Best Practices for Managing Course Evaluations in a Complex Environment

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Facts and Figures

The University of Chicago is an urban research university that has driven new ways of thinking since 1890. Our commitment to rigorous inquiry and intellectual freedom draws pathbreaking scholars to our global campuses, where field-defining ideas are born that challenge and change the world.

Key Facts and Figures:
- Founded in 1890 by John Rockefeller
- 98 Nobel Laureates affiliated with UChicago
- #6 U.S. News and World Report Best College ranking
- #10 QS World ranking
- #13 THE University ranking
- 7,653 Undergraduate students
- 10,564 Graduate students
- 2,168 Faculty and Academic personnel
- 4:1 Undergraduate Student to Faculty ratio

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University Organization

Undergraduate

The College

Graduate Divisions

Biological Sciences Division; Humanities Division; Social Sciences Division; and Physical Sciences Division

Professional Schools

Chicago Booth School of Business; Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice; The Divinity School; Graham School for Continuing and Professional Education; Harris School of Public Policy; The Law School; Pritzker School of Medicine; Pritzker School of Molecular Engineering

Campuses and Centers

London; Paris; Hong Kong; Beijing; New Delhi

Evaluations Background

- College students began evaluating undergraduate courses in the 1980s through a Student Government initiative.

- In the early 2000s, the College Dean agreed to automate the student process and partnered with central IT Services to build a web application to support the collection of surveys and distribution of results.

- Booth School of Business used paper evaluations administered during class.

- The Law School used a vendor-based system.

- The graduate units used either ancillary or paper systems OR no evaluation instrument at all.

the college
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THE UNIVERSITY OF
CHICAGO
THE LAW SCHOOL

CHICAGO BOOTH

Evaluating Course Evaluations

UChicago students have spent over 3,912 years on coursework over the last 10 years.

The Culprit of Course Evaluations

Course evaluations set an unhealthy expectation for the amount of time students should spend on their work.

r/uchicago
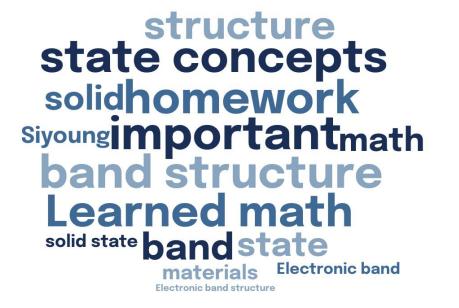by spring-qtr-throwaway • 10 mo. ago

Improved (hopefully) course evals site with no login

Hi, I created a faster, less clunky, and mobile-friendly alternative to the uchicago course evals site (no login required), and I wanted to share it in case it helps for pre-registration tomorrow: http://uofcourses.com/

The goal is to provide info on courses at a glance and allowing comparison of metrics between a section and the average for the course. Probably the most useful metrics I collected are hours worked, keywords, and sentiment score for the comments.

Let me know what you think!

structure
state concepts
solid homework
Siyoung important math
band structure
Learned math
solid state band state
materials Electronic band
Electronic band structure

SurveyMonkey

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HELP!

- In the summer of 2019, the Registrar began a process to replace the outdated and aging systems ~~and business processes~~ for the College undergraduate students.

- Stumbling block was Faculty Governance

- As part of the systems discovery, the review team was determined to find a <u>technological solution</u> to modernize the system that would <u>replicate</u> the current process and policy.

Course Evaluations Requirements

- Ability to configure the system by the business units without customizations.
- Ability for both instructors and students to opt-out of the process.
- Adhere to a defined response threshold before evaluation responses are released.
- Protect student anonymity and/or confidentiality.
- Provide a text search function for review of free responses.
- Integrate with Canvas (LMS) for notifications on students' to-do list, calendar, and assignments.
- Ensure that all evaluations are completed via messages that appear when students' login to their portal.
- Reach students anywhere, anytime, and on any device (including mobile).
- Evaluate complex courses such as team-taught and cross-listed courses.
- Evaluate courses that do not fit into traditional quarter offerings (i.e. summer, Study Abroad, September offerings).
- Ability to functionally use the system for all academic units across the University.

A Blue Decision!

In 2019, the University decided to move to Explorance Blue for evaluations in:

- The College
- Chicago Booth
- The Law School

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College Course Evaluation - Autumn 2019 for CHEM 12100 1

Before submitting your finalized feedback, review your answers to each question and make any appropriate changes.

The Course

What are the most important things that you learned
to prepare early and often

Describe how aspects of this course (lectures, discu
labs!

Please respond to the following:

This course challenged me intellectually.
Agree

I understood the purpose of this course and what I
Neutral

I understood the standards for success on assignm
Strongly Agree

Class time enhanced my ability to succeed in grade
Strongly Agree

I received feedback on my performance that helped
Agree

My work was evaluated fairly.
Strongly Agree

College Course Evaluation - Autumn 2019 for CHEM 12100 1

Messages

When this icon is visible, you can modify text.

There are no errors to display

Instructions [Show]

Item List

Preview Questionnaire

View Personalizable items ⌄   All options ⌄

You have the option to create up to four (4) customized questions using the fields below.

To create a question, click on the Edit button to the left of the question. Once you have entere
button to the right to confirm that the question should be displayed in the evaluation.

Please be sure to click Submit at the bottom of the screen before navigating away to another

⌃ Collapse Section   ⌄ Open All Questions

Edit   [1. Please click on the Edit button to enter your personalized question

Edit   [2. Please click on the Edit button and enter your personalized questio

Edit   [3. Please click on the Edit button and enter your personalized questio

Edit   [4. Please click on the Edit button and enter your personalized questio

Copy to ⌄   ⌄   Copy   Copy & Submit   Save   Subr

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Welcome Kelly Simmons
University of Chicago Evaluations

English ⌄   Sign Out

My Home

Tasks   chem ✕   All ⌄   Reset

Sort by Name ⌄

2 of 2 (filtered from 76 tasks)   Show opted out ⬤

Add customized questions for CHEM 12100 1 of College Course Evaluation - Autumn 2019
⏱ Sat, Nov 2, 2019 5:41 PM
College Autumn 2019 Open

Opt-out of evaluations for CHEM 12100 1 in the College Course Evaluation - Autumn 2019
⏱ Sat, Nov 2, 2019 12:41 PM
College Autumn 2019 Open

Reports   Search   All ⌄   Reset

Sort by Name ⌄

0 of 0 (filtered from 0 tasks)   Show child reports 0   **Current**   Archived

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Committee on Graduate Education

Faculty and and Student Report addressing the UChicago situation with PhD academic employment, the campus climate, doctoral student funding, doctoral student support services, and feedback on instruction.

Graduate Faculty Governance for Course Evaluations

- The Provost convened a faculty committee from all the graduate units along with one student and the Registrar.
- The goal was to offer a comprehensive evaluation form and tool across the graduate education landscape (12 independent academic units).
- The committee settled on ten quantitative questions and six qualitative questions.
- One quantitative question, pushed by the Student Graduate Council was about inclusion in the classroom – *Please comment on how respected, valued, and included you felt as a participant in the course.*
- The committee later added questions around effectiveness of Teaching Assistants.
- The process of Course Evaluations was rebranded as *Course Feedback*.

The Course Feedback Process

- Courses eligible for feedback are traditional classroom-based courses.

- All instructors are automatically opted into the feedback process. However, undergraduate instructors are given the opportunity to opt out before the feedback process begins. Graduate course instructors cannot opt-out.

- Instructors are given the opportunity to add up to four custom free-response questions during that time period.

- As an incentive to complete feedback, student grades are withheld until they complete feedback for all their course enrollments.

- If feedback is not completed three days after finals, then all student grades are then released.

- During the following quarter, evaluation results are publicly released.

- The data is secure and cannot be accessed without active University credentials.

Qualitative Questions

- We do **NOT** censor the students.

- The University of Chicago prides itself in the University's overarching commitment to free, robust, and uninhibited debate through the Chicago Principles.

- The Chicago Principles is a model free speech policy statement that 99 additional universities in the United States have adopted, affirming their commitment to free expression.

- However, we do review all open-ended written responses for any "ad hominem" remarks. Meaning a remark directed against a person rather than the position they are maintaining.

- Any ad hominem remarks are referred to the appropriate Dean or Vice Provost for review.

- It is their decision id to remove them before the qualitative evaluations are posted.

Confidentiality vs. Anonymity

- All feedback responses are confidential and ONLY the project administrators can access the unique identifier associated with a respondent

- Only the project administrator can access data outside of our standard reports to ensure complete anonymity.

- We recently included this statement in our Course Feedback instructions to our students:

  Your identity will be kept confidential from your instructors, but forms may be subject to administrative review for compliance with the University's evaluations review policy. Course feedback forms are intended solely for feedback on the educational aspects of the course. They are not intended to serve as a reporting mechanism for possible violations of University policies.

Additional Review Policy

If an instructor feels that comments made by a student or several students are defamatory, they will need to reach out to their area dean or chair to request the comment be removed. Any evidence should be included in the initial request, as well as the specific reason the content is defamatory.

Considerations:

- Is this a personal attack or is the comment about the class?
- Does the instructor have specific evidence to show the process was unfair or that a specific claim is erroneous?
  - If the claim includes more than one student or if an instructor requests evaluations from the entire course be pulled down, the instructor would need to provide actual evidence of collusion between students.
  - Do they have any correspondence (emails, LMS postings, social media posts, etc.) that shows the student may have intended to post untrue/defamatory information?

Using Feedback by Instructors (Center for Teaching & Learning)

- Look for patterns that point towards a consensus among the students, whether it is about readings and workload, the format of the course, or particular assignments.

- Where there is negative consensus, consider removing that aspect of the course in the future. If there is a debate and students disagree about the worth of a particular reading/assignment/exercise, then the instructor should decide whether that aspect of the course meets the learning goals outlined in the syllabus.

- Pay attention to student responses about workload and assignments to determine if the intended connection between assignments and learning goals was achieved. In other words, did the students understand how each component contributed to their learning, and if not, what alterations can you make in the future to ensure assignments match up with stated learning goals?

- Make sure to take note of the positive aspects of the course as a reminder to continue using those practices that worked in the future. Don't get caught up only in seemingly negative comments.

Pros and Cons of Feedback

Pros:

Evaluations allow students to reflect on the course overall, providing a space for them to reflect on what worked and what didn't for them. They give the instructor a sense of students' comfort level with readings and assignments, and they can often alert the instructor to overwhelmingly good or bad aspects of the course.

Cons:

Because students write these evaluations quickly and informally, the language used to evaluate tends to be overly hyperbolic. To avoid this kind of response, tell the students that you take their comments seriously and ask them to write the comments both clearly and constructively. Keeping all of this in mind will allow instructors to both gather the most useful feedback and to read evaluations in an informative manner.

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Data and Reporting

Data Integration

Challenges and Advice

- At complex and decentralized institutions, one size does not always fit all – be prepared for change management and navigate the change through awareness, training, and communications.

- Institutional sponsorship is critical to success. Ensure that your provost and deans are onboard for a successful launch.

- Ensure that you keep faculty engaged through their governance counsels.

- Students should be allowed to express their comments freely; however, free form comments must be reviewed.

- Reporting access in Blue across different projects is challenging. Integration of Blue data in your institutional data warehouse offers a plethora of opportunities for data driven decisions.

- Knowledgeable staff across projects is required for success.

Thank you!

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