SCANTRON®

University of South Alabama

Mobile, Alabama

The University of South Alabama (USA), located along the Gulf Coast in Mobile, Alabama, has an enrollment of more than 16,000 undergraduate and graduate students in nine colleges and schools, eight of which use Class Climate® for their student evaluations of teaching. Class Climate is managed through the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE).

Challenge

Before implementing Class Climate in Fall 2011, each college and school in the university had its own survey instrument. Evaluations were administered using different systems: some used paper Scantron forms while others collected survey data via eCollege, their Learning Management System (LMS), or other survey software.

Solution Snapshot

9 colleges and schools conduct custom evaluations

Support paper and online evaluation forms

Multiple types of surveys conducted beyond course evaluations

Response rates doubled

Fully automated, time-saving process

The result was a disjointed process that did not provide an opportunity for faculty, chairs, and deans to examine the results of student evaluation of teaching longitudinally. The individual efforts did not support making comparisons across colleges and schools or modalities of instruction.

The university did not have a central repository for the results of student evaluations of teaching to allow easy access for annual evaluations, tenure, and promotion. In addition, many of the courses offered at USA are team-taught, which presented tremendous challenges for administration and reporting purposes.

Implementation

Starting in Fall 2011, four colleges implemented Class Climate for student evaluations of teaching, and the remaining five colleges began using Class Climate the following spring semester.

In addition, the university uses Class Climate to conduct a series of other evaluations, including administrative, student, alumni, employer, and other accreditation-related surveys as well as to conduct student elections.

Departments administrating online surveys were very concerned about response rates. One of the benefits of Class Climate is that it offers a variety of methods for improving response rates. USA uses a variety of the tools offered by Class Climate to improve response rates, such as:

- **Participation tracking reporting**
- **Certificates of participation**
- **Weekly response rate reports to chairs**
- **Automatic notifications to faculty from Class Climate regarding response rate**
- **Integration of Class Climate software with Sakai, their new LMS, for evaluation and survey announcements as well as direct connections to surveys**

"Certificates of participation have been very popular among our faculty," says Cecelia Martin, Director of Assessment and Institutional Effectiveness. "For example, the College of Nursing requires all students to upload the certificate as part of course requirements, while other faculty offer points for turning in the certificate."

The combined impact of these tools has been significant. In Spring 2012, the response rate was 34.7%. For Fall 2015, the response rate nearly doubled to 68.3%. Four of the eight colleges reported response rates of more than 70% and 12 departments obtained response rates of more than 80%.

As a result, the number of departments using online surveys rose from three in 2011 to 14 in 2016.

"We expect that the response rate will continue to improve," Martin says, "At the beginning of the 2015–16 academic year, the Provost established an institutional target of 70% for student evaluations of teaching."

Another benefit of Class Climate is its flexibility of administration. For example, in some programs students are required to have a laptop, so evaluations are administered electronically in class. Class Climate includes module surveys that simplify administration and reporting for team-taught courses, such as courses in the Colleges of Allied Health Professions and Nursing.

Class Climate also offers a variety of reporting options. For example, for candidate evaluations, the university creates sub-reports by respondent type. Chairs find trend-line reports helpful for faculty evaluations as they are able to compare individual instructor evaluations to the department overall.

USA has achieved acceptable response rates for online student evaluations of teaching using the various tools of the Class Climate solution. The OIE continues to promote the use of Class Climate features, such as participation tracking and certificates of completion, as strategies for improving response rates for student evaluations of teaching.

Scantron is proud to help the University of South Alabama transform their course evaluations.

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