

3/1/2010

eValueate

TRANSITION TO ONLINE COURSE EVALUATIONS University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus

What is eValueate?

eValueate is an online, web-based course evaluation system with significant advantages over the old paper-based system. About 60% of all instructors and courses offered on the Norman Campus have already transitioned to the online system including courses in the Colleges of Arts & Sciences, Education, International & Area Studies, and Atmospheric & Geographic Sciences.

During Spring 2010, courses in the Colleges of Architecture, Business, Earth & Energy, Engineering, Fine Arts, Honors, Journalism, Aviation, Expository Writing, and University College at OU will transition to this system.

This memorandum is meant to answer some questions instructors may have regarding online evaluations and to explain the process further.

Why are we moving to online evaluations?

Moving to an online evaluation system was made necessary because of technical difficulties associated with the university's paper-based evaluation system. The aging system that converted the paper evaluation forms into evaluation reports was replaced in Fall 2008. Unfortunately, the new system was more expensive than the previous system. It required that we print one form for each student enrolled in a class (rather than a number of forms sufficient to hand-out to the likely number of students in attendance) and required about 110,000 forms each full semester. The unused, printed forms could not be reused and the cost to the colleges for the forms was prohibitive.

As a result, the Provost's Office began to consider alternatives to the paper evaluation system. Our research showed that many of our peer institutions had successfully adopted an online teaching evaluation system (including Wisconsin, MIT, Michigan, Texas A&M, Oregon, Yale, Vanderbilt, Boston College, Minnesota, Stanford, Virginia, Penn, McGill, and Harvard).

Because the College of Arts and Sciences had already created a program to evaluate its growing online course offerings, the college decided to pilot the use of ***eValueate*** for all A&S classes in Spring 2009. The pilot program was successful and three other units (College of Education, College of Atmospheric and Geographic Sciences, and the School of International and Area Studies) successfully used ***eValueate*** for all of their teaching evaluations in Fall 2009.

In addition to decreasing cost and waste, online evaluation also helped units give faster feedback to faculty regarding their evaluations, particularly during the tight Fall evaluation cycle when academic units are anxious to receive the Fall evaluations that are used in January for the calendar year faculty evaluation process.

The online system also eliminated the need for utilizing class time to complete paper evaluations and eliminated the occasional losses or mistakes that occurred when paper forms were hand-carried around campus. Additionally, students appreciated the convenience of the online system, appreciated being able to participate in course evaluation even if they were not in attendance on the particular day that the instructor handed out evaluation forms, and appreciated the fact that their typed comments could not be identified via handwriting.

How does *eValuate* work?

eValuate is a web-based system that permits enrolled students to give feedback during a set evaluation period or window. Arts & Sciences has established an evaluation window that opens 11 days before the last day of class and remains open for 10 days. Other colleges can adjust this window for timeframes within which courses are delivered as long as they adhere to the principle that students ought to evaluate the course prior to completing the final examination.

When the evaluation window opens, the instructor will receive an instructional email from *eValuate* (eval@ou.edu) that provides a link to the *eValuate* website (<http://eval.ou.edu>), a list of the instructor's classes that will be evaluated, and the specific dates and times of the evaluation window.

Enrolled students receive an e-mail to *eValuate* that requires using their 4+4 and password to access their evaluations. They can log on any time during the evaluation window and they are not required to complete all evaluations in one session. Enrolled students receive additional e-mail prompts at day 5, day 9 and day 10 for any of the courses in which they are enrolled but for which they have not yet completed evaluations.

Please note that instructors will not be able to log on to the website when the evaluation window is open. Instructors receive an e-mail on day 5 telling them what percentage of their enrolled students has completed the evaluations. Instructors also receive an e-mail after the evaluation window for their courses has closed that tells them what percentage of their enrolled students participated in evaluation. Future versions of *eValuate* will add an instructor section that will allow instructors and their supervisors to download the evaluation reports directly after the evaluation window has closed.

Will the questions be different from the past?

No. Each college has already developed its own set of evaluation questions and those questions have all been migrated to the new system. Units that incorporate supplemental questions into their evaluation process will be able to do so just as in the past. In future versions of *eValuate*, instructors will be able to add their own supplemental questions to the evaluation form.

What if I teach a class that ends before the end of the semester?

eValuate is capable of evaluating classes at any time during the semester. If your class ends before the end of the semester, your evaluation window will still open 10 days before the last day of your class.

The only exception is for classes that are less than 28 days long. The *eValuate* system is flexible in terms of defining an appropriate window that would be endorsed by the dean of the college as appropriate and fair to both students and faculty for compressed format courses. This defined window would not be frequently changed and would require the Dean's approval to change for all college courses that are offered in that particular format.

How are students prompted to complete the evaluation beyond the initial *eValuate* e-mail?

For those courses that have an 10 day evaluation window (the large majority of Norman Campus courses); students receive additional e-mail prompts at day 1, day 5, day 9 and day 10 of the evaluation window telling them which course evaluations have not yet completed and reminding them of the window of opportunity to complete these evaluations.

Instructors receive an email from *eValuate* on day 5 showing the percentage of their enrolled students who have completed the course evaluation so far for each of the instructor's classes. The instructor may

remind students to complete their evaluations if the return rate is low. Any email reminders or other prompts about the evaluations from the instructor **must be sent to all enrolled students**.

Instructors can add a link to <http://eval.ou.edu> on their home page and mention it in their course syllabus.

Can an instructor offer my students extra credit as an incentive to complete the evaluation?

No. The confidentiality of the responding students must be respected, so identifying participants for individual credit is not possible. We also believe that students ought to responsibly participate in the evaluation system as their contribution to continuous improvement of the quality of instruction on this campus.

What will the students see?

When they log into *eEvaluate*, students will see all of the courses in which they are currently enrolled. They will be able to evaluate each of their courses all at one time or they can complete the evaluations over several sessions. Once they have submitted a course evaluation, they will not be able to open it again.

Will students be able to answer the open-ended questions in the evaluation form?

Yes, in fact we have noticed that students answer a greater proportion of the open-ended questions online than when writing comments in class, and the answers are typically longer. Instructors will no longer have to keep a file of paper forms with the written comments. Each instructor will now have an electronic copy of their students' typed comments. The comments report can be easily printed and comments can be cut-and-pasted into evaluation material.

How do I get my evaluation results?

Reports will be available more quickly than before. Within two weeks of final grades being posted, two evaluation reports will be sent to each college for further dissemination. The first report will include the same evaluation report that you have been receiving for the past several years. The second report is a searchable PDF file that includes all of the written comments that students completed during the evaluation. Eventually, you will be able to download your reports and comments directly from the *eEvaluate* website.

How can I opt out of the public UOSA report?

As you may know, The Faculty Senate and the President adopted a policy in 1994 agreeing to submit to the UOSA a report that summarizes the student's responses to five key questions for each course (Faculty Handbook section 3.30.2). Each college selected the appropriate 5 questions to be forwarded from their own college course evaluation questionnaire. The master list of each college's five questions is available at this website: <http://www.ou.edu/provost/pronew/content/course-evaluations.html>. Only the statistical reports including each college's five questions are sent to UOSA. The answers to the open-ended questions are not shared with students.

Instructors may opt out of this report. On the day after the evaluation window closes, you will receive an email from *eEvaluate* that contains an "opt out" link. By clicking on that link, your evaluations for the semester will not be included in the public evaluation report that is sent to UOSA.

How good is the new evaluation data?

The first consideration is response rate. In the old paper system, the response rate was based upon the number of students in attendance on the day the forms were handed in class. The online system can potentially achieve higher response rates by greatly increasing the time available to respond. For the College of Arts & Sciences, the response rate in the paper evaluation system was historically about 64%.

The eValuate response rates in Spring 2009 and Fall 2009 were 58% and 57% respectively. While somewhat lower than the paper-based rate, this response rate is well about the response rates (some less than 40%) experienced on some other campuses during the first online evaluation implementation. Other institutions have experienced response rates over time as students become familiar with the system. Based on the experience of other institutions, establishing an online system for the entire University should increase response rates for all the individual colleges.

Won't eValuate attract only students who are unhappy with the class, resulting in lower scores than the previous semester?

Analysis of data from the College of Arts and Sciences shows that differences from previous semesters are, on average, not significant. Empirical studies at other institutions have also failed to observe significant differences in scores in paper versus on-line course evaluation systems. References on this topic are posted here: <http://web.augsburg.edu/~krajewsk/evals/annotated-biblio.pdf>.

Nonetheless, for faculty evaluation purposes, units may wish to note when the method of delivering course evaluations was changed. Comparison data for the unit and the college (the percentile data found in the last two columns of the evaluation report) will continue to be provided to the colleges; these data can be used to access how effective a particular instructor is compared to others teaching similar kinds of courses within the same college.

What can I do to help?

Students are being made aware of the online evaluation system through e-mail, social networking websites, and traditional campus media outlets such as oZone. Research suggests that students are much more likely to participate if they believe that their input is important (e.g. http://www.ur.umich.edu/0809/Nov24_08/01.php). Accordingly, instructors should let students know how important the evaluation process is and encourage them to participate in accordance with the guidelines above. Instructors can add a link to <http://eval.ou.edu> on their home page and mention it in their course syllabus.

Evaluating teaching online is new to OU but has already been adopted by universities across the country. Your efforts can help make eValuate a success here as well. If you have any questions, please contact either Senior Vice President & Provost Nancy L. Mergler or your college representative who works with the eValuate system for your college.

These individuals are listed here: <http://www.ou.edu/provost/pronew/content/course-evaluations.html>