In February of 2009, staff in the Office of Institutional Research, Planning and Assessment (IRPA) conducted phone interviews on the Fall 2008 CourseEvalUM process. We called faculty receiving high response rates, in order to generate “best practices” to share with other faculty. Additionally, we called students who had not completed any of their evaluations, to identify areas to focus our attention in attempting to increase participation. These results should not be considered representative of these populations, but rather anecdotal, especially with regard to the students. The full set of results is attached.

Faculty Best Practices

Over a hundred calls were completed, with faculty receiving either 100% response rates in single-section courses, or over 70% response rates in at least one section of their large lecture courses. Almost all of them indicated they had verbally reminded students in their classes to complete the evaluations. Almost half sent electronic reminders. Several mentioned utilizing the information posted by IRPA staff every weekday morning during the evaluation period on section-specific response rates, some even creating friendly competitions among sections. Only some reported mentioning this expectation on their syllabus; perhaps that is an area for us to focus more attention on.

There was a theme across many courses that reflected a high importance placed on teaching in general, and that the faculty reported influenced their response rates. They believe that students know they take teaching very seriously, that they ask for feedback throughout the semester in various ways, and that they make changes to their courses based on that feedback. So, in these cases, the “best practices” message is not so much individual actions faculty should take only during the evaluation period, but rather a culture to be built around the importance of teaching and learning.

Student Non-Participation

Almost 100 phone interviews were completed with students who did not fill out a single CourseEvalUM evaluation. Over 12,000 students fell into this category. Results are not representative of this entire population – many hundreds of calls were placed, most calls went unanswered, and some students who were reached refused to answer questions.

Contrary to our expectation, the vast majority of the students we reached reported checking their UM email and knowing about the CourseEvalUM process. The most popular reason among our respondents for not participating was that they were too busy and/or ran out of time. Many of these reported that administering these evaluations during finals was a bad idea. In fact, they are not administered during finals, but because students are preparing for finals during the last few weeks of class, they perceive this inaccuracy. Several suggested administering evaluations after final exams; however, we assume that once students complete exams, they will be leaving town and not focused on such administrative issues. This process should take each student less than twenty minutes to complete, and the system is open for two weeks. It is unlikely that students are studying every minute of those two weeks, so their reporting that they do not have time seems to be a misconception. The reality would more likely be that among all of the things they have or want to do during those two weeks, including studying, resting and recreating, completing course evaluations is not a priority.

Two other responses seem actionable. Several of the respondents reported filling out other evaluations in class and therefore did not want to attend to these, and in fact some assumed they had participated in our process. Encouraging colleges and departments to rely on the central system might help in increasing response rates. Also, a few respondents indicated that they didn’t believe these evaluations made any difference. Perhaps faculty can make an effort to point out changes made to their courses on the basis of evaluations, so students see the effect of their participation.

Since 12,000 students fell into this category of complete non-response, and our overall response rate for the system was 61%, it would appear that our incentive of students being able to view results only after completing all evaluations is working for those that take the time to sign on at all; said another way, it appears that most students either answered all of their evaluations, or none. We need to find ways to make this expectation more of a priority to these students who are not at all engaged as of yet.
Best Practices from Faculty with High Participation Rates in CourseEvalUM Fall 2008

108 phone interviews with faculty (across all colleges) receiving:
100% return rates in single-section courses or 70% return rates or better in at least one section of large lectures. Results are not representative of this entire population.

Number of sections: Single section - 67, Multiple sections - 35

Paraphrased answers to question: “What did you do to encourage participation in CourseEvalUM?”

Individual Efforts “Best Practices”
Noted on syllabus (even listing as “required”)
Verbal reminders in class
Email reminders
Notes on Blackboard or other course site (even next to homework assignments)
Department/college/dean sends email reminders
Announcements of running response rates
Competition among sections for highest response rates
Taking students to computer lab during class to participate
Asking students to sign on to laptops during class to participate
Conveying importance of everyone participating for generalizability

The “They know teaching is very important to me” Theme
Everyone’s responsibility
Value of student participation
Students know this faculty cares about them and teaching
Checked in for feedback during semester
Specific use of responses in teaching
Encourage active participation in their education

Counts of closed-ended questions, “Did you do the following:”
Faculty verbal reminder - 97
Electronic reminder by faculty - 47
   Email – 33, Blackboard – 14, Other - 5
Include info on syllabus - 20
TA verbal reminder - 14
Electronic reminder by TA - 7
   Email – 5, Blackboard – 2, Other - 2
No special reminders - 5
Other in-class evaluations
   Yes - 36, No - 70
**Reasons Why Students Didn’t Participate in CourseEvalUM Fall 2008**

Ninety-eight phone interviews were completed with students who did not fill out a single course evaluation. Over 12,000 students fell into this category. Results are not representative of this entire population – hundreds of calls were placed, most calls went unanswered, some students who were reached refused to answer questions.

Did you know that the University has an online course evaluation system called CourseEvalUM?
   Yes – 87, No - 8

Do you check your official University of Maryland email account on a regular basis, or have it forwarded to an account you check often?
   Yes – 86, No - 11

**Of the 87 that responded that they knew about CourseEvalUM:**

Did you receive an email reminder to complete your course evaluations?
   Any of these - 82
   Email from the CourseEvalUM system - 80
   Email from an instructor and/or TA - 29
   Email from your college/department - 27
   Email from the Provost, Dr. Nariman Farvardin - 11

Did you run across any other reminders?
   Any of these - 22
   Posters on campus - 9
   Flyers on campus - 8
   Diamondback ads or articles - 6
   Other - 6

Did you receive a verbal reminder from any instructors or TAs?
   Yes - 53, No - 29, Don’t know - 4

Paraphrased answers to: “Why did you NOT fill out your course evaluations?”
   Too busy / ran out of time - 43
   Responded to another evaluation - 14
   Forgot - 14
   Didn’t want to - 12
   Lazy - 7
   Won’t make a difference - 5
   Annoyed by email reminders - 4
   Didn’t know about them - 3
   Don’t need to see results anymore (i.e., graduating) - 2
   Technical difficulty logging into system - 2
   Thought it was not mandatory - 2
   Evals too long / too many questions - 0
Other reason (which didn’t fit neatly in categories above) – 22:
  Courses weren't over yet. And Business School told them that evaluations distributed in
class were the ones they would be looking at and you could do the other online
evaluations but they wouldn't be using them.
He thinks that course evals should be taken after finals.
Teachers/TAs made it seem optional.
Recently transferred and not used to online evaluations. Chose not to answer any more
questions.
She dropped out of all of her classes.
Doesn't feel like he sees the results "quick enough."
Instructor mentioned online evals at the end of lecture but did not give the information on
where to find the online evals.
He was in large lectures and never went to class – only showed up for exams. He doesn't
feel "qualified" to evaluate the classes.
He was auditing one class and the other was just a discussion. He didn't "feel the need"
to fill out evaluations for them.
Should be optional. Would like to decline participation to stop receiving the emails.
“My evening hours are mine.”
For one class couldn't drop the class so didn't fill it out.
Had to study and evaluations are annoying to do every year.
Read through email first time and had the rest set to be filtered out.
He filled them out before, but wasn't able to see the results, so he felt like it was a waste
of time.
Under the belief that online course evaluations are not as valuable for professors as the
ones taken in class.
Doesn't use the results and makes teacher choices based on course description.
She did fill out some of her online course evaluations. [Editor's note: Not on
CourseEvalUM]
Dealing with a financial situation with the office of financial aid.
Fed up with teachers and didn't feel like bothering to give them feedback.
She only feels the need to fill them out when the teacher is either excellent or terrible.
Wasn't active in classes and ended up withdrawing so didn't think her input would be
constructive.