Take Your Blue Email Notifications to the Next Level

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VCU   VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY   Make it real.

About Virginia Commonwealth University

Urban university with two campuses

13 schools and one college

31,000 students

17,500 courses per year

6% short courses

History of course evaluation at VCU

Paper and pencil
evaluations until 2009

Switched to Online
evaluations in 2009

Switched to Blue
in 2013

Course evaluation by the numbers

225,000 evaluations per year

200,000 emails per year

We have learned a lot
in last 6 years

Goals of our communication strategy

Goal 1

Increase response rate

Goal 2

Get quality feedback

Goal 3

Increase transparency, reduce confusion and improve satisfaction

Goal 4

Reduce the need for troubleshooting

Lessons we have learned...

1. We are salespeople

2. Email is our best marketing tool

"

E-mail remains a significantly more effective way to acquire customers than social media – nearly 40 times that of Facebook and Twitter combined."

- McKinsey & Company

After trying for a few semesters we stopped using posters, postcards, Twitter, Facebook, campus TV and raffle prizes

3. Content is king

Emails to students include

Introduction

List of open evaluations and their due dates

Link to evaluation forms

Importance of their feedback and how it will be used

Confidentiality

Contact information

Unsubscribe link

Emails to faculty include

Introduction

List of evaluations

Start and end dates, report availability

Link to check response rates

How to improve response rate and get better feedback

Contact information

Unsubscribe link

A/B testing

A/B testing basics

Create two versions of an email

Divide email recipients into two groups

Send different versions of email to each group

Measure completion rate

A

Subject line:

It's Time to Give Feedback to Your Instructors

B

Subject line:

It's Time to Evaluate Your Instructors

✓

13% more responses

A

Subject line:

Reminder: Please Evaluate Your Courses and Your Instructors

✓

30% more responses

B

Subject line:

Need a Study Break? Take a Few Minutes to Evaluate Your Professors

Faculty testimonials

Here's what VCU faculty members have to say about course evaluations:

> " Student evaluations have helped me improve my teaching every year. I especially value the written comments at the end of the evaluation because they help me decide which activities and assignments are helpful to students in terms of mastering the skills taught in the class and which ones I should discard or change.
>
> - Mary Mullins, Assistant Professor, Core Education | Read more testimonials

A

B

With testimonial

Without testimonial

> Student evaluations have helped me improve my teaching every year. I especially value the written comments at the end of the evaluation because they help me decide which activities and assignments are helpful to students in terms of mastering the skills taught in the class and which ones I should discard or change.
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> - Mary Mullins, Assistant Professor, Core Education | Read more testimonials

No significant difference

A

I fill out evaluations every semester, but does anyone look at them?

Instructors use this valuable information to improve and enhance their courses, *they really do*. They especially appreciate the time you take to write individual comments.

Department chairs and other administrators use these reports for promotion and tenure decisions. The data is also used for assessment and accreditation.

Are these evaluations really confidential?

The feedback you give is completely confidential. Your instructor will never see your name or your individual responses. We only include cumulative data (e.g. Question 1: 23 students said "Excellent", 18 said "Good" and so on) in course evaluation reports. Additionally, your feedback is not available to your instructor for at least four weeks after the evaluation period.

B

✔

6% more responses

It's not "just a formality"

Instructors use this valuable information to improve and enhance their courses, *they really do*. They especially appreciate the time you take to write individual comments.

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A

Subject line:

Your Course Evaluations are Still Pending

✓

12% more responses

B

Subject line:

Reminder: Your Course Evaluations are Still Pending

A

Subject line:

Only 3 Days Left to Evaluate Your Professors!

B

Subject line:

Your Course Evaluations are Due in 3 Days

No significant difference

Feature request:

A/B testing functionality in Blue

Tips for writing great content

Pay attention to subject line

A well designed subject line can make big impact

Put yourself in their shoes

If you were a student or instructor,
what information would be helpful to you

Are they asking you the same questions repeatedly?

Consider including this information in the email

Be conversational

Keep it to-the-point

Avoid being clever, using puns

Sound official, authoritative

Don't beg, make them care instead

Create a sense of urgency

instead of

"please complete your evaluations"

say

"evaluations are due in 2 days"

Divide up content into small sections

Use headings

We have kept the evaluation forms short. Most of them can be filled out in 3–5 minutes.

You can even complete them on the go – our course evaluation system now supports most mobile devices.

Your feedback is very important. Instructors use this valuable information to improve and enhance their courses. They especially appreciate the time you take to write individual comments, so please provide detailed constructive feedback. Read faculty testimonials on how course evaluations have helped them.

Department chairs and other administrators use these reports for annual reports and promotion and tenure decisions. The data is also used for assessment and accreditation.

Confidentiality is the central tenet of our course evaluation system. Our system has multiple layers of confidentiality built in

- We conduct evaluations only for courses with 5 or more students enrolled in them.
- Your instructors will never see your name. They will only get an aggregate report for each course. See a sample report.
- Instructors get access to these reports only after they have submitted all the grades in eServices.
- Our course evaluation system (Blue) encrypts the link between your ID and the evaluation you submitted preventing anyone to link the two.

This is your last chance. Please don't wait until the last minute.

If you have more questions or having trouble completing the evaluations, please send an email to courseeval@vcu.edu.

It takes just a few minutes

We have kept the evaluation forms short. Most of them can be filled out in 3-5 minutes.

You can even complete them on the go – our course evaluation system now supports most mobile devices.

It's not "just a formality"

Your feedback is very important. Instructors use this valuable information to improve and enhance their courses. They especially appreciate the time you take to write individual comments, so please provide detailed constructive feedback. Read faculty testimonials on how course evaluations have helped them.

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4. Personalize to the right extent

Two banks
Two very different emails

citi®

Citi Alerting Service

Credit Card - Statement Notification

Citi Credit Card XXXXXXXXXXXX1234

Your latest Citi ThankYou® Plus Card statement is available online. For more account information, to view statements, or to check activity since your last statement, go to www.citicards.com.

ABOUT THIS MESSAGE

Please do not reply to this email. For account-specific inquiries, please sign on to your online account or call Customer Service.

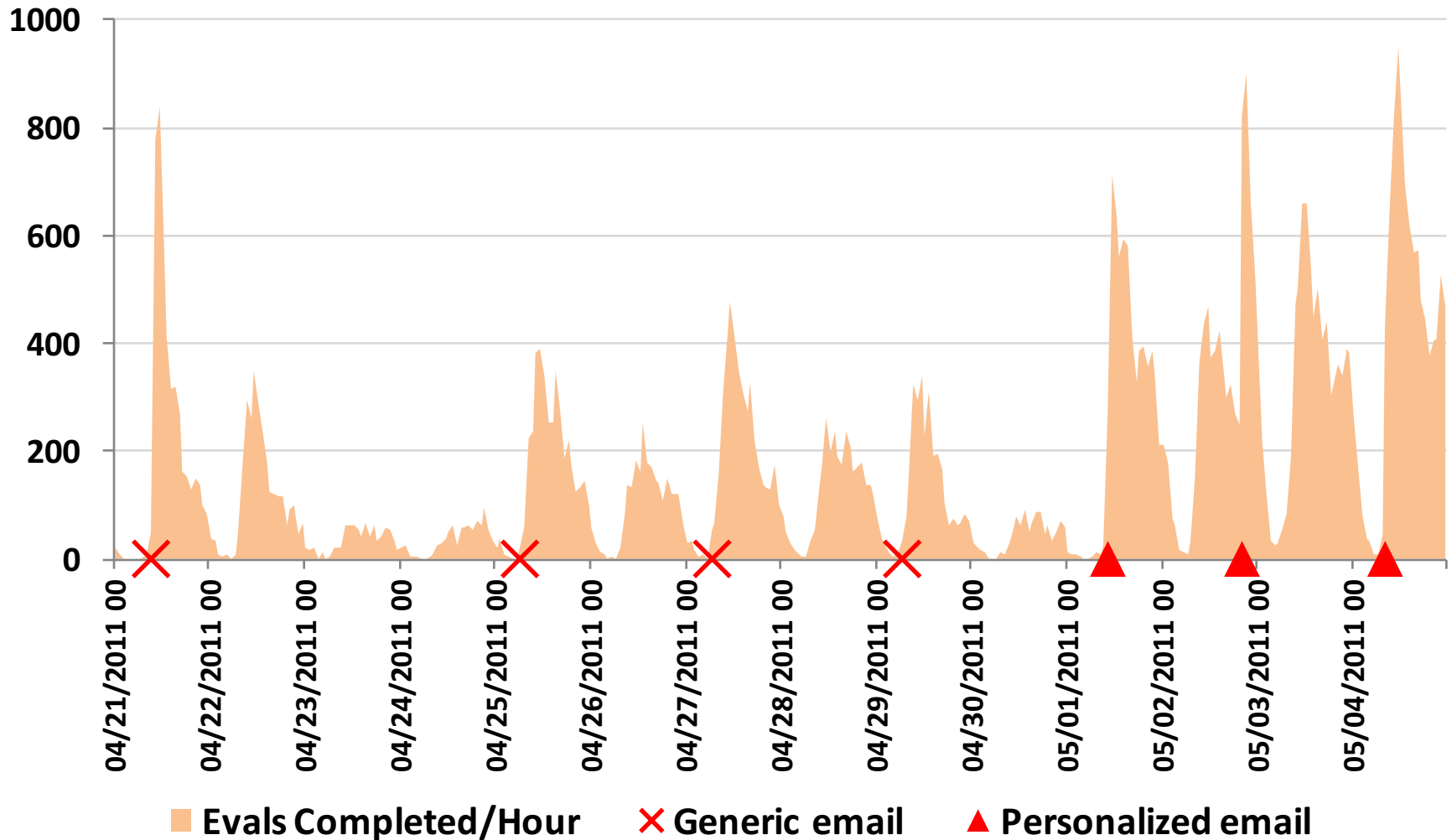| View Account	Make a Payment	Manage Alerts Preferences

📄 Statement Ready

View Now

Your July 2015 statement is now ready for your **American Express Card** account.

Statement Month:	July 2015
Statement Balance:	$0.00
Minimum Amount Due:	$0.00
	No payment is required.

Which email would you rather receive?

Personalized email improved our response rate (Spring 2011)

Personalized data used at VCU

Name

List of courses

Instructor names

Due dates

Personalized subject line

Hello Gaurav,

As the semester comes to an end, please make sure you evaluate your instructors and your courses. Your feedback will enable your instructors to know how they are doing and how they can improve the course. Below is the list of available evaluations

Course	Instructor
BIOL 101-001 BIOLOGICAL CONCEPTS	Colleen B. Higgins
BIOL 291-001 TOP: QUANTITATIVE BIOLOGY	Andrew J. Eckert, Dianne B. Jennings
ARTH 391-001 SP TOP: ISLAMIC ART OF SPAIN	Michael Schreffler
BIOL 391-001 TOP: EVOLUTION	Brian C. Verrelli
BIOL 321-001 PLANT DEVELOPMENT	Wenheng Zhang

Evaluate your courses now »

Almost any data can be included

Field Mapping | Reliability | Categories | Application Theme | User Theme | Admin Password | Password Sett

Email Field Mapping

Results: 1 - 9 of 9 Item(s)

	Mapping Symbol	Description
○	$COURSENAME	course name to include in the student email. Includes c title
○	$EVALENDDATE	Course Eval Due Date for each course
○	$EVALSTARTDATE	Course Eval Start Date for each course
○	$TERM	Academic Period Drecription
○	$FIRSTNAME	First name of users
○	$COURSEIDENTIFICATION	COURSE IDENTIFICATION
○	$INSTRUCTORNAMES	Names of all the instructors combined into a string
○	$COURSESUBJECT	four letter course subject
○	$COURSENUMBER	THREE DIGIT COURSE NUMBER

5. Formatting the email

Unformatted

Hello Gaurav,

As the semester comes to an end, please make sure you evaluate your instructors and your courses. Your feedback will enable your instructors to know how they are doing and how they can improve the course. Below is the list of available evaluations

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Formatted

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Evaluate your courses now »

Find a web designer

Tips for your web designer

Use call to action buttons instead of links

Minimize use of images

Use inline CSS

Responsive design

Resources for your web designer

Responsive email tutorial

http://webdesign.tutsplus.com/articles/creating-a-simple-responsive-html-email--webdesign-12978

BeeFree

https://beefree.io/
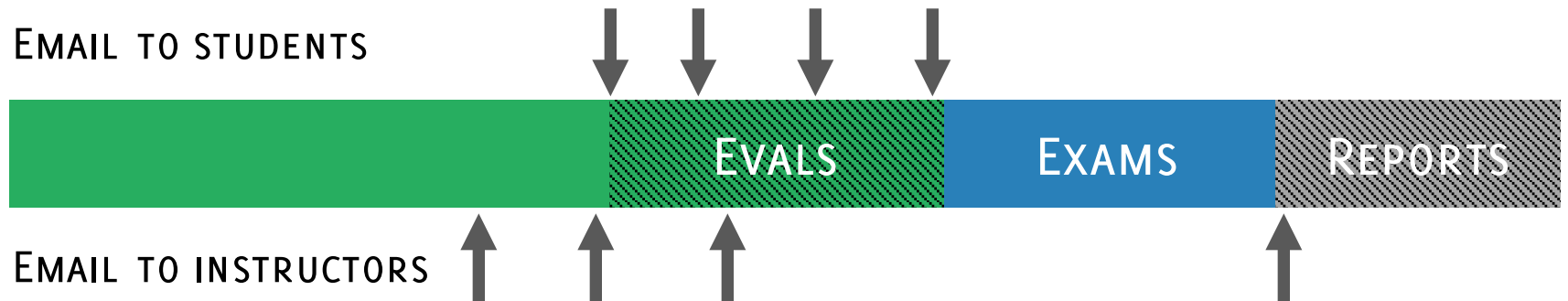
Zurb CSS Inliner

http://zurb.com/ink/inliner.php

6. Getting the timing right

Typical course evaluation cycle

Course duration	Evals	Exams	Reports

(14 days)

Typical communication cycle

EMAIL TO STUDENTS
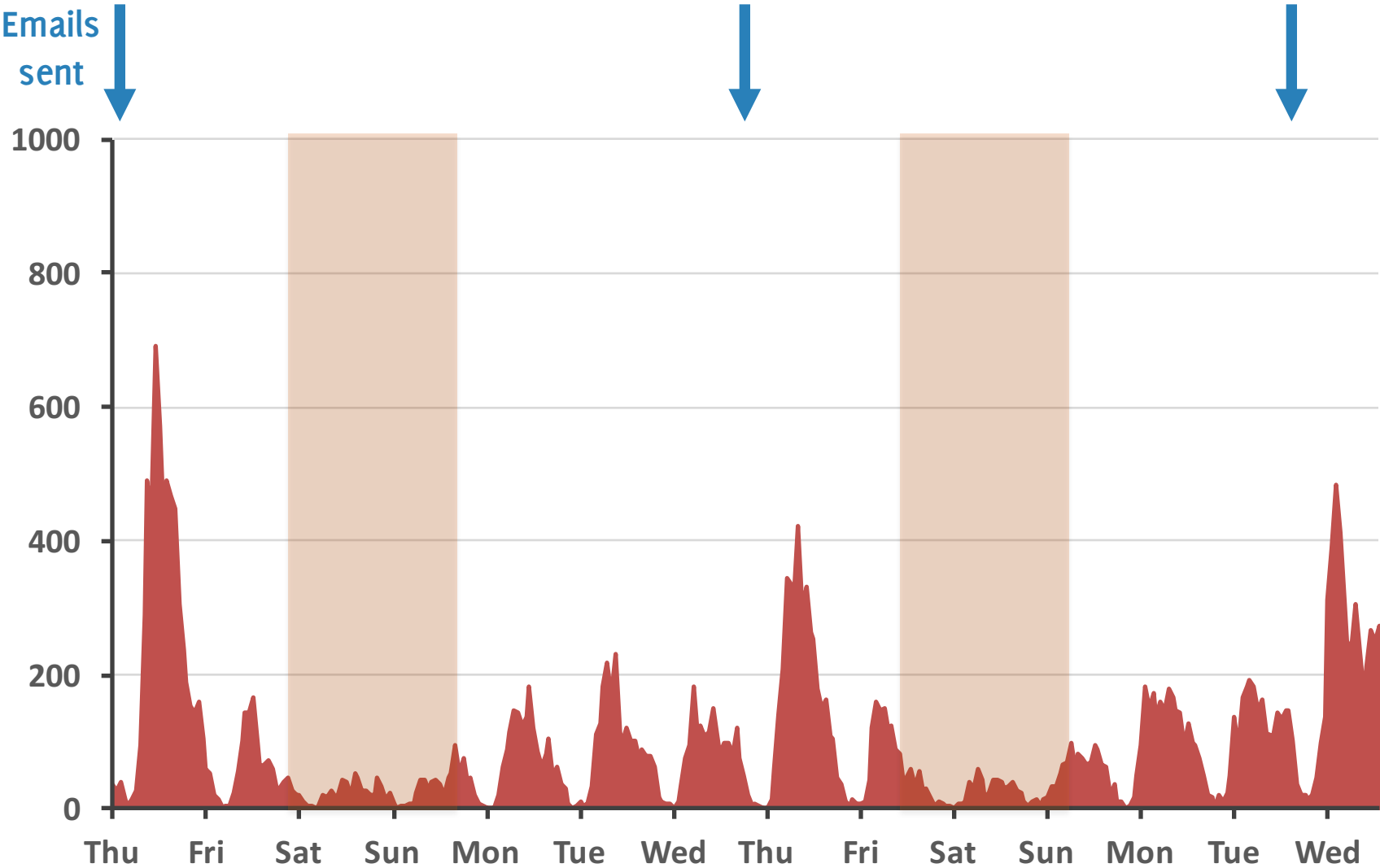
EVALS   EXAMS   REPORTS

EMAIL TO INSTRUCTORS
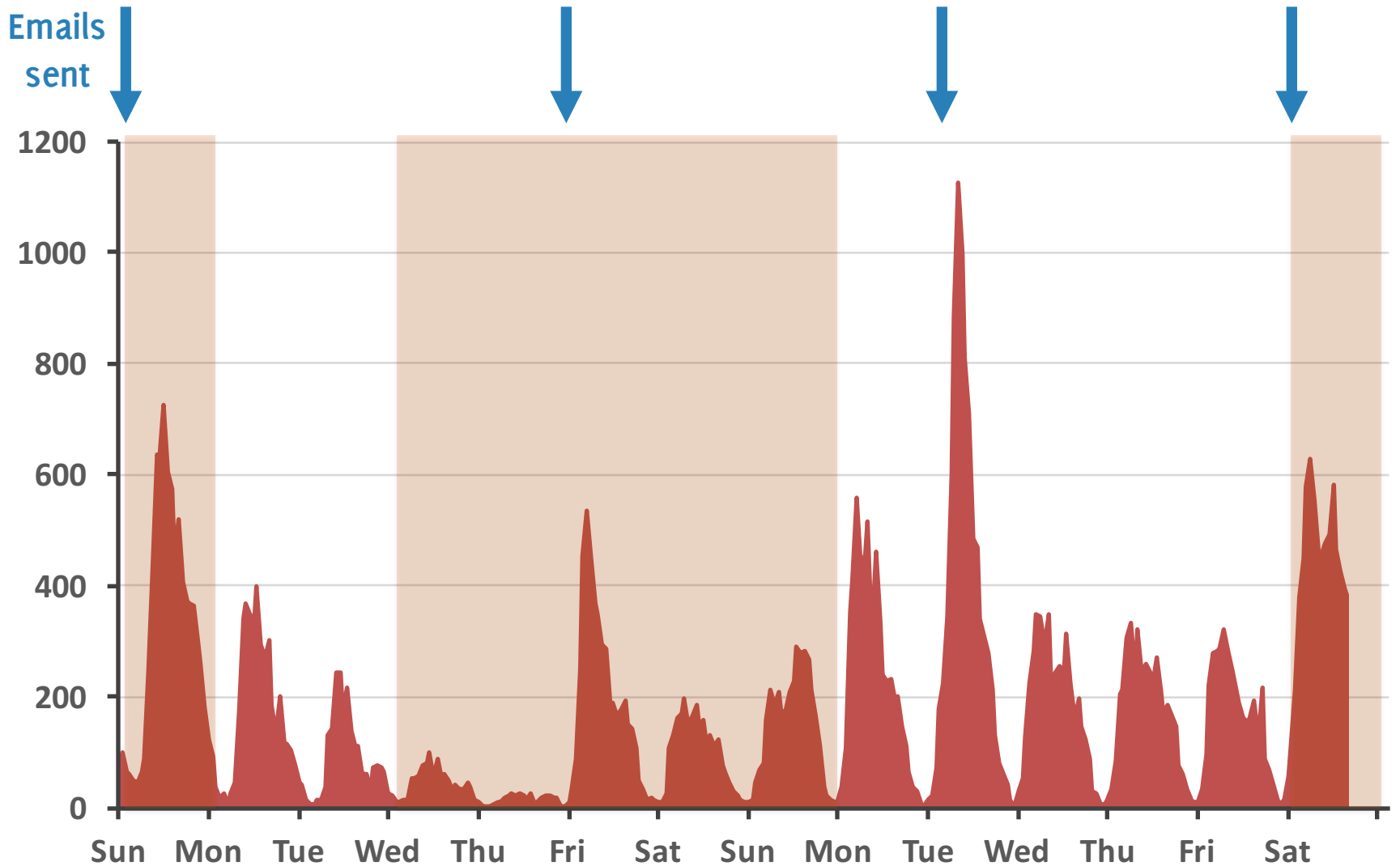
We analyzed data from last four semesters
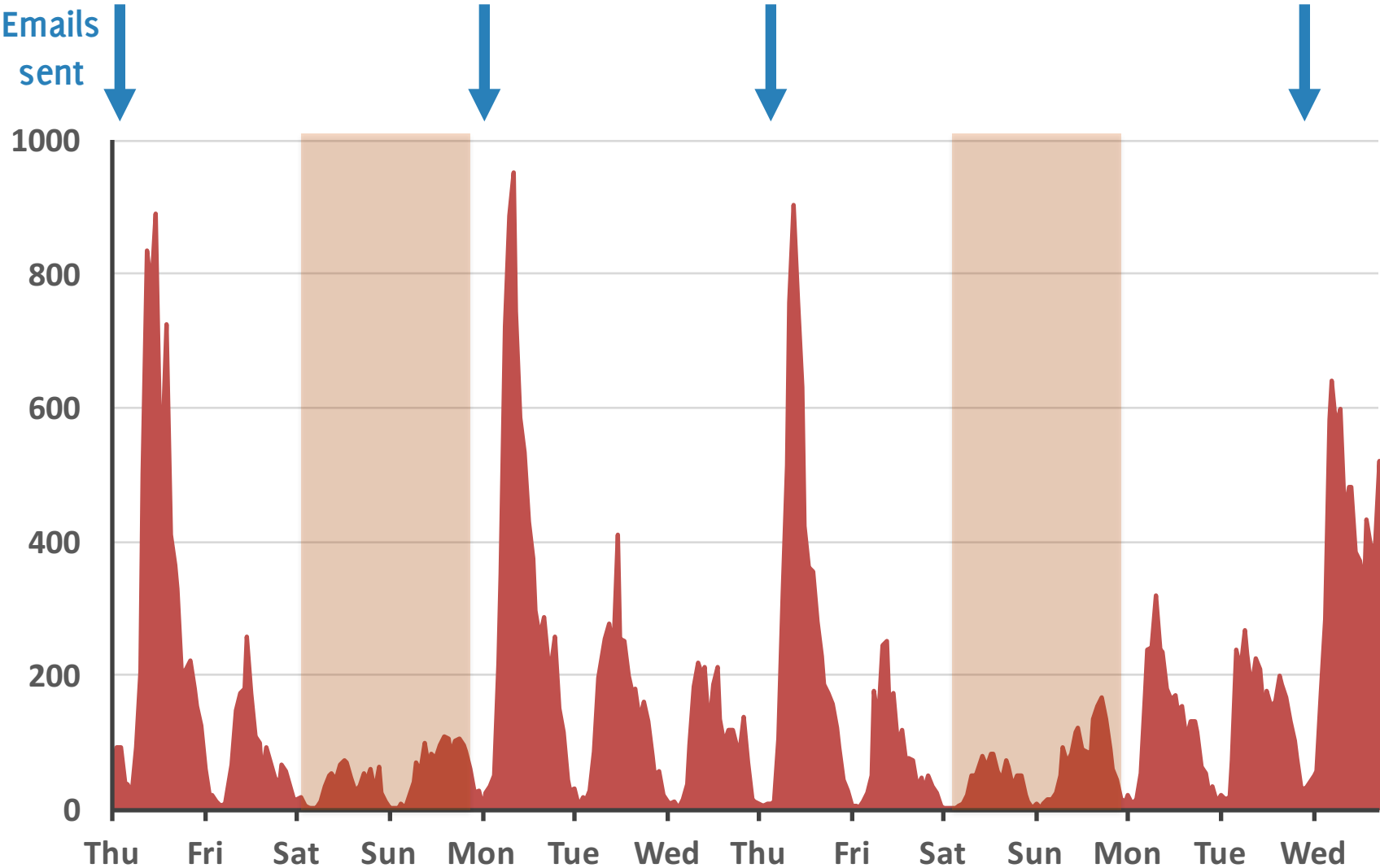
Evaluations completed/hour – Fall 2013
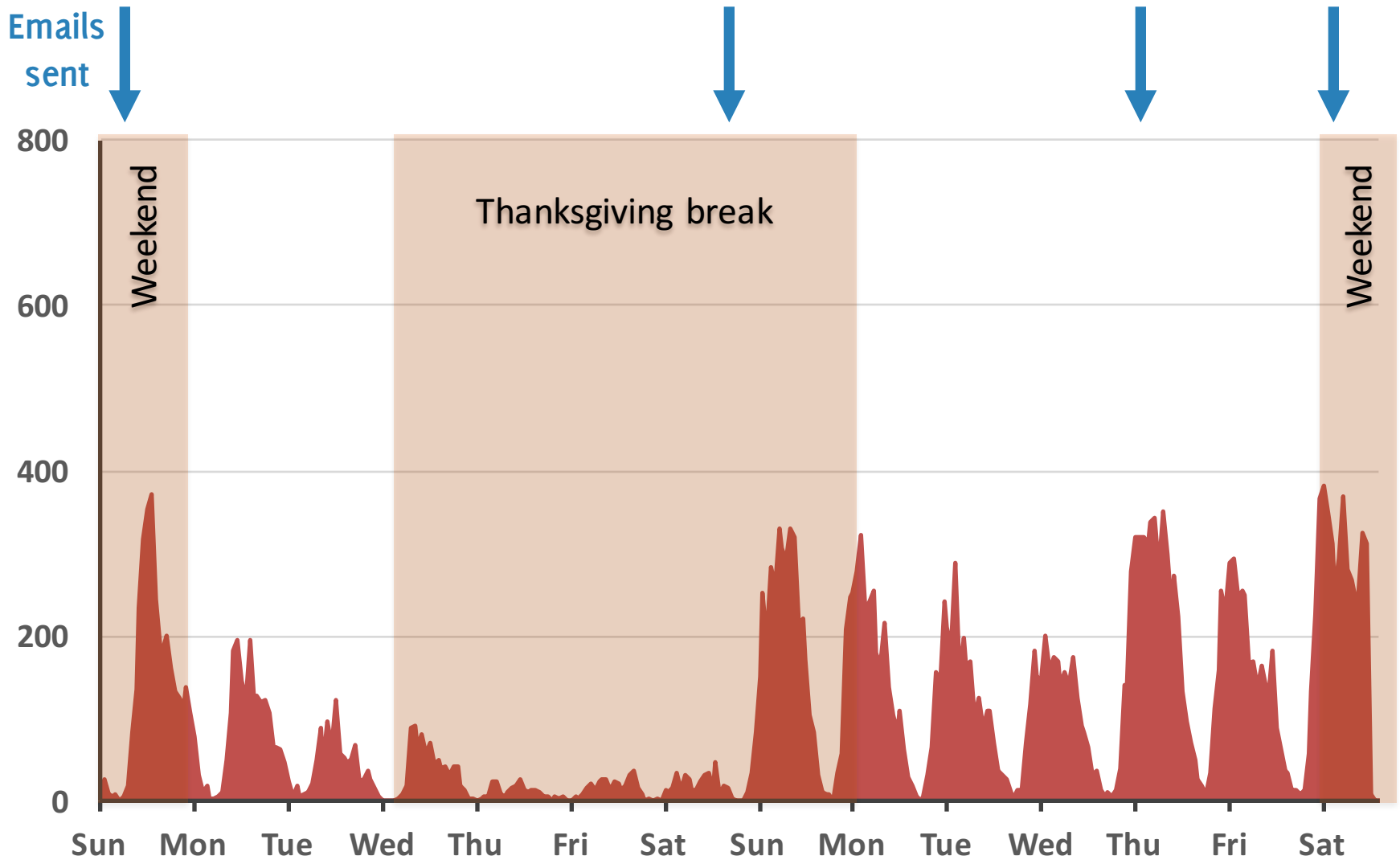
Evaluations completed/hour – Spring 2014

Evaluations completed/hour – Fall 2014
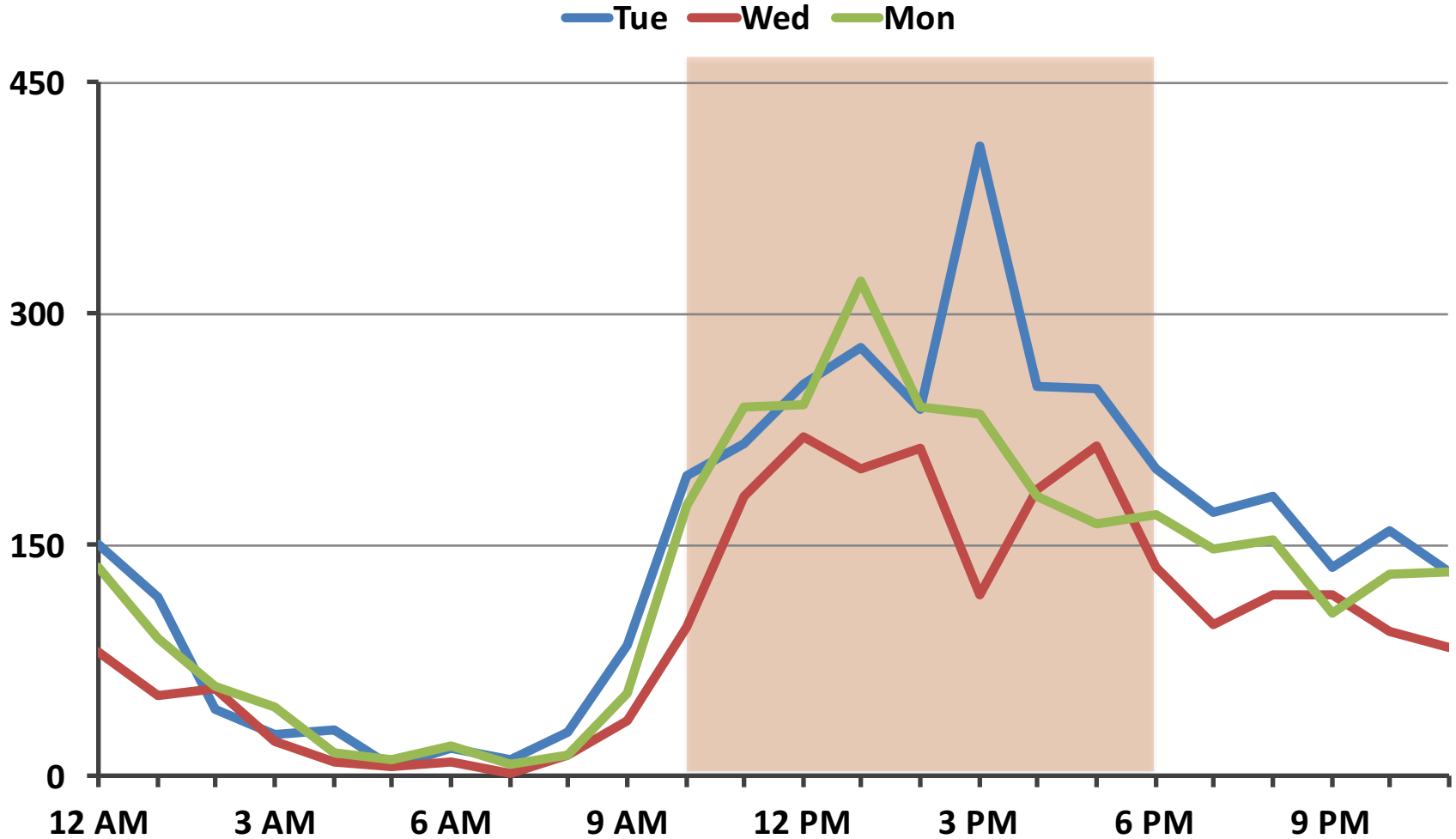
Evaluations completed/hour – Spring 2015

Best days to send emails

First and last day of evals
Monday – Thursday

> Friday – Sunday

> Thanksgiving / long weekends

Evaluations completed/hour in a single day – Spring 2015

Best time to send emails

10am   minus   time required to send all emails (3-6 hours for us)

7. Testing

Testing process

Create a test project with 4-6 courses

Remove all students, instructors

Add yourself and student and instructor to each course

Compose email and send it

Test after every edit, even if it is a minor one

Dear ▓▓▓▓▓

As the semester comes to an end, please make sure you evaluate your instructors and your courses. Your feedback will enable your instructors to know how they are doing and how they can improve the course. Below is the list of available evaluations.

[*()]

Course	Due Date
S$NAME	S

Evaluate my courses

Direct link: https://courseeval.vcu.edu/Blue//a.aspx?l=24_2342

Another feature request:

Easier way to send test emails

Thanks!

I would love to hear from you

✉ guptag@vcu.edu

🐦 @FrshBakedPixels