*
20. *Remind students to complete the evaluation and inform them that their constructive criticism is used to improve the quality of the course.*
21. *I provide class time to complete evaluations. In my last class session, I do a review where I highlight everything we have learned and how useful it will be for them in the future. Then, with about 20 minutes left, I give a pointer to ICES and leave.*
22. *I encourage all students to participate, yet the response rate remains 30% or less (mostly, students that know they have not done well and expect bad grades tend to participate so that they can give a low rating to the professor). A university specified requirement of 100% will ensure a fairer system as all students including students that expect good grades will then participate. Give equal weightage (33.33% each) to student/peer/self evaluations and calculate a composite score on the basis of this to minimize bias and grade-based evaluations which tend to favor professors who grade leniently.*
23. *Filling out the forms should be required before receiving a course grade. I don't understand why this cannot be done. As it stands, online evaluation forms are useless. Completely useless. I routinely get less than 30% of the students to respond.*
24. *I have seen colleagues provide treats on evaluation day and do or say other things that potentially tilt the results.*
25. *I try to add specific questions about course materials (favorite or least favorite readings) so students know I personally care about their evaluation.*

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee on Educational Policy supports recommendations from the Center for Innovation in Teaching and Learning (CITL), the Provost's Office, and the Take Force Report on Assessing Teaching Effectiveness to continue administration of online student evaluations. EP also supports the creation of a new student evaluation system. How best to implement best practices or a system to enhance response rates should be further investigated in the coming semesters as the new Student Feedback Survey is developed and tested. EP would like to thank the members of the Senate who participated in the survey which assisted in gathering information for this report.

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