Berk, R. A. (2012). Top 20 strategies to increase the online response rates of student rating scales

rating scales for any of those excuses, legitimate or illegitimate, response rates plummet. Recent improvements in the technical design and execution of online delivery systems have reduced and, in some cases, eliminated those perceptions in some institutions, but they still exist at most where comprehensive administration procedures have not been implemented to systematically address those reasons.

Faculty members also have had concerns that dissatisfied students are more likely to respond than other students (Johnson, 2003). This possible negative response bias was supported by Kherfi and Benton et al.'s correlations between response rate and student ratings.

STATISTICAL ISSUES

Although the minimum response rate based on sampling error for a seminar with 10 students may be different from a class with 50, 100, or larger, rates in the 80% to 100% range will be adequate for most any class size. Statistical tables of response rates for different errors and confidence intervals are available (Nulty, 2008).

Unfortunately, the rules of survey sampling do not provide a simple statistical answer to the response rate question for online rating scales. The class (sample) size that responds in relation to the class (population) size is not the only issue. There are at least two major sources of error (or unreliability) to consider: (1) standard error of the mean rating based on sample size and (2) standard error of measurement based on the reliability of the item, subscale, or total scale ratings. Confidence intervals can be computed for both.

In typical survey research, inferences about characteristics of the population are drawn from the sample statistics. Only decisions about groups are rendered; not about individuals. In contrast, the inferences from sample (class) ratings are used for teaching improvement (formative) and important career (summative) decisions about individual professors. The response rate for one type of decision may not be adequate for other types of decisions (Berk, 2013).

CURRENT RESPONSE RATES

So what is the current state of practice at many institutions? The response rates for online administration have been reported in the 50s compared to 60s to 70s for paper-based administration (Benton et al., 2010). The online rates have been consistently lower than paper at several institutions (Anderson et al., 2005; Avery et al., 2006; Mau & Opengart, 2012; Morrison, 2011; Nowell, Gale, & Handley, 2010; Nulty, 2008; Sax, Gilmartin, & Bryant, 2003; Sid Nair, Adams, & Mertova, 2008; Stowell, Addison, Astigdon, or 2010; -4<07-4(g)9(t)-4(

FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATORS

15. Deans, department chairs, and faculty communicate to students the importance of their input (Berk, 2006; Johnson, 2003; Sorenson & Reiner, 2003)
16. Faculty emphasize the intended purpose(s) of the ratings (The IDEA Center, 2008)
17. Faculty strongly encourage students and remind students to complete forms (Adams, 2012; The IDEA Center, 2008)
18.

and projects at the end of the semester, then the incentive is gone. Intentionally delaying that posting is questionable. There are also legal issues involved in withholding grades which have been raised in courts outside the U.S.

d. Strategies 15-17: Administrators and faculty should coordinate communication to students on the importance of responding to overcome their apathy. This is highly recommended and one of the reasons students do not bother to respond. They are not convinced their ratings will make any difference to improve teaching. Faculty should also follow up with reminders in their classes.
e. Strategies 18-19: These course-specific incentives are the most contentious nationally and internationally. They have been used in individual courses, but not system-wide, with highly variable increases in response rates. Your faculty should discuss the merits of these incentives for their classes. They have ethical and legal implications related to course objectives, content, and grading.
f. Strategy 20: These in-class administration options can produce response rates comparable to the paper-based version of yesteryear. They are applicable to F2F and blended courses, but not online courses. Many professors are comfortable with this in-class administration because it retains the best of both worlds. To assure standardized administration conditions, your faculty must agree to system-wide administration in-class (or computer lab) OR online, but not a mix of both.

PICK THE *"RIGHT" COMBINATION*

Overall, it is the right combination of administrative procedures and incentives that can yield response rates in the 70-80s. The administrator of the online system and faculty must carefully review and discuss all of the preceding options to decide on what combination of strategies for their particular program is right. What is right for your institution may not be right elsewhere. It should receive the commitment of all stakeholders involved in the process and be compatible wit

The design and operation of the online administration will be major determinants of whether students will continue to complete the rating scales. Their expectations about how the results will be used are also critical to future response rates. Chen and Hoshower (2003) found that *students' motivation to participate* in the rating system hinged on the following semi-observable outcomes (in order of decreasing importance): (1) improvements in teaching, (2) improvements in course content and format, and (3) faculty personnel decisions (promotion, tenure, salary increase).

SYSTEM ACCOUNTABILITY

+RZ ZLOO \RXU V\VWHP UHVSRQG WR \RXU VWXGHQWV¶ H affect their behaviors and future response rates. The bottom line relates to the LQVWUXFWLRQDO FKDQJHV PDGH DV D UHVXOW RI WKH VWX

Changes. The efforts to make changes and the actual changes that occur based on the UHVXOWV DUH RIWHQ UHIHUUHG WR DV ³FORVLQJ WKH ORR credibility and administrative accountability into the system. The changes convey: ³6WXGHQW UDWLQJV DUH PHDQLQJIXO DQG LPSRUWDQW´ matters. They are engaged as active participants to provide evidence in the process of evaluating teaching effectiveness.

No changes. 6WXGHQWV¶ L%DOO VWDQG LW ³FKRHV´ ZLOO EH UL voted on the follow-up actions taken by your administrators and faculty. Their texting grapevine is extremely effective. Contrary to the preceding scenario, suppose students do not see any results. Their expectations are explicit because the intended purpose of the ratings were stated in the directions on the scale. Those words need to be backed up with observable actions. If not, ZK\ VKRXOG WKH\ ERWKHU WR FRPSOHWH WKH VFDOHV WK purposes are not fulfilled, the response rates can plummet again. 7KHQ \RX where you started with low response rates.

CONCLUSIONS

Low response rates are a ubiquitous and thorny problem in the online administration of student rating scales and other measures in higher education worn70048>7<000(hi)-4(g)ep44p195<0

6.

Chen, Y., & Hoshower, L. B. (2003). Student evaluation of teaching effectiveness: An assessment of student perception and motivation. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 28*(1), 71-88.

Cook, C., Heath, F., & Thompson, R. (2000). A meta-analysis of response rates in web or internet