

## ONLINE COURSE EVALUATIONS AT PRINCETON:

### Frequently Asked Questions

This fall, the Committee on the Course of Study will be piloting an online course evaluation system for undergraduate courses at Princeton. Some graduate programs may also elect to participate in the pilot. This system has been used with great success over the last year in the Freshman Seminar Program and the Princeton Writing Program, and we are now ready to expand the pilot.

**Q: When will the new online course evaluation process open?**

**A:** Students will receive an email from the Registrar explaining the new system on Monday, December 1. The system will open on Monday, December 8.

**Q: How does the online system differ from the paper version?**

**A:** The online evaluation combines the main questions from the old quantitative form with related free-response questions. Our peer institutions have had great success in moving their evaluations online, and we expect the thoughtfulness and effectiveness of narrative responses to increase. In fact, our experience with the Freshman Seminar and Writing Seminar evaluations suggests that students preferred having the ability to complete their evaluations at their leisure rather than in a rushed session during the last class of the term.

**Q: How will the online data be stored? Who will have access to them?**

**A:** As has been the case historically, quantitative data will be widely available to anyone with a Princeton University netID and password. Narrative comments will be available only to individual instructors and department chairs. University administrators will not have electronic access to narrative responses for individual faculty members.

**Q: Why will response rates go up?**

**A:** Students will have two incentives to complete the online evaluations. In the first instance, they will not be able to view their grades online until they have completed the evaluation. The bar is set fairly low for completion. In fact, if they enter the evaluation and indicate that they decline to evaluate the course, they will have immediate access to their grades. Experience suggests, however, that very few students actually select this option. Our completion rates to date have been above 80%, which is substantially higher than our completion rates on the paper forms.

In the second instance, students will have the opportunity to provide advice to other students about their courses, and those responses will later be made available to students. At present, the only formal mechanism for students to share advice with each other about courses comes through the online Student Course Guide (SCG). Because there is no link between the SCG and enrollment data, there is no way to ensure that comments are posted by students who actually took the course in question. In addition, because the number of responses in the SCG is so small, one or two students can skew the distribution of responses. With the data we collect moving forward, the information shared with students will be much more accurate and useful.

**Q: How will the Online Course Evaluation process work?**

A: The timeline for the evaluation process is as follows:

- On Monday, December 1, the Registrar's Office will send an e-mail to students explaining the new process. That will be followed by an e-mail on December 8 announcing that the evaluation website is open for business. The application will remain open until Monday, January 26.
- Students will access online course evaluations via SCORE. When students click on the course evaluation link, they will be directed to a page that lists all of their courses for the semester. Students will be able to identify the class instructor, preceptor, and lab instructor as appropriate. Because the system is fed by data from PeopleSoft, only relevant course questions will appear (for example, there will not be a lab question for Economics 100). Students will then complete the relevant portions of the evaluation. They will also be able to opt out of the process by scrolling to the bottom of the page and selecting "Decline."
- The Registrar's Office will send out reminders at strategic intervals to students who have not completed the evaluation. Faculty members may also want to send a reminder e-mail of their own during the last week of classes or Reading Period letting students know how much they value student feedback.
- As always, faculty members will have access to their students' evaluations only after they have submitted their final grades for the course to the Registrar's Office and when the evaluation period has ended.

**Q: How can faculty members view their completed evaluations?**

A: Faculty members will access the online course evaluation results via the Teaching and Advising link in PeopleSoft.

Questions about the online course evaluation process may be directed to Dean Peter Quimby (pquimby@princeton.edu).