

Strategies for Increasing Response Rates for Online End-of-Course Evaluations

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Student Evaluations of Teaching (SETs) are used by nearly all public and private universities as one means to evaluate teaching effectiveness. A majority of these universities have transitioned from the traditional paper-based evaluations to online evaluations, resulting in a decline in overall response rates. This has led to scepticism about the validity and reliability of the SETs. In this study, a large, US public university transitioned to online SETs in 2007 and suffered a decline in overall response rates from 73% for the paper-based evaluations in 2006 to a low of 43%. The aim of this study was to determine successful strategies used by instructors to improve their own SET response rates. A survey was conducted of faculty members who had high response rates, and the data were analyzed to determine which strategies were being employed. The study found that when instructors show students they care about evaluations, response rates tend to be higher. The results from the study have been turned into a FAQ on myths and suggestions that has been distributed to the faculty at the university to provide guidelines for increasing response rates on SETs.

Universities are facing increasing pressure to assess educational outcomes. In this climate, one concrete way to assess teaching effectiveness is through end of course evaluations. Although several studies have shown student evaluations to be reliable and somewhat valid, end of course evaluations are not without their problems (Aleamoni, 1999; Centra, 2003; Hobson & Talbot, 2001). Individual faculty members are often concerned with the validity, reliability, and usefulness of the SETs in assessing their individual teaching effectiveness. Owing to small sample sizes, the data obtained from these evaluations can lack statistical significance, and results can be biased. Especially when response rates are low, instructors are concerned that only dissatisfied or less successful students respond to SETs. Research refutes this common myth, as more successful and engaged students tend to complete online evaluations (Adams & Umbach, 2012). Obtaining a high response rate can help alleviate some of these concerns. Since the majority of institutions use SETs to inform decisions about faculty salaries as well as reappointment, promotion, and tenure, ensuring statistically significant data through high response rates is a goal shared by administrators and faculty alike (Education Advisory Board, 2009; Haskell, 1997). For example, one study showed that instructors with class sizes under 10 should have at least a 75% response rate under liberal (10% sampling error) conditions to create reliable feedback and 100% under stringent (3% sampling error) conditions (Nulty, 2008), while others refute this notion, noting that response rates under 100% are not satisfactory as they may not be generalizable to the entire class, especially for small class sizes (Kulik, 2009). Despite the importance of obtaining a high SET response rate, research on best practices in increasing evaluation response rates is relatively scarce (Misra,

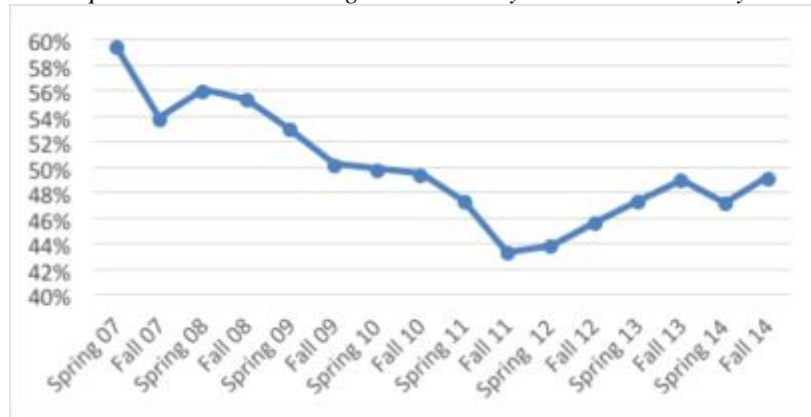
Stokols, & Marino, 2013), and there have been calls by researchers for more study on strategies for increasing response rates (Adams & Umbach, 2012; Goodman, Anson, & Belcheir, 2015).

According to the University Planning and Analysis (UPA) and the Evaluation of Teaching Committee (EOTC) at the university under study, response rates for end-of-course evaluations have been gradually declining since the instrument began being administered online. The EOTC was considering recommending changes to the current “no-incentives” policy by allowing incentives for students who complete SETs as a potential way to boost response rates. The EOTC knew different strategies were being used by instructors to help increase response rates, but it was not known which strategies were being employed, which strategies worked, and which strategies aligned with current university policy. Misra et al. (2013) found, “Developing effective strategies for increasing response rates can help reduce nonresponse biases in survey data and improve the quality of research findings” (89). The purpose of this study was to determine which strategies were being used by faculty members to effectively increase SET response rates.

Review of the Literature

SETs are often the primary assessment of teaching performance in institutions of higher education in the U.S. (Pounder, 2007), but as with all types of evaluation, they are inherently political (Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2009). Student evaluation of teaching in higher education was initially intended to help instructors improve their teaching and/or student learning. It was only later that the results were commonly used for promotion and tenure purposes (Lindahl & Unger, 2010). Marzano (2012) reported that teachers perceived evaluation in one of two ways: for measurement and for development.

Figure 1.
Overall response rates since moving to an online system at the university under study.



Most SETs used in higher education today are for the purposes of measurement and not for development and are typically summative since they are performed at the end of the semester.

Instructors have long argued the problems with SETs, mainly because of their use for promotion and tenure purposes. Critiques abound on the usefulness, validity, and reliability of these traditionally end-of-term instructor evaluations. Lindahl and Unger (2010) claimed that the situation itself leads to atypical behavior: “The structure of the collection process itself, involving a group situation, heightened emotional arousal, and anonymity, encourages deindividuation and may allow the mechanisms of moral disengagement to operate, permitting behavior that students would never engage in face-to-face” (73).

There are additional reasons why end-of-course evaluations at research-intensive universities rarely result in instructional improvement. SETs habitually get distilled down to a single quantitative number whether high or low; they often tell one nothing about how to improve teaching, and often ratings are based on a consumerism model that is focused on entertainment level or difficulty of the course (Wright, 2000). Courses vary widely by discipline, class size, student demographics, and outcomes, but end-of-course evaluations are usually standardized and may not be suitable across institutions (Richardson, 2005). McCullough and Radson (2011) suggested that SETs are often not calculated correctly because they are based on ordinal data but analyzed as interval data. Add to this the issue that students are not trained to rate any one question in the same way. This leads to unreliable and likely invalid results. When the stakes are high, the pressure to make false or misleading statements increases. Studies have shown that students lie on faculty evaluations, especially in cases where the student

has an axe to grind (Clayson, 2008). However, some studies show that the dissatisfied or poorer students are less likely to fill out the SETs (Adams & Umbach, 2012; Avery, Bryant, Mathios, Kang, & Bell, 2006; Fidelman, 2007; Sax, Gilmartin, & Bryant, 2003). Adams and Umbach (2012) found students who have spent time working to get a good grade are more likely to fill out SETs and surmised that students with higher GPAs and course grades have “the intellectual ability to evaluate the course at a meaningful level” (586).

Online SETs and Response Rates

To complicate matters more, most SETs are now administered online. Potential advantages of performing SETs online include standardization across the institution, no loss of class time to perform SETs, reductions in cost due to the absence of printing, distributing, and collecting results (Bothell & Henderson, 2003), getting feedback to instructors more efficiently, and reduction of errors for partially or improperly filled out forms. Online SETs can be argued to have more flexibility in the time and location for completion (Cummings, Ballantyne, & Fowler, 2001), which allows students to write more thoughtful comments online than on paper (Adams & Umbach, 2012; Ballantyne, 2003; Cummings et al., 2001; Hativa, 2013; Kasiar, Schroeder, & Holstad, 2002; Stowell, Addison, & Smith, 2012). In addition to the cost savings, Dommeyer, Baum, Hanna, & Chapman (2004) pointed out that online evaluations may help minimize the faculty influence over in-class SETs (e.g., activities that happen prior to evaluation, presence of the faculty, and peer influence) as well as allow more students to complete them (i.e., if they were absent on the day of the in-class evaluation.) Online administration provides for more anonymity, eliminating potential handwriting recognition of paper-based SETs (Avery et al., 2006).

Multiple studies reported that while response rates for online SETs initially average near 60%, they soon drop off to the 30 to 40 percentile range (Avery et al. 2006; Nulty, 2008; Sax et al., 2003). As seen in Figure 1, this phenomenon occurred at the university under study when it moved to online evaluations in the spring of 2007, reaching a low of 43% in the fall 2011 and spring 2012 semesters. While these levels of response rate may hold some statistical significance in large courses, smaller classes are more problematic as 40% of a class of 20 is only eight responses (see Table 1 for recommended levels for validity.) SETs with low response rates may not be representative of the whole and add to the argument against making instructional changes or personnel decisions based upon such feedback, although one study found that scoring methods were similar for both forms of administration (Fike, Doyle, & Connolly, 2010).

Low response rates for online SETs are partially due to a lack of motivation for filling them out since students are no longer in class. Students do not necessarily benefit from SETs (Bullock, 2003) as they are done at the end of the term, and thus can provide only a snapshot of the instructional process at a point when the current students will not experience instructional improvements. Students perceive that evaluations have no effect on an instructor's teaching effectiveness or performance review. Often they are left with the notion that no one but the individual instructors will see them or that the SET results are not taken seriously (Spencer & Schmelkin, 2002). These perceptions have some validity as research has shown that faculty do not view student evaluations as valuable for improving instruction and report not making changes based SETs (Beran & Rokosh, 2009; Gaillard,

Mitchell, & Kavota, 2006). SETs are fraught with problems, and although only a sampling of the criticisms is presented here, the literature is clear that the low and declining response rates for online SETs present fundamental problems as well as misperceptions (Avery et al., 2006, Dommeyer et al., 2004; Norris & Conn, 2005; Nowell, Gale, & Handley, 2010; Stowell et al., 2012).

Response/Non-response Rates

Low response rates for online SETs are a recognized problem in higher education and have been studied from a variety of perspectives. This problem stems from the concern that low response rates have the potential to create bias if the students filling out the evaluations are not representative of the entire class population. Adams and Umbach (2012) found that that non-response bias may actually double-bias SET results as "not only are students with higher grades typically awarding higher ratings, but they are also the ones who are more likely to respond" (586). They also found that engaged students were more likely to respond to courses in their major, but the more SET requests sent to a student, the more unlikely the student is to respond (i.e., survey fatigue). It is no surprise that in an earlier study some instructors were found to prefer the traditional paper method because of their beliefs that they can achieve higher response rates and a more accurate representation of the population (Dommeyer et al., 2004). But, as mentioned earlier, in-class evaluations are not without their own issues (e.g., potential instructor and/or peer influence, students filling out multiple evaluations, concern of student anonymity, etc.)

Table 1
Suggested Minimum Response Rates Required for Validity of Data (Adapted from Nulty, 2008)

Class Size	Recommended Rates under	Recommended Rates under Stringent
	Liberal Conditions*	Conditions**
10	75%	100%
30	48%	96%
50	35%	93%
70	28%	91%
100	21%	87%
200	12%	77%
300	8%	70%
500	5%	58%

*10% sampling error; 80% confidence level; **3% sampling error; 95% confidence level

Incentives and Increasing Response Rates

Misra, Stokols, and Marino (2011) found that social norm-based appeals for issues such as social cooperation and social responsibility were effective in increasing web-based response rates. A number of researchers have noted that reminding students about the evaluations as well as letting the students know the importance of SETs has helped response rates rise (Dommeyer et al., 2004; Goodman et al., 2015; Johnson 2002; Laubsch 2006; Nulty, 2008; University of British Columbia, 2010). Additionally, researchers have shown that instructors who performed a formative mid-semester evaluation as part of their class gained between 9% and 16% in response rates (Crews & Curtis, 2011; Lewis, 2001b; McGowen & Osgathorpe, 2011; Tucker, Jones, & Straker, 2008). Students respond positively when they feel their comments will make a difference in improving a class. Students then become more engaged in the course as well as better evaluators (Lewis, 2001b). They are more motivated if they feel their voices will be heard and it can begin with simply stating how SETs results are used in the course syllabus (Chen & Hoshower, 2003; Tucker et al., 2008).

Several studies have examined aspects of the use of incentives to increase response rates in online surveys (Crews & Curtis, 2011; Dommeyer et al., 2004; Goodman et al., 2015; McGourty, Scoles, & Thorpe, 2002a, b). Cook, Heath, and Thompson (2000) found that personalized correspondence is linked to higher response rates in electronic surveys. Students are also more likely to reply to surveys they find more relevant. One study found that the best determinant of response rate was issue salience. In other words, the more salient the issue to the respondent, the more likely he or she is to respond (Sheehan & McMillan, 1999). Interestingly, Cook and colleagues (2000) found that the use of incentives was negatively associated with response rates and resulted in more homogeneous responses. Several researchers have discussed the importance of giving positive incentives such as extra credit or bonus points in order to achieve high response rates (Anderson, Cain, & Bird, 2005; Goodman et al., 2015) or making SET completion an assignment for the class (Ravenescroft & Enyeart, 2009). Another study found that entering students into a random drawing for a cash prize upon completing their evaluations worked as an incentive option but was not highly effective (Ballantyne, 2003). Some universities withhold early access to grades unless the evaluations are filled out (Anderson et al., 2005). Clearly, the research on which incentives work to increase response rates in web-based evaluations is mixed (Misra et al., 2011).

Methodology

Because of poor response rates for SETs (see Figure 1), the EOTC at the university under study wanted to know what could be done to improve them. This study was designed to determine the following:

What strategies are instructors using to successfully improve response rates in SETs?

How do these strategies compare to the university policy?

What strategies should be recommended for use throughout the university?

The university under study is a large (over 33,000 students) research intensive institution located in the United States. SET process and procedure is governed by policy and administered by a centralized division reporting to the university's Provost. Prior to spring of 2007, when they began to be administered online, SETs were administered in a face-to-face format. Since that time, response rates have steadily declined.

The University's SET is administered online through a proprietary system and includes 12 Likert scale questions and three open-ended questions to allow for comments. Deans, department heads, and instructors may add a limited number of their own questions to this set of 15 common-core questions. The system automatically sends out generic email reminders several times to those students who have not filled out their evaluations. Instructors cannot see their SET results until after the last official day to post final grades but can monitor the response rates online and in real time (NCSU, 2013, para. 1).

The policies relating to strategies and/or incentives for completion of SETs are clear and cover such topics as the instrument, the scope, and the procedures. Specifically, students are not required to fill out the evaluation (NCSU, n.d., para. 31) and incentives to increase response rate are forbidden (para. 33).

Population and Data Collection

The population under study consisted of 205 instructors (out of approximately 950 total faculty members who taught at least one course in the previous semester) that received an SET response rate of 70% or higher. Because the objective of the study was to find successful strategies for increasing response rate, the decision was to limit participants to only those who taught at least one course in the semester that had a 70% or higher response rate. Seventy percent was selected in order to find successful strategies, and 70% covered most requirements for survey validity for class sizes over ten in liberal conditions (see Table 1). The

Table 2
List of Survey Strategies to Increase Response Rates

Strategy
Sent announcements through Moodle asking students to complete evaluations. If so, how many announcements do you generally send?
Sent personal e-mails to students asking them to complete evaluations. If so, how many emails do you generally send?
Talked about the importance of ClassEval in my class.
Included statements on the syllabus about ClassEval and its importance in my class.
Worked to create a climate in my class that reflects mutual respect between instructor and students.
Held my course in (or took my class to) a computer lab and allowed time for students to complete the evaluation while a moderator was there.
Encouraged students to bring laptops/tablets/smartphones to class and allowed time for students to complete the evaluation while a moderator was there.
Told my students how I use student evaluation feedback to modify my course.
Offered a mid-semester evaluation where students could give feedback and then used that feedback to modify my course.
Forwarded an e-mail from a Department Head or Dean about the importance of course evaluations to my College or Department.
Offered to bring snacks to class or final if a particular response rate was achieved.
Added bonus points to students' test or assignments if certain course response rates were achieved.
Dropped a low assignment grade for all students if certain response rates were achieved.
Increased all students' grades if certain course response rates were achieved.
Added a bonus/extra credit question or questions to the final if a certain course response rate was achieved.
No actions were taken to increase ClassEval response rates in these courses.

survey was anonymous, was open for three weeks, and used two follow-up reminders. Out of the population of 205, 120 participants completed the survey resulting in a response rate of 59%.

Instrumentation

A Web-based survey instrument was developed that listed 15 different strategies (see Table 2) that were either found in the literature as having been associated with higher response rates for SETs or that members of the EOTC heard were being used. The list was reviewed for face validity by members of the committee. It should be noted that the SET instrument used at this institution is called ClassEval. In addition, there were two text boxes in which respondents could add alternative methods that were not represented in the list. The survey began with qualifying questions (see Table 3) that if answered in a particular matter would disqualify a participant. This was done to assure that

participants actually did teach at least one course in the term that received a 70% or higher response rate. Because of the university policy against incentives, the study did not collect any identifying characteristics which could be linked back to a particular respondent, class, and/or set of evaluations.

The final part of the survey listed the 15 potential strategies along with two spaces for respondents to add strategies not represented as seen in Table 2. The prompt was stated: "In those courses that received a response rate of 70% or higher, select all of the ways you or someone else took action to increase response rates."

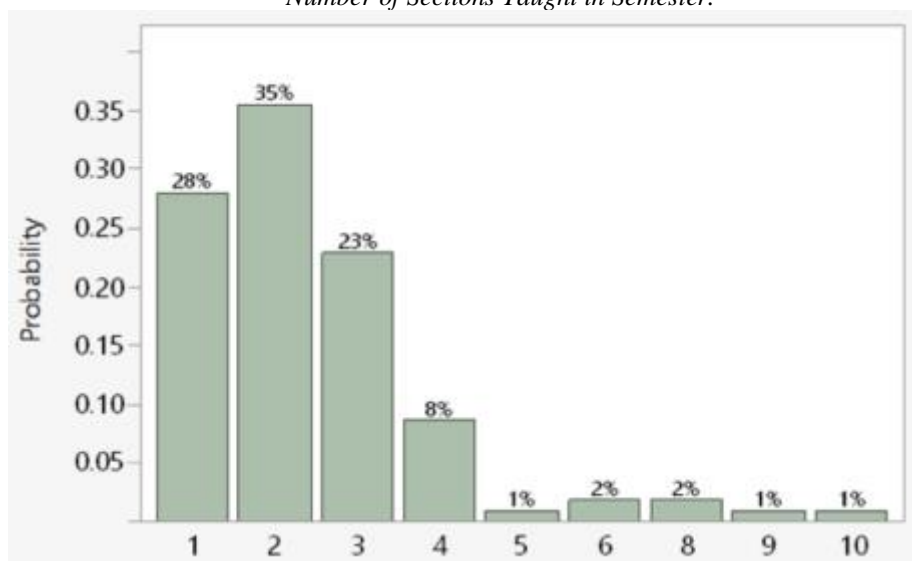
Findings

The instrument included three demographic questions. The first question asked respondents to report the number of course sections they taught in the prior semester (see Figure 2). Those that reported they taught five or more sections were likely considering

Table 3
Qualifying Questions

Qualifying Question	How Participant was Disqualified
How many course sections did you teach in Fall 2012?	Participant disqualified if response was zero
Of these courses, how many of them received an end of course evaluation response rate of 70% or higher (an estimate is fine)?	Participant disqualified if response was zero

Figure 2.
Number of Sections Taught in Semester.



labs, independent studies, and other course structures that differ from the standard three credit hour course. The second question asked respondents to specify the number of sections received an SET response rate of 70% or greater as seen in Figure 3.

The third question asked respondents to estimate the number of students in the class for those with an SET response rate of 70% or greater. Here the majority of the classes had from 11 to 25 students enrolled (see Figure 4).

Strategies

Respondents were asked to select strategies used to increase SET response rate in their courses that had a 70% or greater response rates in the previous semester. They could select from the list of 15 options in Table 2, or they could add additional strategies. They were allowed to select more than one option. The list of strategies included those that are considered incentives against the current policy as well as non-incentive strategies. Figure 5 shows the results of comparing instructors based on their use of incentives. As seen, the number of faculty using no form

of incentive strategies is statistically higher than those that used any form of incentive.

Response frequencies for each strategy are listed in Table 4. The most used strategies seen in Table 4 are not ones associated with giving away bonus points or altering assignments, but with the way in which the instructors approached students about the SET process. The most often used strategy was merely talking about the importance of SETs in their classes, followed closely by creating an environment of mutual respect in the classroom. The assumption here is that mutual respect creates an environment where students want to fill out evaluations. The third most commonly used strategy (and the only other strategy used by more than half of the respondents) was instructors who told their students how they used evaluation results to modify their courses. The next three most highly rated strategies were used by 27% to 35% of the respondents and were all related to the ways in which information about the SET was communicated.

During analysis, incentives were also categorized by type of incentive, a category that classified the strategy as either "No Incentive," a "Red Incentive," or

Figure 3
Number of Sections with SET Response Rate of 70% or Higher.

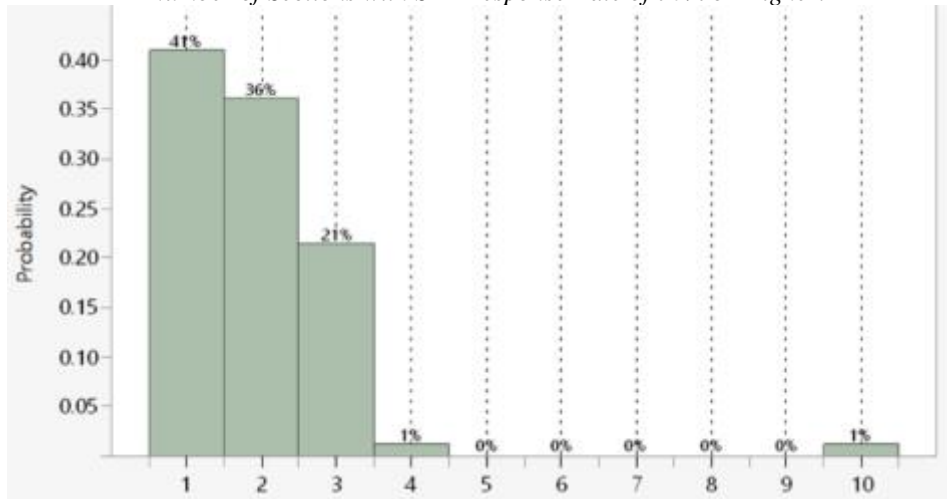


Figure 4
 Number of Students in Sections with SET Response Rates 70% or Higher.

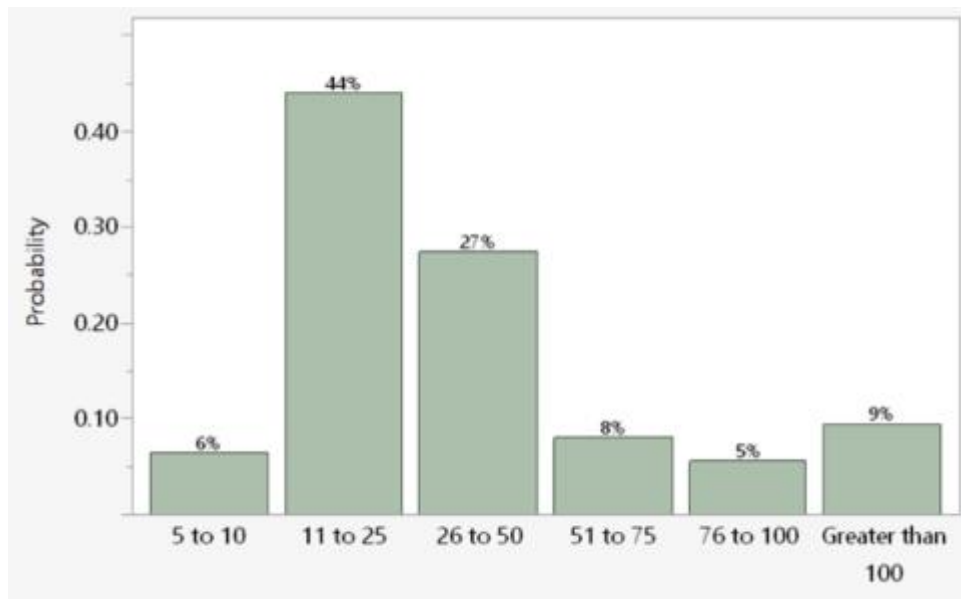


Figure 5
Proportion Testing of Faculty Using any Form of Incentive (95% confidence error bars)

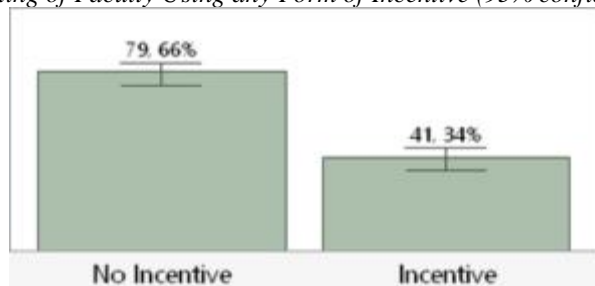


Table 4
Response Frequencies for Strategies to Increase Response Rates

Strategy	N	%	Type of Incentive	
1	Talked about the importance of ClassEval in my class.	97	87%	No Incentive
2	Worked to create a climate in my class that reflects mutual respect between instructor and students.	93	83%	No Incentive
3	Told my students how I use student evaluation feedback to modify my course.	87	78%	No Incentive
4	Sent announcements through Moodle asking students to complete evaluations. If so, how many announcements do you generally send?	39	35%	No Incentive
5	Sent personal e-mails to students asking them to complete evaluations. If so, how many emails do you generally send?	36	32%	No Incentive
6	Included statements on the syllabus about ClassEval and its importance in my class.	30	27%	No Incentive
7	Encouraged students to bring laptops/tablets/ smartphones to class and allowed time for students to complete the evaluation while a moderator was there	26	23%	No Incentive
8	Offered a mid-semester evaluation where students could give feedback and then used that feedback to modify my course.	25	22%	No Incentive
9	Added bonus points to students' test or assignments if certain course response rates were achieved.	15	13%	Red Incentive
10	Held my course in (or took my class to) a computer lab and allowed time for students to complete the evaluation while moderator was there.	11	10%	No Incentive
11	Increased all students' grades if certain course response rates were achieved.	8	7%	Red Incentive
12	Added a bonus/extra credit question or questions to the final if a certain course response rate was achieved.	8	7%	Grey Incentive
13	Dropped a low assignment grade for all students if certain response rates were achieved.	4	4%	Red Incentive
14	Forwarded an e-mail from a Department Head or Dean about the importance of course evaluations to my College or Department.	2	2%	No Incentive
15	Offered to bring snacks to class or final if a particular response rate was achieved.	2	2%	Grey Incentive
16	No actions were taken to increase ClassEval response rates in these courses.	0	0%	No Incentive

*Respondents could choose more than one strategy.

a “Grey Incentive.” These categories were defined by the EOTC whereas a red incentive was classified as being totally against policy while grey incentive strategies were against the policy, but not as egregious because students were considered to be affected in the same manner. Both types of strategies were considered incentives currently prohibited by university policy. This categorization is displayed in Table 4.

The issue of grade influence only begins to show at the ninth most often used strategy where instructors added bonus points to tests or assignments if a certain response rate was achieved (13%), and strategies ranked at 11, 12 and 13 also refer to strategies that could will likely influence grades.

The total number of non-incentive strategies employed by faculty who used at least one incentive

versus those faculty who did not was statistically the same, as seen in Figure 6. Also, most instructors who received high response rates employed an average 4.3 different strategies. Even when a faculty member used a prohibited incentive to increase their response rates, he or she still employed an average of 4.5 non-prohibited strategies. Because the group distributions of “No Incentive” and “Incentive” were not normally distributed, a Wilcoxon/Kruska-Wallis Test using JMP™ software was employed to test the null hypothesis that the samples come from the same distribution. Since the p-value is 0.61, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected and it can be concluded that the number of non-incentive strategies employed by faculty who use at least one incentive is the same as faculty who do not employ incentives.

In Figure 5 it was shown that statistically, more instructors are employing incentives in alignment with university policy as compared to those that are using strategies prohibited by policy. However, class size seems to impact those decisions. Figure 7 shows the contingency analysis when doing the same comparison with regard to class size: small (5 to 25), medium (26 to 75), and large (greater than 75). The class sizes from Figure 4 had to be

merged to ensure at least five items of each class size occurred for each category (i.e., no incentive and incentive) to make the analysis valid. The null hypothesis (the proportion of faculty employing incentives for all three class sizes is the same) is rejected because the p -value for the Chi square test that is less than 0.0001. The larger the class size, the more likely a faculty member was to use a prohibited incentive to help increase response rates.

Figure 6
Comparing the Number Non-Incentive Strategies Employed by Each Respondent.

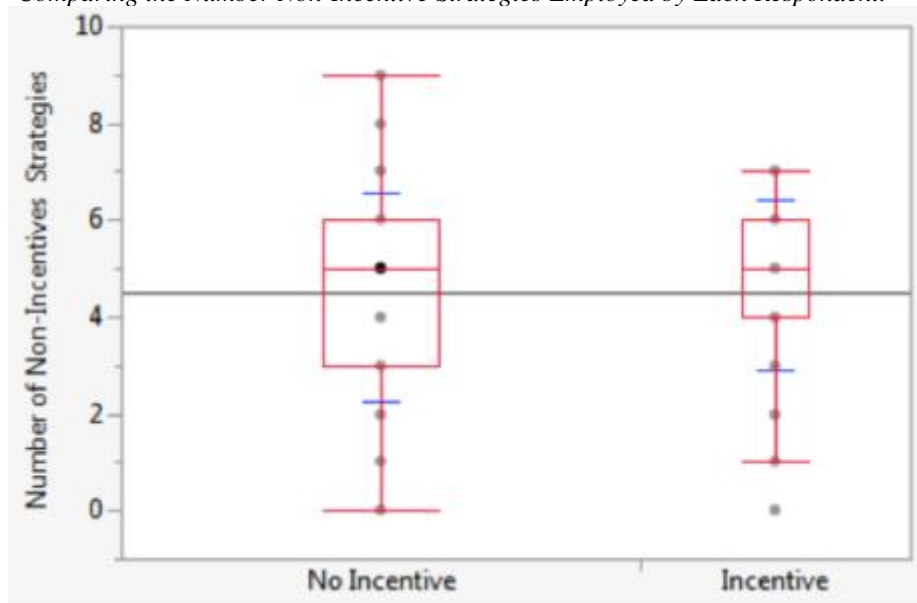
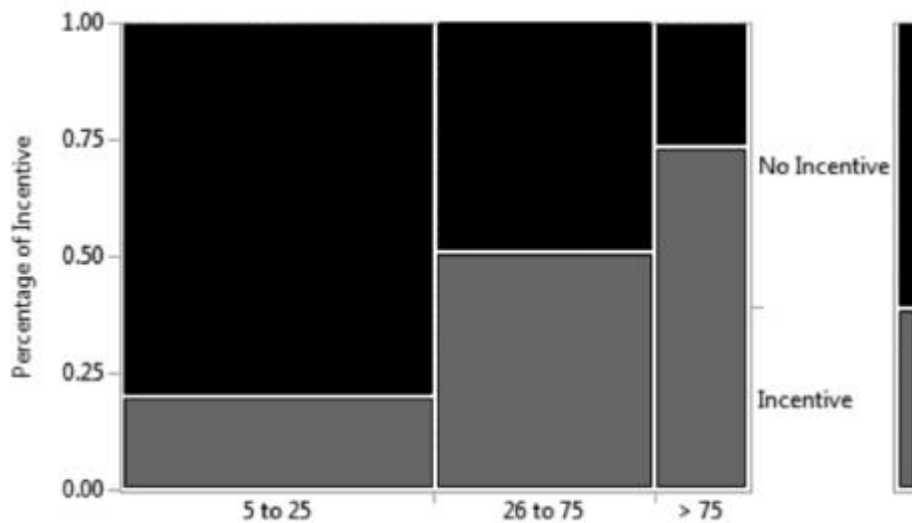


Figure 7
Comparing the Use of Incentives Based on Class Size.



Additional Strategies

Thirty respondents submitted strategies they felt were not represented in Table 4, but after closer inspection, only 10 were considered additional strategies (Table 5). The first strategy was related to evoking student responsibility where instructors would not only talk about the SET in class, but would also imply the student had a social responsibility in helping to create better learning environments and providing input affecting the career of the instructor. Some instructors told students that evaluation was a privilege that was fought for decades ago and others described it as a responsibility. This can clearly be seen in one instructor's comment "I emphasize that I worked hard to deliver their course and if they respect that fact, I am entitled to feedback- positive or negative."

Another instructor described her strategy, "I explain that low response rates mean that the evals, whether positive or negative, are somewhat suspect." The next most often mentioned additional strategy was giving students time off: "I let students leave early or not have class if a certain response rate was achieved," explained an instructor. Note that all mention of time off related to the last day of class, whether it was part of the day or the entire day.

Discussion

This study sought to determine the types of strategies that are successful in increasing response rates to SETs. Although the findings are limited due to the self-reporting nature of the study, there are still valuable findings and implications for policy, instructors, and administrators. While instructors can employ a myriad of methods, three strategies were used by more than 75% of the respondents in this study. These strategies were:

1. Talked about the importance of class evaluations in my class;
2. Worked to create a climate in my class that reflects mutual respect between instructor and students; and
3. Told my students how I use student evaluation feedback to modify my course.

These results clearly show that at this institution, high SET response rates are more associated with course climate and instructor-student communication than with incentives given to students. In fact, the top eight strategies did not include incentives and it was only at 13% when actual incentives appear in the results (adding points to tests or assignments.) This contradicts the findings of Goodman and colleagues

(2015), who determined that grade incentives were the most effective way of increasing response rates.

Policy and Standards

When reviewing the usage of strategies that are acceptable to the institution and incentives that are not, the results have clear policy implications. The policy at the university under study states, "There is no penalty to students who decline to submit evaluations," and, "No form of incentive should be provided to increase response rate." While the great majority of instructors achieving a 70% or higher response rate used strategies that would not be considered incentives, there were instructors using incentives that are opposed to the institutional policy. Table 6 displays the strategies instructors used that may be considered incentive-based.

Implications for Instructors

The clearest implication from this study for instructors is to talk about student evaluations of teaching with their students. This not only includes explaining their purposes, but also focusing on how the instructor uses the information and who benefits from the information that is submitted via an SET (Lewis, 2001a). Results of this study support the case for creating a climate of mutual respect, one where student opinions are respected and addressed and instructor needs are taken into consideration. This can be accomplished through class discussion and by modeling behaviors such as using formative evaluations of teaching and pointing out to students the changes that result from analysis of the data. The key information here is that incentives are not only against policy, likely to bias data, and have questionable ethical implications, but they also do not work as well as simply reinforcing the importance of participating in the process making students feel their voices make a difference.

Implications for Policy and Administrators

The results of this study in no way support the use of incentives to raise SET responses rates. Policy makers should focus on rules and processes that enable faculty members to conduct productive evaluation discussions in all classes. Steps should be taken to reduce the conflict between the use of SET results for course improvement and the use for promotion and tenure purposes. When an institution places high importance on SET data for promotion and tenure, it may also increase the likelihood of an instructor to use incentives to increase response rates. Should SETs be primarily used to improve instruction, response rates and validity become less of a high-stakes issue and the

Table 5
Additional Strategies via Open-ended Responses

Strategy	N	%
1 Evoked Student Responsibility or Guilt	4	4%
2 Make Learning about Statistical Significance a Part of Class Content	4	4%
3 Gave Students Time Off	3	3%
4 Gave Bonus attached to Honesty Attestation	2	2%
5 Commanded Students to Complete Evaluation	1	1%
6 Appealed from the Student Perspective	1	1%
7 Withheld Final Grades	1	1%
8 Created Competition Among Sections	1	1%
9 Altered Final Exam	1	1%
10 Withheld Study Aids	1	1%

Table 6
Strategies that May Be Construed as Incentives

Strategy	N	%
1 Increased all students' grades if certain course response rates were achieved.	15	13%
2 Added a bonus/extra credit question or questions to the final if a certain course response rate was achieved.	11	10%
3 Dropped a low assignment grade for all students if certain response rates were achieved.	8	7%
4 Gave Bonus attached to Honesty Attestation	2	2%
5 Offered to bring snacks to class or final if a particular response rate was achieved.	2	2%
6 Withheld Final Grades	1	1%
7 Altered Final Exam	1	1%
8 Withheld Study Aids	1	1%

pressure to increase response rate somewhat diminishes. The goal for policy makers should be to reduce the impetus for participating in activities that would bias results or be considered unethical. As echoed by the American Evaluation Association (AEA) evaluation standards (AEA, 2015), SET policy should project and guard against unintended consequences, such as extreme urgency in inflating SET response rates, as well as avoid conflicts of interest between the formative and summative uses of the SET. In order for SETs to be valid and reliable, policy makers should decide their primary purpose (i.e., course improvement or faculty promotion and tenure).

Conclusion

This study examined practices among instructors who had high SET response rates in order to determine best practices in increasing end of course evaluation response rates. Findings indicated that the most common strategies to successfully increase SET response rates were:

- a. Discussing the importance of evaluation feedback and how it will be used to inform future courses
- b. Working to create a classroom culture that reflects mutual respect between instructor and students.

Showing students “that their input is important in the collaborative venture of teaching and learning” is mutually beneficial to instructor and student (Keutzer, 1993, p. 240). Use of incentives was not employed as widely as the investigators expected. Based on the results, an FAQ document was created to assist faculty in increasing response rates without the use of incentives (NCSU, 2014). The FAQ document was distributed through multiple channels, and there is some anecdotal evidence that it is making a difference as the response rates have risen back to the upper 40% range over the past few semesters.

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