Factors Motivating Students to Respond to Online Course Evaluations in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences at the University of Florida

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Introduction

- Course evaluations used in virtually all universities
- Scores and comments on course evaluations are important (Norris & Conn, 2005)
- Response rates dropped when evaluations moved online (70% to 45%) (University of Florida, n.d.)
- Non-response error (Ary et al., 2010)
  - As response rates decrease, the potential for a biased sample increases (Israel, 2009)
- Validity of results is the issue

Purpose & Objectives

- Purpose
  - To describe factors that motivate students within the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences at the University of Florida to/from completing the online course evaluations

- Objective
  - To understand instructor and student perceptions of motivating factors for students to complete online course evaluations

Methods

- Basic qualitative study

- Spring, 2014

- Staff interviews
  - Purposively selected, > 80% response rate to course evaluations
  - N=7
  - Semi structured format , 30 minutes, audio recorded and transcribed verbatim
  - Psuedonyms

Methods

- Student focus group
  - Purposively selected for diverse perspectives
  - Came from two large undergraduate courses
  - Semi- structured, lasted 90 minutes, audio recorded and transcribed verbatim
  - Food was provided as an incentive
  - No individual identifying remarks taken

- Triangulation, audit trail, peer debriefing improved trustworthiness and rigor

- Constant comparative method for determining themes

Results – Overall Themes

Instructor	Student
Context	What's in it for Me?
Motivation	Response Motivators
Logistics	Logistic Challenges
Course	Frustration

Faculty

- "Even when I am handing out the syllabus, I talk about feedback and how I appreciate any comments." – Nancy

- "Yeah, so what I really try to do is I try to establish a relationship with the students, so then they are not just providing an evaluation of the course, but they are providing perspectives about the…and they want to do it because there is a connection to me." - Richard

Instructor Results – *Context* Subthemes

- Relational and caring
- Communicative
- Promotion and tenure
- Feedback

Instructor Results – *Motivation* Subthemes

- Incentives
- Reminders
- Purpose

Instructor Results – *Logistics* Subthemes

- Previous system
- Time and devices
- Explanations
- Participant fatigue

Instructor Results – *Course* Subthemes

- Coursework
- Dynamic methods

Students

- "So if I fill out the evaluation it's like, here, he doesn't care, he's not going to change how he's teaching, I'm like, clearly the department already knows how bad of a teacher he is, so what am I going to gain by wasting my time to fill out an evaluation about something that everyone already knows." – S1

- "… we are not really informed about what they do…. and I didn't know until this year that like how important they were…" - S4

Student Results – *What's in it for Me?* Subthemes

- Pointlessness
- RateMyProfessors.com

Student Results – *Response Motivators* Subthemes

- Incentives
- Bipolar feelings
- Time in class
- Instructor passion and compassion
- Formative vs. summative feedback

Student Results – *Logistic Challenges* Subthemes

- Participant fatigue
- Low priority
- Cognitive load

Student Results – *Frustration* Subthemes

- Who looks at them?
- Ambiguous motivators

Explanatory Theoretical Framework

- Expectancy-Value Theory (Wigfield and Eccles, 2000)
  - People are more motivated if
    - Expectancy of a task is positive
    - Value of the task is positive

Students expect their responses will make a difference	×	Students value that others will find their responses useful	=	Students are motivated to complete course evaluations

Conclusions, Recommendations & Implications

- Students are motivated to complete online course evaluations if
  - There is an expected benefit to them such as course improvement
  - There is value in the task, such as a positive relationship with the instructor

Conclusions, Recommendations & Implications

For Practice
1. Approach instruction from a relationally and communicatively
2. Use formative assessment
3. Remind frequently
4. Use incentives (within rules and reason)
5. Anticipate logistical challenges
6. Provide time in class
7. Scaffold timing of deployment
8. Explain the purpose of course evaluations
9. Connect improvements in courses to course evaluations

For research
- Repeat this study temporally and spatially
- Test methods described here quantitatively

Thank you

- Questions?

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