

FAQs related to the motion from the course evaluation committee

Q1: Why are we proposing a move to an electronic form?

A: Administration of course evaluations using the paper form consumes a significant amount of time and energy without producing satisfactory quality of student course review.

Quality concerns – Often the paper evaluations are returned with little narrative content. Under the current format, students have little incentive or time to reflect on their experience. Ample anecdotal evidence suggests that students collaborate in the classroom on evaluations and that significant peer pressure exists when evaluations are given in a group setting with time pressures for completion.

Time cost – Faculty give up anywhere from one to two-thirds of a class period, and in some cases a full class period, to have the paper course evaluations administered by a member of the class. This breaks up the momentum of the course and has curricular implications at a critical time during the semester.

We asked the Dean of Faculty's office to prepare a list of the steps involved each semester in the preparation and recording of the current paper evaluation forms. The following steps do not include the often significant roles played by the academic secretaries, department chairs, and program directors in the preparation, administration, distribution, and review of course evaluations. Also not included is the large amount of time Administrative ITS spends importing the scanned data into the database and producing the analyses and individual course reports.

According to the dean of faculty's office, the purchasing and scanning of the paper forms costs the college approximately \$2,000 each year. This does not include the labor and time costs associated with processing the forms.

1. A 'checklist' of courses eligible for evaluation, and their corresponding enrollments, must be prepared, sorted, and sent to the appropriate department/program secretaries for confirmation that the courses on their list will in fact be evaluated. A final, electronic 'checklist' is prepared based on the confirmations.
2. Labels for each course must be generated from the checklist and manually attached to envelopes. The appropriate number of paper forms must be counted out and then stuffed into these envelopes.
3. Sharpened pencils for each course must be counted out and packaged to accompany each envelope.
4. The envelopes containing the course evaluations are then sorted and distributed to the appropriate department/program secretaries.
5. 'Header sheets,' containing summary information for each course must be manually completed (fill in the bubbles) for scanning.
6. After the last day of classes, the envelopes containing the course evaluations are sorted and compared with the 'checklist' to confirm that all have been returned. The evaluations for courses without envelopes must be tracked down. The electronic 'checklist' must be corrected for courses missing evaluations.
7. All blank evaluations must be removed from the envelopes.
8. Forms completed in pen, torn, wrinkled, or mangled in any fashion are unscannable and must be copied over in pencil. The narrative is not transferred onto the duplicate form. However, the original form is saved and returned along with the other forms after scanning.
9. Forms with partially, or incorrectly, completed bubbles (e.g., the student chose to use an "X" or a check mark) must be completely filled out where possible or copied over if necessary.
10. For each course, the forms are then removed from their envelopes, the completed course 'header sheet' is placed on top, and the forms are sorted and oriented (i.e., right-side up) in the order they appear on the 'checklist' and packed for scanning.

11. The forms are then shipped to the University of Maine for scanning.
12. Once scanned, the forms return to the Dean of Faculty's office and the electronic summary information is transmitted to ITS.
13. The summary information must be verified against the 'checklist' and any inconsistencies or scanning errors must be resolved (a common problem occurs with courses in the natural sciences division in which students return forms for lab and/or class sections without regard to the actual section for which they are registered).
14. Three copies of the statistical summaries are prepared, one to be included with the evaluations, a second to be collated with the other summaries by department/program and distributed collectively to the secretaries, and a third for filing with the Dean of Faculty's office.
15. The 'header sheets' are removed and the forms for each course are returned to their original envelopes along with their statistical summary. Any original forms that were unscannable and corrected are returned to their appropriate envelope.
16. The forms are then returned to the department/program secretaries for distribution to the chairs and ultimately to the faculty.

Persistent problems

- Forms for the same course arrive in the Dean of Faculty's office at different times or a student who missed the class at which evaluations were administered arrives seeking to complete an evaluation.
- Tracking down missing evaluations, or correcting the 'checklist' for courses that decide not to administer the forms.
- Team-taught, or multiple instructor courses have the option of evaluating all of the instructors at once or multiple evaluations, one for each instructor. (e.g., PS111: Introductory Psychology in fall 2009 is being team taught with 4 faculty. Each will be evaluated, thus students will complete 4 forms for this course.)
- Evaluation forms for labs or discussion sections are returned in the envelopes for the regular class section.
- Evaluation forms for courses with multiple sections arrive in different envelopes.
- Faculty arrive in the Dean of Faculty's office with forms left in the classroom.
- Forms go to dorm rooms overnight or over a weekend.
- Instructions on how to complete the form are not read to the class prior to distributing the forms.
- To avoid the delay associated with processing the course evaluations, a significant amount of photocopying of completed evaluations is done each semester by the Dean of Faculty's office for faculty under review for promotion and tenure, probationary periods, adjunct appointments, and merit evaluations.

Q2: What has been the experience of our peer institutions in the use of electronic course evaluations?

A: We have surveyed administrators at other colleges to determine their experiences. The response rates at Bates and Hamilton are approximately 90%. St. Olaf reports an 80% response rate. St. Olaf's experience mirrors that of our pilot study in reporting that their student narratives are longer and more thoughtful than when they administered paper evaluations.

Institution	Online Course Evaluations	Response Rate	Comments
Bates	Yes	90%	In place since Fall 2001. They don't release online grades until evaluation is completed, but students are able to go to Registrars Office to get their grades. Majority just chooses to do the online survey.
Beloit	No		
Bucknell	Limited	"high"	Four departments are using the online system. The evaluations are administered during class time with either students bringing laptops or taking the class to a lab. They have found that the comments have increased with the online system.
Dickinson	No		
Franklin & Marshall	No		
Hamilton	Yes	91%	Piloted on full professors for a year before going completely online, students write more.
Holy Cross	No		
Lafayette	No		
Macalester	No		Using the IDEA Assessment tool.
Manhattan College	No		
Mount Holyoke	No		Tried a home grown online application about five years ago, but the decrease in response rate was so great, returned to the paper process.
Oberlin	No		
Reed	No		
Sacred Heart	Yes	80%	Switched in 2007. Works well for off-campus and online students.
St Olaf	Yes	20-80%	Student responses to narrative are longer and more thoughtful.
Union	No		Currently investigating products
Wellesley College	Yes	95%	In place since 1998. Switched to electronic form to protect student anonymity and added non-numeric questions
Wheaton	No		
Williams	No		

A recent study published in the *Journal of Economic Education* found that "...Web-based evaluation methods led to lower response rates, but that lower response rates did not appear to affect mean evaluation scores." The authors of this study conclude that "...faculty evaluation scores will not be adversely affected by switching from paper to Web-based evaluations."¹

Q3: Why are we suggesting a new form?

A: The proposed changes to the course evaluation form represent work done during the past two years by the course evaluation committee in response to a directive from the faculty to evaluate the current form. Specifically, in its final report to the faculty on November 7, 2007, the ad hoc curricular planning group (AHPC) made the following recommendation:

¹ Avery, Rosemary J., et al., "Electronic Course Evaluations: Does An Online Delivery System Influence Student Evaluations?" *Journal of Economic Education*, Winter 2006, pp. 21-37.

We recommend that during the 2007-2008 academic year the Faculty Course Evaluation Committee, in conjunction with the Office of Institutional Research, evaluate whether our current all-college course evaluations incorporate the best assessment methods available and meet high standards for accuracy, validity, and reliability. A survey of course evaluations at peer institutions also appears warranted.

A more qualitative approach to evaluating student learning and teaching effectiveness, relying on structured student narratives, was suggested by the faculty who participated in the reaccreditation self-study groups to help answer questions raised in the quantitative surveys administered to our students each year.

The new form used in our pilot study last year attempts to encourage student narratives and improve on the current form in areas related to the quality of student learning and academic engagement while addressing the same questions found on the current form.

Mapping the current course evaluation form to the proposed electronic evaluation form

Paper Form	Electronic Form	Paper Form	Electronic Form
Question 1	Question A3	Question 5	Question C3
Question 2	Questions A4, B2	Question 6	Question C1
Question 3	Questions A1, A2	Question 7	Questions C4, C5
Question 4	Question C2	Question 8	Question C7

Q4: Should we be changing the way we administer the evaluations and the form at the same time?

A: Those faculty who have expressed concern that we are confounding the issues by changing to an electronic format and a new form at the same time have a legitimate point. A friendly amendment may be in order to separate the two issues, e.g., moving first to an electronic administration of the current form and then (perhaps at some future date) respond to the directive from the AHCPD to revise the current form to produce a more useful evaluation of classroom learning and effectiveness.

Based on the pilot study done during the 2008-09 academic year, there are relatively few questions that remain unanswered about the College's ability to administer the current form electronically. The resource allocation issues, preliminary findings from the pilot study, and the experience at some of our peer institutions all indicate that moving to an electronic format for administering course evaluations is feasible and would produce an acceptable outcome in terms of the response rate and higher quality of student narrative responses.

Q5: What are the implications of moving to a new form on my evaluation as a teacher for merit review and promotion?

A: If a faculty member is struggling to be successful in the classroom, the new form may reveal in greater detail these shortcomings and provide direction earlier that might prove useful in addressing them. If a faculty member is succeeding in their teaching, the new form should highlight and draw attention to those successes.