



course evaluations survey results

arts and science students' union

june 2014

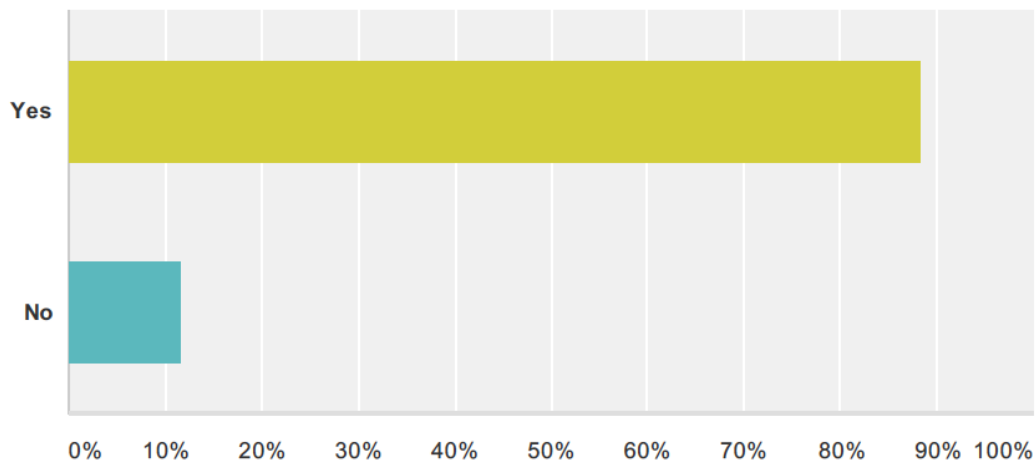
Introduction

As you know, the course evaluation system for the Faculty of Arts and Science in the 2012-2013 academic year switched to an online system managed by the central administration at U of T. Previously, course evaluations were handled by the Arts and Science Students' Union (ASSU) and were published each year in the Anti-Calendar. Since, the switch to the online system, ASSU has received a lot of complaints in regards to the efficiency and effectiveness of the online system. To properly obtain student feedback, we launched a survey online asking our students how they felt about the online system. As of **Tuesday June 17th**, we received 154 responses. This brief report will outline our findings.

Questions and Results:

1. Do you complete your online evaluations?

Yes – 136, No – 18



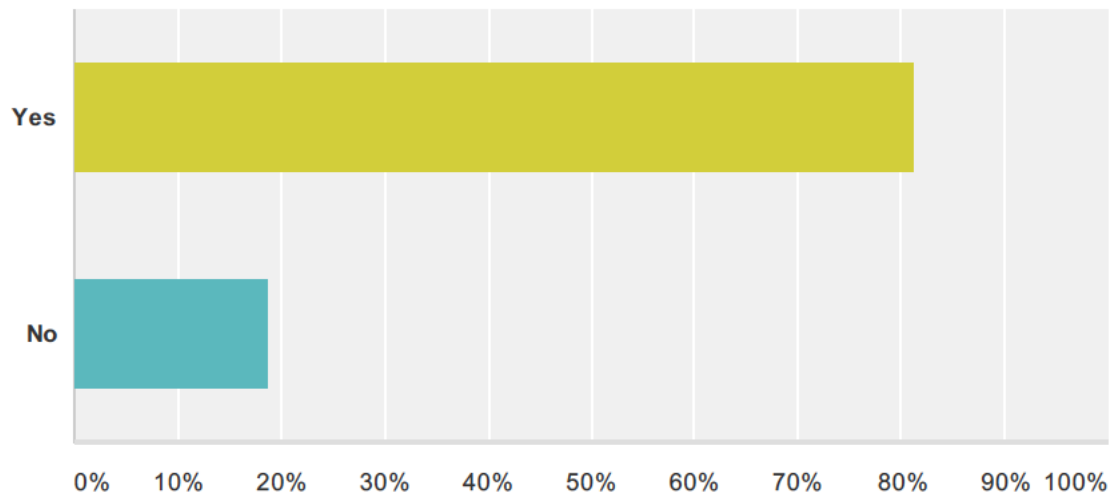
2. Have you used the results online and have they helped you in choosing courses?

Out of the 154 responses we collected, 90 students responded that they did not use the current online evaluation system when choosing courses while 39 did. 24 responded that they either used them “a little bit” or that they did not use the online system but rather consulted the ASSU Anti-Calendar. A few students mentioned, that they did not know where the results were posted and some expressed surprise that were put online.

3. Have you used earlier versions of the ASSU Anti-Calendar to help you select courses recently?

Yes – 125

No - 29



4. Do you think course evaluations are important? If so, how are they useful to you as a student?

There was near consensus on this question. Students agree course evaluations are important and play an integral role in their educational experience at U of T. Many students said they use the course evaluation results to help them decide what courses to take, especially for breadth requirement courses outside a student's chosen field of study. Students appreciate the results, as they help to complement the information included in the calendar by providing a clearer picture of the course. They noted that evaluations help them figure out how the instructor teaches, the workload, how the course is structured, the marking scheme, etc. This information is especially helpful for courses where there are multiple sections taught by different professors.

Students found this information helpful, as it allowed them to create a schedule that matched their learning needs and capabilities. One student noted that this information was especially important to them because they have a learning disability. Students want to get the best experience and because opportunities to take certain courses are limited, the evaluations serve an important purpose in helping students to decide what courses to take.

It was also mentioned that the evaluations are important for first year students, who do not have an existing support base at U of T, as they serve as the only background information for them when choosing courses.

Reliability was also brought up as major reason students appreciate evaluations. Unlike websites, like “Rate My Prof” which can be biased and unreliable, students appreciate the fact that course evaluations often eliminate extreme opinions on both ends and provide them with the consensus reached. One student said that the courses they took always had an 80% retake, and the courses they ended up dropping were not listed on the Anti-Calendar.

Finally, students appreciated the ability to give feedback to the instructor and get involved in their education. Many stressed the importance feedback plays in restructuring courses and teaching styles. Professors are given important information on how students found the course, the content and the methods of teaching used. This information allows professors and instructors to reevaluate methods if they are not working and possibly introduce methods, thus improving the quality of education. Students appreciated the fact that they were helping future students pick courses through this process as well.

It should be noted that students were commenting on the concept of evaluations in general and not the efficiency of the current online system. It was also mentioned in the responses we received that comments, as opposed to numerical values only would make interpreting results a lot easier.

5. What do you like about the current online system?

Most students said that they liked that the system was online and accessible. They enjoyed the fact that they could complete the evaluations at their own time and convenience. They felt that they could think more about their answers and that the system was really easy and quick to use. Others brought up the environmental benefits of using less paper. Some students, unfortunately, felt the system had nothing to offer.

6. What do you think could be improved and what do you want to see going forward?

Many recommendations and suggestions were brought up as to what can be improved with the current evaluation system. One that stood out was regarding the quality of the questions and how it can be improved. Students rely heavily on these course evaluations when choosing their courses. They want to know what the instructor was liked the instructor and their quality of teaching. Students feel that the current questions that are being asked are too vague and do not answer these questions. Providing just the numerical results seems not enough. Seeing

only numbers are not enough especially when most of the results' average rating are in the 3's on a scale of 1 to 5. Another suggestion that is worth mentioning is bringing back the retake rate. This gives students a good idea of how many students actually enjoyed taking the course. In addition to the retake rate, students also agreed that to improve the quality of these results, having access to comments would likely be the key component. The summarization of the comments would greatly help the students in having a better insight to the courses they may wish to take in the future.

The other recommendation that is worth noting was on the actual filling of the evaluations and what can be done to improve the response rate. Some suggested having it in class and others proposed having an incentive such as a bonus mark for completing them.

Finally, what they would like to see going forward is better promotion of the results of the evaluation system. Drawing the results from question #4, many students were not even aware that the results were available for them to access. Getting the word out and promoting further that these results are accessible and available for students to see, will lead to more students taking part in their own evaluations.