WHY SHOULD I FILL THIS OUT?

STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING RESPONSE RATES IN END-OF-COURSE EVALUATIONS

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STANDARD EVALUATIONS OF TEACHING (SETS)

Used by nearly all institutions of higher education

Questions and interpretation are often suspect
Students asked to fill out 10 or more in a semester
Some questions are less applicable to certain courses

Serve dual purposes (course improvement and RPT)
High stakes for instructors (incentive for positive results)

Online delivery shows response rates steadily decreasing
Low response rates lead to invalid results

RESPONSE RATES AND SETS

- **Online SETs usually start at about 60% and soon drop off to 30-40%**

- **30% response rate in a class of 20 is only 7 students**

- **Little motivation for students to fill them out**

- **The more the student cares about the issue, the most like he or she is to fill it**
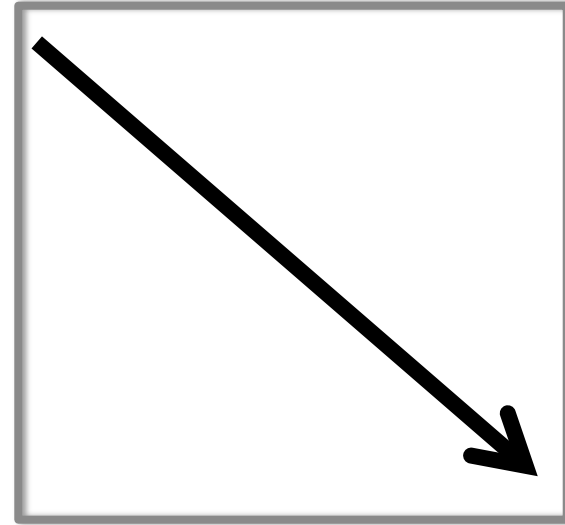
Bottom line: non-response and low response rates are problems for end-of-course evaluations in higher education

INCENTIVES TO INCREASE RESPONSE RATES

- Pressure to increase response rates validity in the RPT

- Some incentives have ethical issues

- Mixed evidence on the efficacy of incentives to increase response rates

What are best ways to increase response rates in a way that does not bias the results?

THE STUDY

Question: What strategies are used by instructors who receive high response rates on their end-of-course evaluations?

Instructors with 70% & above response rate in one or more courses

Method: Survey listing 14 strategies with opportunity to add others

Prompt: *In those courses that received a response rate of 70% or higher, select all the ways in which you or someone else took action to increase response rate.*

SURVEY INCENTIVES LIST

Announcements asking students to complete evaluations

Talked about the importance of evaluation

Syllabus statements about the evaluation and its importance

Created a reflecting mutual respect between instructor and students

Took my class to a computer lab and allowed time completing the evaluation

Allowed time for students to complete the evaluation in class

Told my students how I use student evaluation feedback to modify course

Held mid-semester evaluation and feedback to modify my course

Forwarded e-mail from a Dean about the importance of course evaluations

Offered to bring snacks to class if a particular response rate was achieved

Added bonus points to test or assignments if certain response rate was achieved

Dropped a low grade for all students if certain response rate was achieved

Increased all students' grades if certain response rate was achieved

Added a extra credit option to the final if a certain response rate was achieved

SURVEY

Online survey

Anonymous

Over 3-week collection period (2 reminders)

Population: 205 instructors

Respondents: 120

Response rate: 59%
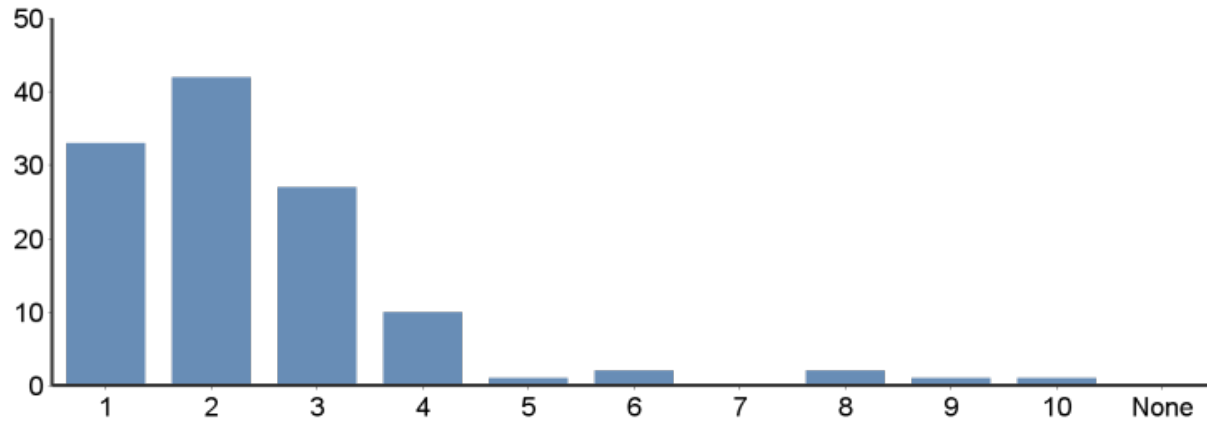
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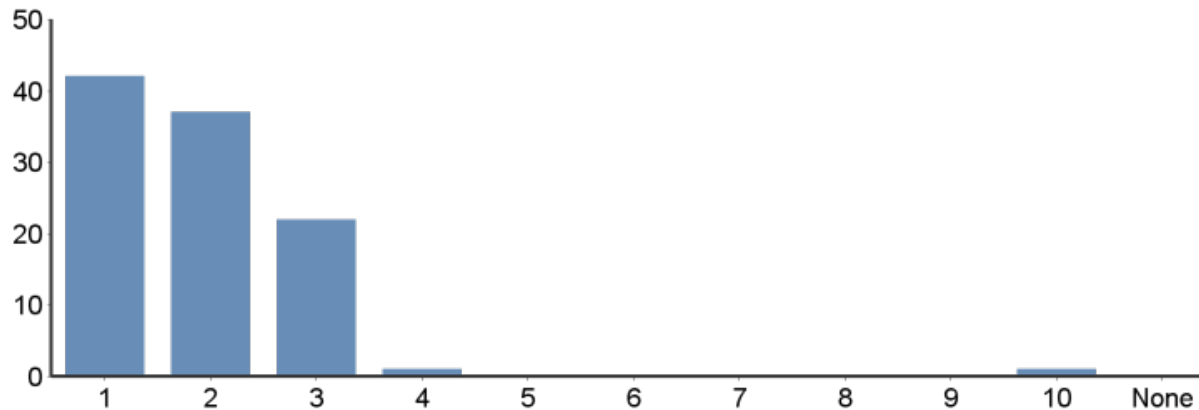

Figure 1. # sections taught in semester

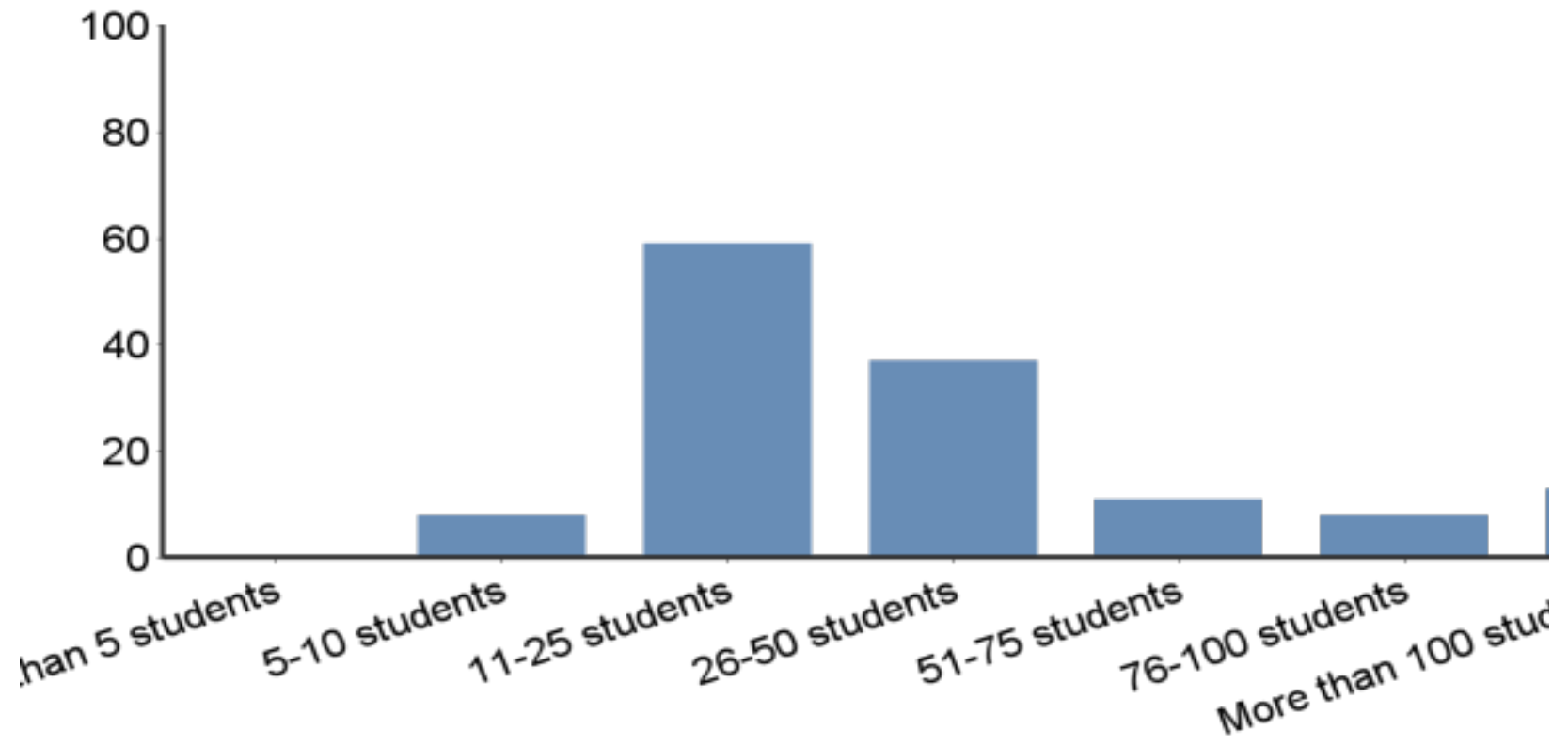Figure 2. # sections with SET response rate of 70% or higher

Figure 3. #students in sections with SET response rates 70% or higher

RESULTS

Top 3 strategies were used by at least 78% of respondents:

87% - **Talked about the importance of the evaluation in their classes**

85% - **Worked to create a climate in their classes that reflects mutual respect between instructor and students**

78% - **Told students how they used the evaluation to modify the course**

The usage rate dropped off to 35% after that.

THE MIDDLE TIER

36% - **Sent personal e-mails to students**

30% - **Included statements on the syllabus and its importance**

26% - **Encouraged students to bring technology to class and allowed time for students to complete the evaluation**

25% - **Offered a mid-semester evaluation and then used that feedback to modify my course**

15% - **Added bonus points to students' test or assignments if certain course response rate was achieved**

11% - **Took my class to a computer lab and allowed time for students to complete the evaluation**

THE BOTTOM TIER

8% - Increased all students' grades if certain course response rates was achieved

8% - Added a bonus/extra credit question or questions to the final if a certain response rate was achieved

4% - Dropped a low assignment grade for all students if certain response rate was achieved

2% - Forwarded an e-mail from a department head or dean about the importance of course evaluations

2% - Offered to bring snacks to class or final if a particular response rate was achieved

0% - No actions were taken to increase response rates in these courses

ADDITIONS TO THE LIST

4% - evoked student responsibility or guilt

4% - made learning about evaluation a part of the class

3% - gave students time off

2% - gave bonus attached to honesty attestation

1% - commanded students to complete evaluation

1% - appealed from the student perspective

1% - withheld final grades

1% - created competition

1% - altered final exam

1% - withheld study aids

STRATEGIES, INCENTIVES AND INSTITUTIONAL POLICY

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."

OBSERVATIONS

Overwhelmingly, the strategies that instructors use to successfully get high response rates are in line with University policy

AT this university, high SET response rates can be achieved through strategies below rather than providing incentives

Using strategies rather than incentives protects the integrity of the process and is less likely to result in unreliable data

Everyone who responded used some sort of deliberate strategy to increase response rate

IMPLICATIONS FOR INSTRUCTORS

- Talk about student evaluations of teaching in courses

- Explaining their purposes

- Focus on how the instructor uses the information and who benefits

- Create a climate of mutual respect by letting students know what changes were made as a result of evaluations

- Use mid-semester evaluations to address the needs of current students

- If using mid-semester evaluations, address all concerns, and explain why you will make changes for some and not for others

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

- **Making clear distinctions about the differences between strategies and incentives for increasing response rate**

- **Including guidelines (strategies) for improving response rates in a centralized location**

- **Policy makers should focus on rules and processes that help faculty include productive evaluation discussion**

  - Reduce the impetus for participating in activities that would bias results or be considered unethical

  - Open discussion about the conflict between the use of SET results for course improvement versus the use for promotion and tenure purposes

  - Supporting systematic implementation of a mid-semester evaluation program

QUESTIONS