Making the Switch to Online SRIs: Frequently Asked Questions

1. Do I have to switch to online SRIs?

Not necessarily, but it depends on decisions made by your department. OEA charges your department for paper administration. As of 2017 spring, rates are $0.10 per survey form and $0.08 per comment form, plus $0.16 per survey form processed. (See http://bit.ly/uwiasrates for current rates.) OEA does not charge for online SRIs. There is no university mandate or timeline for making the switch to online.

2. How do I make sure that I get the kind of surveys I want, when I want them?

Many departments have an administrative person who coordinates the ordering and scheduling of SRIs. If your department does not have such a coordinator, you may request online or paper evaluations at http://bit.ly/uwiasrequest. The timing of SRIs is up to you. Online forms open at 3:00 am on the date of your choice, and for paper administration, the packet of forms generally arrives through campus mail a week before the scheduled date.

3. Do I have to schedule SRIs during the final week of instruction?

No, you may schedule them for any time that is appropriate. Although SRIs are traditionally administered during the final class session, that is often not the most convenient or appropriate time. For online administration, opening the forms after the final class session can result in low response rates.

4. Besides cost, what are the advantages to doing SRIs online?

With online SRIs, you can receive your results report sooner—about a week after course grades are due. You also have the option of having students complete online SRIs outside of class, but this usually results in a lower response rate. If you wish to add your own questions to the SRI, doing this is easier with online administration. Research shows that students generally provide more and more complete written feedback online than they do on paper.\(^2\,^3\)

5. Will my response rates ever be as high with online SRIs as they were with paper?

They can be, but it requires additional planning and effort. Research shows that for many institutions that have made the switch from paper to online, overall response rates remain lower than they were prior to the switch.\(^3\) In an AAUP faculty survey published in 2015, faculty reported response rates of 20–40% for online SRIs, compared to 80% for paper.\(^4\) OEA is hoping that UW faculty will eventually be able to achieve 70% response rate for online evaluations.

(FAQ continues on back...)
6. What is an adequate SRI response rate?

It varies with class size, but 80% or better is usually considered adequate for most courses. The smaller the class size, the higher the response rate must be.¹ A lower response rate usually means diminished reliability and validity of the ratings.

7. Why are response rates lower with online SRIs?

“...possible reasons [from research]: apathy, technical problems, perceived lack of anonymity, lack of importance, inconvenience, inaccessibility, and time for completion.”¹

8. How can I increase my response rates?

Research has shown that without doing anything, you can expect response rates below 50%. Rates can be increased slightly by reminding students before and during the survey window to submit SRIs. They can be increased a bit more by:

• Letting your students know how important their feedback is to you and the on-going improvement of your course and teaching
• A departmental and/or college-wide effort to communicate the importance of the information gathered from SRIs
• Setting aside in-class time for students to complete SRIs using their laptops or mobile devices⁴

Talk with an ET&L instructional consultant about implementing a mid-quarter course assessment. This can help build rapport with students and communicate your commitment to course improvement.

Providing incentives to encourage students to submit SRIs is problematic with regard to legality and ethics.¹ Most importantly, it teaches students the wrong reasons for providing feedback.

9. Is there a correlation between lower response rates and lower ratings?

The research on this is inconclusive. Anecdotally, several ET&L clients have reported lower scores when they made the switch to online. Research also shows that students who earn higher grades are most likely to fill out SRIs, whether on paper or online.⁶,⁷

10. How can I increase my course ratings?

Please arrange a meeting with an ET&L instructional consultant, and we can offer you guidance tailored to your specific course and situation.

References