Facilitating Response Rates in IDEA Online

Achieving adequate response rates for online student ratings of instructions continues to be a challenge. While the IDEA Student Ratings of Instruction System has an 80% average response rate for paper delivery, the online survey delivery struggles to reach 50%. A minimum response rate of 65% is desirable to have confidence that the results represent the general experience for students.

Some campuses have employed strategies that result in average online response rates of 75% or better. The following describe some of these. It is not likely that a single campus will employ all of them, but in order for online responses to be meaningful, it is important to address the challenge of achieving adequate response rates.

- **Communication from Instructors to Students**: This is the single most important factor to facilitate good response rates. If instructors encourage student feedback, students will be more inclined to participate.

- **Additional Student Communications**: Some campuses have undertaken an advertising campaign to notify students and faculty about the online survey process. Ads in student publications, posters, announcements on student radio stations, flyers in mailboxes are all possible communication strategies to announce the online rating period and review the purpose and use of the results.

- **Student Confidentiality**: Students need to be reassured that their responses are confidential. When their responses are downloaded for processing, no identifying information is associated with the responses. Confidentiality is a concern for students who worry about reprisals for poor reviews, so assurances of the confidentiality of the system may help them be more comfortable with responding.

- **System Monitoring and Communication**: It is very important that the On-Campus Coordinator (OCC) monitors the status of the surveys during the survey period. Managing the Online survey system is not a passive process. The status of response rates needs to be monitored and communicated to faculty, chairs, and deans. At that time, faculty can be encouraged to communicate with their students about the importance of their input. This also adds a level of accountability.

- **Acknowledging/Rewarding High Response Rates**: It is often helpful to "publicly" acknowledge those faculty and/or departments with good response rates. Some campuses offer rewards to departments that achieve a target response rate to add a bit of "healthy competition" and accountability to the process.

- **Class Time**: Emulating the "captive audience" nature of in-class paper ratings can be helpful when possible. This is most easily achieved on campuses where students have laptops. Also consider scheduling computer lab time or using part of a chat-room lecture/discussion period for survey completion.

- **Email/Login Accuracy**: It may sound obvious, but verifying the accuracy of student emails and/or the student identifier/login (for the URL delivery method) is critical. When using the URL method, it is critical that the student identifier is something the students know and is easy to input without making typing or logic errors (e.g., placement or use of commas, hyphens, or spaces).

- **Frequency of Reminders and End Dates**: Typically, if surveys are available for a two-week period, reminders should be sent every 3 days. If the time period is shorter, then more frequent reminders are recommended. If response rates are not adequate as the end date approaches, sending reminders on a daily basis can help. Extending the end date can also help encourage additional responses.

- **Integrating the Process into the Campus Culture**: The ultimate goal is to make ongoing assessment a part of the institutional culture. Students who are expected to participate in ongoing assessment and student feedback throughout the class simply "expect" to complete the final survey. Some institutions introduce the online process as part of freshman learning communities or orientation courses and discuss the importance of instructional assessment and the student role in the feedback process. Others make it clear that improving learning for future students by providing feedback is a responsibility of every member of the institutional community.