

This study was commissioned by Teaching and Learning Services in fall 2012. The goal was to understand factors influencing students' likelihood of completing end-of-course evaluations with a view to making suggestions that could be implemented at McGill.

The Students Respond:
Increasing End of Course Evaluation Response Rates

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INTRODUCTION

This study took place over six months, analyzing the limited literature on factors contributing to course evaluation response rates, collecting data from McGill undergraduate students, and analyzing the results. This report reviews the data and findings and ends with three recommendations that can be implemented to increase response rates. Overall, we found that students do not complete course evaluations because the timing is bad and they feel their feedback is not valued.

DATA AND METHODS

Data were collected from three sources:

1. Focus Groups – two focus groups were held. Two students participated in the first focus group and five in the second.
2. Interviews – Eight students were interviewed.
3. Questionnaire – The findings from the focus group and interview were transformed into questions for an online questionnaire; 58 McGill students responded.

Sex		
Female		41
Male		32
Faculty		
Arts		32
Desautels Faculty of Management		9
Education		1
Engineering		6
Law		1
McGill School of Environment		2
Medicine		2
Religious Studies		4
School of Continuing Studies		1
Science		12
Other		3

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants

FOCUSGROUPANDINTERVIEWFINDINGS

Three main themes consistently s

(2.1) Importance of feedback not communicated

A fourth year management student commented, “The worst professors get lots of feedback but never change or get better. Everything stays the same.” A third year cognitive science student stated, “It’s hard to follow-up on whether a course has changed or not.” A third year Economics’ student added, “Yeah, it’s hard to know unless you go sit in on a lecture or something.”

Increasing response rates can be as simple as an instructor showing genuine interest in student opinions. A fourth year environment student (T.) and a third year cognitive science student (J.) both echoed this sentiment:

T: “Knowing that they have an honest interest in wanting feedback makes it worthwhile.

J: Yeah, just a sign that it matters. I feel more for TAs because you know them better and you know that there will be more concrete results or effect for them, like getting hired.

(2.2) Alternative methods of feedback

Students do not feel that their feedback is valued; we asked them for suggestions as to how to communicate this to fellow students. The following is an exchange between a fourth year Environment student (T.), a third year Pharmacy Student (K.), and a third year Cognitive Science student (J.):

T: There should be alternative ways, including in-class, to give feedback to professors. That’s not anonymous, and it maybe would replace course evaluations, but it would be really helpful.

K: Big classes would be difficult. There might be low response rates in these, because one person just feels so meaningless in those.

T: Maybe break up a large class, and smaller groups could talk to a TA or a TLS person like you mid-way through talk about the class.

J: Everything comes out in tutorials because they’re smaller. TAs must get a lot of feedback, but maybe they wouldn’t want to share it with the professors because they are their bosses.

A first year Arts student in the same group summed up their sentiment, “Make it a dialog throughout the semester, or have the mid-term evaluation.”

3. Devote in-class time

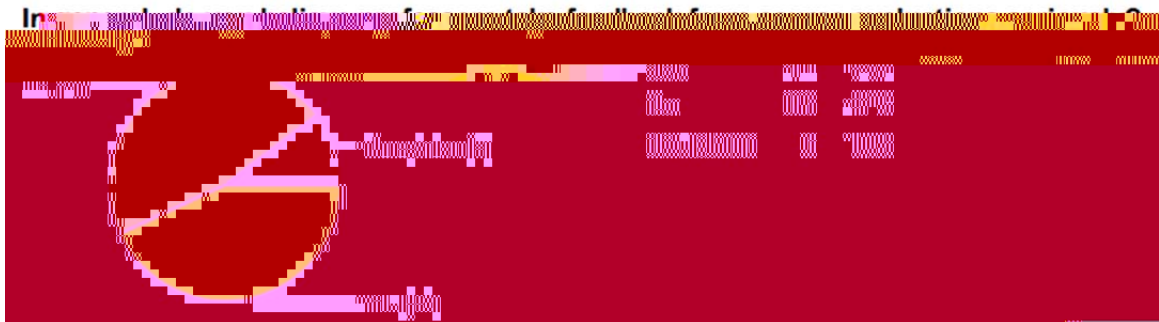
To a lesser extent, although equally important, focus group and interview students expressed the importance of class time devoted to end-of-course evaluations. Often students would suggest reverting to in-class paper evaluations commenting, response rate would be nearly 100%. Although reverting to paper based evaluations is out of the question, the essence behind this suggestion is to get students to do course evaluations on the instructor’s time. This spirit can be replicated with online course evaluations as well.

QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The findings from focus group and interviews were confirmed with the online questionnaire.



61% of students from our sample said they would be more likely to complete course evaluations after exams were done. This confirms the potential positive impact of extended course evaluation periods on response rates.



47% of survey respondents believe that instructors do not take feedback from course evaluations seriously. This suggests that if students felt that their feedback was taken seriously they would be more likely to respond.

74% of our survey respondents