May 1, 2012

ACADEMIC DEANS
COLLEGE PROVOSTS
DEPARTMENT CHAIRS
DEPARTMENT MANAGERS

Dear Colleagues:

Re: Online Course Evaluations - Uniform Procedures

We are pleased to share with you information from the winter deployment of the Online Course Evaluation (OCE) system. Overall feedback continues to be positive from students and staff.

SUMMARY

- 15 new departments came onboard Winter quarter including the entire Division of Physical and Biological Sciences
- 387 online survey instruments (either single course or groups of over 50 courses by department) were issued with a possible 34,436 total responses.
- Response rates: 58% undergraduate, 62% graduate

To improve response rates and to facilitate standardized reporting, we have targeted three (3) areas:

- Increasing communications to students and faculty explaining the value of evaluations
- Establishing a defined schedule for quarterly evaluation open and close period
- Using the approved UCSC Template

Based on user feedback, implementing uniform procedures across campus will increase the response rate, ensure data integrity, and improve reporting. Please adhere to the following procedures when utilizing the Online Course Evaluation system:

UNIFORM PROCEDURES

1. **Standard Template**

   Do not alter the standard template, questions 1-29. Departments can add department-specific questions at the end of the survey beginning with question 30. Altering the template will result in data not being archived properly. Any modifications made to the standard template will jeopardize data integrity over time.

2. **Communication Plan**

   At UCSC, faculty engagement appears to be the single most important factor to increase student participation and response rates. Department Managers and Chairs can increase response rates by alerting faculty of the dates that evaluations are to be completed and requesting that they encourage their students to complete the online review process even in courses that do not use eCommons for any other purpose.

   A comprehensive communication plan includes:
   - A message from the Department Chair or Provost to students and faculty communicating the importance of course evaluations and noting the ease of doing so online.
   - Information and instructions for faculty to give to their students about online

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1 Previously referred to as Online Instructor Evaluations (OIE), renamed so as not to conflict with the Office of International Education.
2 A [review of data from 300 institutions](https://example.com) found that while the online evaluations had lower response rates, student responses were similar. A [2006 review of online evaluation](https://example.com) at a single university noted that, "A diminished response rate to course evaluations has less to do with the method of distribution than it does with faculty and student engagement".
evaluations (e.g., passwords used, anonymous, confidential, value of constructive criticism and feedback) and how the data will be used.

- Department-specific student notification and reminder text should be included in each survey (evaluation), specifying open and close dates. For Spring quarter, it is important the evaluation period close by Sunday, June 10 at 11:59 p.m. prior to the start of final exams.
- Information for instructors about when the results will be available to them and in what format.

Sample communications are attached.

3. **Deployment Period**

Students and faculty expressed confusion regarding the timing of the evaluation process because different dates have been used by departments over the past two quarters. Historically, paper evaluations were handed out to students in the final week of classes, prior to finals week. With the online process this practice should NOT change. Evaluations need to be collected prior to finals week. This has been, and will continue to be standard campus practice. Please set up Spring 2012 evaluation as follows:

- **Evaluation period:** online evaluations should be available from Tuesday, May 29 to Sunday, June 10 at 11:59 p.m. Evaluations should cease being available by Sunday, June 10 at 11:59 p.m.

- **Student Notification:** until such time that there is a technical solution to aggregate notification (i.e., students receive only one email that includes information on all evaluations they have yet to submit), choose the notification reminder setting ‘every-other-day’ for each evaluation instrument.

4. **File Naming**

To maintain the integrity of our archival process, it is imperative for departments to appropriately name both the evaluation instrument and the report data file. The following are examples of appropriately named files:

- Best practice for naming an evaluation for a single course:
  
  TERM / COURSE / CLASS NUMBER / INSTRUCTOR
  
  Ex. W12 SOCY 177G 12345 Smith

- Best practice for naming a group or batch of evaluations:
  
  TERM / DEPARTMENT
  
  Ex. W12 Music Dept Course Evaluations

5. **Faculty Review of Evaluations**

Faculty may see their evaluations once the grade posting deadline has passed and it has been verified that they have submitted grades for their course. Until all grades for a course are submitted, faculty should not review evaluations. This standard campus practice is not changing.

- All units are responsible for the distribution of the evaluation reports directly to their own faculty, just as they have done when using Scantron or other evaluation processing methods. It is important that the administrator communicate with instructors their schedule for the release of this information. It is not currently available online for instructors.

6. **Faculty Communication**

Communication from faculty to their students is of the utmost importance to increase student response rates. Some methods to increase student response rates include:
• Remind students of the deadline date of the evaluation and the importance of results after each class.
• Explain in the course syllabus the importance of student input for course improvement and that their evaluations are taken seriously and do effect change.
• Reinforce the message that instructors will not have access to individual student evaluations. Summary reports will be provided only after grades are submitted.
• Remind students that their response will be used to improve the course for future students. Students should know that a professor will take their feedback seriously and specific actions will be taken to resolve any issues raised.
• Help students understand how to give constructive criticism. This will help students give valuable feedback. Further, this action will help convince them that their comments will be heard.
• Direct students to a computer laboratory where they can submit their evaluations.
• Consider the use of department- or course-level incentives. Departments have access to the list of students who have completed evaluations; some faculty have used this information within their classes. Of course, such information should not be shared with fewer than 10 respondents, as it may make responses identifiable. Evaluations can be submitted without answering any questions.

TRAINING AND SUPPORT
The Faculty Instructional Technology Center (FITC) provides consulting and support for each course-sponsoring agency’s administrator. First-time users must: a) request access with authorization from their department manager via itrequest.ucsc.edu and b) attend New User Training before issuing any evaluations (see list of this quarter’s offerings below). For questions contact: Rebecca Peet (9-1573, rpeet@ucsc.edu) or Robin Ove (9-2436, robino@ucsc.edu).

Online Course Evaluation Training and Consulting
When using Events Manager, please sort by “Unit”:

1. **New User Training – Monday, May 7**
   Unit managers, or their designees, who did not participate in the previous quarter rollouts and are planning to use the online course evaluation system must sign up for a training session offered by Faculty Instructional Technology Center (FITC). Class registration is through the UCSC Events Manager: http://events-manager.ucsc.edu/.

2. **Creating Custom Questions – Tuesday, May 8**
   This training is designed for newcomers to the Online Evaluation system who will be customizing the standard UCSC template with department-specific questions. The prerequisite for this course is “New User Training” (Monday, May 7). Class registration is through the UCSC Events Manager: http://events-manager.ucsc.edu/.

3. **Hands-on, Open Office, Consulting – Tuesday, May 8**
   FITC will meet with users to answer questions and assist them with spring Online Evaluations deployment. Class registration is through the UCSC Events Manager: http://events-manager.ucsc.edu/.

SCANTRON ALTERNATIVE
Units choosing to use the Scantron system will need to budget for the printing and processing costs and provide a FOAPAL for recharges. If you need Scantron forms, please contact Daria Troxell at ugdiv@ucsc.edu. For more information on processing the forms, visit the Learning Technologies website at http://its.ucsc.edu/scantron/evals/index.html.
FUTURE IMPLEMENTATIONS
We will continue to develop the Online Evaluations system based on campus needs and suggestions to every extent possible. One upcoming project is for data warehousing capabilities and BiobibNet integration to significantly automate the inclusion of course evaluations within the academic review process.

More information on Online Course Evaluations can be found at http://its.ucsc.edu/ecommons/online-evaluations/index.html. Feedback on policies related to evaluations may be provided to Senate committees, Deans, and Chairs, or directly to ugdiv@ucsc.edu. Technical feedback may be provided to http://its.ucsc.edu/feedback.php.

Thank you for your feedback and continued support as we further develop the online evaluation system and work to improve the evaluation process across the campus.

Sincerely,

Richard Hughey
Vice Provost and Dean
of Undergraduate Education

Attachment: Sample Communications

cc: CP/EVC Galloway
    Chair Gillman
    Manager Ove
    AVC Peterson
    Director Phillips
    CAP Chair Takagi
    Academic Senate Office
    Assistant Deans
    Curriculum Analysts
    Department Assistants
APPENDIX A
Sample Communications

SAMPLE 1 – General Communication

To: Instructors and Students

From: [Academic Department Name]

Re: Announcing use of eCommons Online Course Evaluation System for ____ Quarter Courses

[Your Academic Department Name Here (i.e., Anthropology)] is using the new eCommons Evaluations System to collect end-of-the quarter instructor and course evaluations. Evaluations will open ____ and close ____. All students in our courses will have access to the evaluation tool in eCommons, whether or not the class used an eCommons site for course work.

How it works:

Students will receive an email when the evaluation survey is available. The email will provide information regarding the evaluation as well as a link to the evaluation in eCommons. Students can click the link, login to eCommons and find the evaluation to take and submit. Alternately, students can login to ecommons.ucsc.edu and click the Evaluation System tool to see current available evaluations. Student submissions are anonymous and confidential. Instructors cannot identify which submissions belong to which students and will only be able to review the data collected after all grades have been submitted.

SAMPLE 2 – Instructions to students

Please give serious thought to your comments. This evaluation will become part of the faculty member's personnel file to be reviewed by colleagues and administration when considering the instructor's future teaching assignments and promotions. Your comments will be studied by the professor after grading your work and may be used to improve future offerings of the course.

SAMPLE 3 - System Email Notification to students after an evaluation has been made available:

All information submitted to the Evaluation System is confidential. Instructors cannot identify which submissions belong to which students. Students are required to login to the system for the sole purpose of providing students access to the appropriate evaluations for their associated courses. Please send privacy concerns to ecommons.help@ucsc.edu

An evaluation (NAME) for: CLASS NAME GOES HERE is ready to be filled out. Please complete this evaluation by DATE THIS DATE IS FROM YOUR SETTINGS at the latest.

You may access the evaluation at:

https://ecommons.ucsc.edu/direct/eval-assigngroup/10
If the above link is not working then please follow the Alternate Instructions at the bottom of the message.

Enter the site using your username and password. You may submit the evaluation once only.

Thank you for your participation.

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Should you encounter any technical difficulty in filling out the evaluation, please send an email to ecommons.help@ucsc.edu clearly indicating the problem you encountered. For any other concerns please contact your department.

Alternate Instructions:

1) Go to https://ecommons.ucsc.edu/xsl-portal

2) Enter your username and password and click on 'Login' button.

3) Click on 'Evaluation System' in the left navigation menu under My Workspace.

4) Click on YOUR CLASS NAME GOES HERE link under evaluation name.

**SAMPLE 4** – Reminder text for students who have not submitted an evaluation during the open period:

*Instructor Evaluations are important. Please take the time to submit the evaluation for CLASS by the DEADLINE.*