Strategies to increase Online Response rates

Response rates from surveys are important to get a fair picture of what is happening in the classroom. The key to getting good response rate is academic engagement with students and recognising that the information that is sought plays an important part in developing the teaching and learning that takes place in the unit.

To achieve the best possible response rates, a number of strategies can be applied both at the Faculty/School/Department level as well by the individual teacher/tutor.

Faculty/School/Department Level

Staff Engagement

1. It is important to have a discussion of the importance of the survey at Faculty/School and Department meetings. There needs to be a public acknowledgement why the faculty/school/departments consider this survey to be important and how it helps not only the students but the staff in achieving the best outcomes.

2. Personalised emails sent to teaching and course co-coordinators from the Associate Dean (Teaching), emphasising the need to promote the value of such evaluations with students.

3. Notices placed in the faculty internal electronic newsletter/intranet site urging staff to inform students of the opportunity to provide feedback through the online evaluations system.

4. Remind staff to inform students of the changes to the teaching and units that have resulted from previous student feedback (e.g. changes to assessment due date, schedules to spread the student work load, reductions in the amount of assessed work required for some units, etc).

5. Widen the message to encourage students, eg Just prior to and during the survey period displaying ‘Have Your Say’ posters around the faculty (e.g. in elevators, in key classrooms and in computer laboratories).

6. Send email reminders from the Associate Dean (Teaching) to students during the evaluation period.

   (Bennett & Nair, 2010)

Individual teacher/tutor Level

1. Personalised contact
   a. Email

   1. When you send an email to students, personalising your email will give your students the perception that the correspondence is directed at them and not a general broadcast email.

   2. The current SPOT process utilises weekly reminders to non-respondents. This elicits responses but not necessary all students respond to a central email. Research has shown personal emails from the teaching staff elicits higher response rates as the tendency for students to read the teacher’s email is greater (Bennett & Nair, 2010).
b. Face-to-Face contact

It is important that you explain to your students the importance of the survey you are carrying out. If you have the chance to talk directly with students in lectures or tutorials, advise them of what you have done with previous feedback (also include this in the unit outline), and encourage them to complete the survey for the current semester.

2. Valuing Student Feedback

Increasing the transparency of your survey results will encourage participants to complete the survey. It is important to give some examples to students on how you utilised your feedback to change the teaching approaches in your class. Participants are very interested to know what actions took place as a result of the feedback as this send a message that their voice is considered important. Direct students to where they can find out more about what changes have been done as a result of their feedback (eg unit outline, LMS site for the unit, your webpage, etc)

3. Reinforce Confidentiality and Anonymity

Students are often concerned about the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. Ensure them that you are not able to track who responded as the surveys are carried out by the central teaching unit. The electronic survey has an added benefit of the written comments being typed so there are not matters related to handwriting being recognised. No one in faculties has access to the database.

4. Leave time for Participants to complete

If you are having students present in a computer laboratory, you can allow them some time to complete the online survey. Other ways to achieve this in-class effect is to also hold classes where students would have to bring in laptops, tablets or smart phones and allow time for the completion of these surveys. To achieve useful feedback it is important to explain why such feedback is needed to participants prior to allowing them to complete them on the electronic devices.

5. Teacher Reminders and Timing

a. A number of surveys could be running at the same time that you intend to get responses from your students. It is good practice to advise students in class of the upcoming survey as well as send them an email prior to the start of the survey period explaining the need for the survey and the importance it is for you and the university (Nair, Adams & Mertova, 2008). Research also shows that many students in general are not aware of the survey and such notification provides an ‘incentive’ for students to complete the survey (Coates, 2006).

b. Emails from the University go out each Friday till the close of the survey period. The first 2 days is where the majority of students who receive the email will respond to the survey. If you intend to send an email inviting your students to complete the survey, send them at the beginning of the week, (though not on Mondays as research shows that this to be the least optimum time for participants to respond to surveys). Do not overdo you personalised email reminders as there are weekly reminders sent by the central system to non-respondents. It is suggested that in a 4 week survey period you
could send up to 2 emails, one in the 2nd week (after you have reviewed your initial 1st week response rate) and one a week before the survey period closes.

References:


