Pitt Success Stories

Higher than Average Response Rates

Below are several strategies shared by instructors whose response rates were higher than the university average. Student Opinion of Teaching Surveys have been administered fully online since Fall 2013. OMET’s tips and suggestions to increase response rates have been based on research at other institutions. Now that we are beginning to gather data here at the University of Pittsburgh, it’s beneficial to highlight some effective measures from our own Pitt faculty. We thank them for providing this information.

“I always discuss with my students the rationale behind the OMET survey and its importance to instructors, particularly instructors like myself that are fully dedicated to teaching and engineering education. I also read and take student comments seriously in order to make appropriate improvements to the course for subsequent semesters. I clearly state this in class so that students are aware that their input is valued. As for the high response rate, I have been fortunate to have most of my classes taught in computer labs that has permitted me to plan the completion of the OMET survey during class time. I normally give students 15 minutes to complete the process at the beginning of a designated lecture.”

Arash Mahboobin
Swanson School of Engineering
Department of Bioengineering
95% Response Rate

“For my OMET data collection I explain to my students how important their feedback is to me, and allow them ten minutes of instruction time to fill out the OMET. To further encourage participation I remind the students that they will continue to receive e-mail reminders until they submit an OMET, so they might as well get it out of the way now. During this 10-minute window I leave the room, so students don’t feel awkward evaluating me while I’m standing right in front of them. Before leaving I have also made a pitch to my students to consider serving as UTAs for the next semester. My current UTAs are on hand to answer any of my students questions about being a TA, and give their opinions freely about teaching while I’m out of the room. The UTAs are also experienced in submitting their own OMETS and can help the students with any technical issues. I then return, and thank my students for participating, and reiterate the importance of their feedback”

Linda O’Reilly PhD
Lecturer
Department of Biological Sciences
87% Response Rate
“I try to encourage my students to participate in the evaluation process. We tend to do a lot of evaluation in my discipline. The students are used to doing self-evaluations, reflective journaling, and regular, scheduled evaluations of student performance with faculty. It helps to remind them that just like faculty feedback contributes to their growth as a student with evaluations designed to shape their professional development, their evaluation of me serves the same purpose.

I think that the anonymous nature of the evaluation process and fact that we do not receive the comments until the next term takes the pressure off the student and really allows them an opportunity to be honest.

Getting feedback from my students really does help shape how I conduct my classes. While a random comment is not likely to create change, hearing similar feedback from multiple students has impact. Hearing about learning activities that made a positive difference in the understanding of content or gaining some insight about what didn’t work well doesn’t always come out during the class session. More often than not, student evaluations help to reinforce that I am on the right track.”

Tammy M. Haley Ph.D, RN
Director of Nursing and Radiological Sciences
Coordinator RN-BSN Program
Associate Professor of Nursing
University of Pittsburgh at Bradford

“I did two things. 1. Send an email a.) reminding them about the survey deadline, b.) emphasizing the importance of their comments and how I can use their comments to be a better teacher in the future. 2. On the last day of the class, I stepped out of the class for 15 minutes (at the beginning of the class) and asked them to do the survey if they have not done so by that time.”

Professor Pandu Tadikamalla
KATZ Graduate School of Business
95% Response Rate

“The very best way to raise response rates is to set aside time in class and leave the room. Like all humans – students get way too many emails and time is at a priority. So, if we focus them and show it’s important to us by taking time out of our class rather than out of the many other things on students’ plates, I think that gives a clear message. Unfortunately, I teach several classes where students are rarely all together. For those I work closely with OMET to tweak the response period to fit when I can get them together. I let students know that I don’t see results until after final grades are worked out, the responses are anonymous both in terms of what a particular student has said, and whether or not they’ve even filled it in. I also send reminder emails, acknowledge that this input helps students in the future, and thank them for their time.”

Paula Leslie
PhD, FRCSLT (UK), CCC-SLP (USA)
School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences
Fall 2015 - 67% (two classes) and 81% (one class)
Fall 2016 - 100% (one class)
“I kept track of the number of anonymous responses through the timely automated University OMET reminders. This in turn prompted me to send Bb announcements as reminders for remaining students to complete the survey. I did not schedule any time in class but did mention after my last class that they can use the extra time (last 5 minutes) to complete the survey but I think students’ intrinsic motivation was a bigger factor. My decision to run an anonymous mid-term survey and respond fairly to concerns helped. I think many students were encouraged to respond to the final survey because I did read all the mid-term surveys and made fair and transparent responses to the student comments/concerns affecting positive changes in the remainder of the course. I also maintained constant open communication – via email or in person – regarding all issues (course content, quizzes, exams, tech related issues, special accommodation) affecting an individual student or the entire class throughout the course.”

Assistant Professor Satish Shyam Kumar
School of Dental Medicine
88% Response Rate

“I take my OMETs seriously and use them to fine tune my teaching every semester – especially the written comments. I decided to treat OMETs exactly as I had in the past: I set aside a time at the beginning of a class that I know most students will attend (exam review or final presentations). I leave the room and give the students 15 minutes to work on their OMETs on their laptops of phones, and if they don’t have those, I send them to a computer lab.”

Professor Ryan McDermott
Department of English
Dietrich School of Arts & Sciences
80% Response Rate

“The steps that I took throughout the semester in hopes of ensuring a high response rate can be broken down into two main steps:

- Letting students know their feedback is valuable
  - On the first day of class, I assured my students that I appreciate their feedback and want to learn from them as well.
  - On syllabus day, I point out some of the changes that had been made to my syllabus as a direct result of previous feedback on course evaluations.
  - Halfway through the semester, I had students fill out a very brief and anonymous mid-course evaluation that simply asked them what aspects of my teaching worked well and what aspects of my teaching could be improved.

- Repeated encouragement to take the OMET survey.
  - Throughout the semester, I reminded students of the OMET survey.
  - When the survey was officially opened, I emailed students and encouraged them to now take the survey.
I then provided time (about 10-15 minutes) at the beginning of class for students to fill out the survey (I encouraged them to bring a laptop or electronic device in advance so they could do it).
I continued to encourage any students who had yet to take the survey to take it before the survey closed and reminded them of the deadline.

"The day that the evaluations are released, I inform students that they are available for them to complete. I indicate that I take the evaluations seriously, that I have adjusted the course on the basis of suggestions I received in the evaluations, offering specific examples, and that I will offer donuts on the last day of class to whoever fills out an evaluation. I then show them specifically where to find them on CourseWeb using the classroom’s computer and internet connections. This takes about 3-4 minutes of class time. I repeat that reminder twice over the course of the final weeks of the semester, each time taking no more than 90 seconds. On the final day of class, I bring in donuts and offer them to anyone who has filled out a course evaluation. Anyone who has not, may fill out the evaluation then and there, and I give them ten minutes to do so, after which they can have a donut. Obviously, it is an honor system. The methods seem to have worked reasonably well in ensuring broad class participation."

For my large class, probably the biggest way to ensure that they complete the evaluations was the two-part process of instructing them to bring a computer to class on the day of evaluations (although I didn’t say in advance what the purpose of bringing it was) and allowing class time for the evaluations to be completed.

For my small group, I reserved a computer lab.

Before both classes completed the evaluations, I reminded them that this process was helpful for me as a professor and that the following semester I would read the anonymous evaluations carefully and adapt my teaching style, course readings, assignments, etc. based on constructive feedback that they provided.
I send 1-2 follow-up emails through CourseWeb reminding those who had been absent on the day of evaluations that they still had time to do them at their convenience and that they would be read carefully next semester.

Overall, I would say the combination of explaining to students why evaluations are important, making sure they have the means to do the evaluations (in a computer lab, or by bringing their own computers or simply using their cell phones), and allowing class time for their completion helped my students to participate.”

Professor Matt Kanwit
Department of Linguistics
Dietrich School of Arts & Sciences
88% Response Rate

“I do not give them time during class to dill it out or anything like that. My main method is that I make sure to remind them at least 3 times to perform the evaluation, at least 2 times in class and at least 1 time through email. Then, I spend a very short time in class emphasizing the importance of the OMET. I tell them that it does, in fact, factor into our evaluations as professors (promotion and things like that), and I tell them what would be the most valuable input to me. In particular, I tell them that I would really like feedback on the parts of the course that they felt they learned well, rather than telling me what parts of the course they think are useful or not.”

Professor John Brigham
Civil Engineering
Swanson School of Engineering
83% Response Rate