What do we know about online evaluations?

- Online evaluations save time, money, and resources
  - 50,000+ sheets of paper, 100s of workday hours saved each year
  - Virtually no delay in evaluations taken and results delivered to faculty
- Online evaluations are just as accurate as paper evaluations
  - Quantitative results of online evaluations as compared to paper evaluations do not tend to differ in any significant way[7, 10, 11, 13, 14, 17, 19, 26]
- Allowing "absentee" students access to the evaluations does not affect faculty evaluation results
  - Students with a higher GPA (presumably those that attend class) complete evaluations at over twice the rate of those with a lower GPA[13, 16, 17, 27, 30]
  - Students expecting a poor grade in a class are no more likely, and in fact have been shown to be less likely, to score an instructor below the class mean than those expecting a good grade[3, 9, 16, 27, 30]
  - In many cases, allowing students who have poor attendance to complete an evaluation can actually highlight ways to improve engagement in a course[29]
- Students give better written feedback when responding to online as compared to paper evaluations
  - More students give written feedback when using online evaluations as compared to paper[7, 13, 14, 15, 16]
  - When provided, the amount of feedback is 4 to 7 times greater when using online evaluations as compared to paper[10, 12, 14]
  - Online comments are more substantive, more descriptive, and more detailed than those gathered via paper[1, 4, 6, 7, 13, 14]
- Although online evaluations can have lower return rates, evidence of this discrepancy is often anecdotal and can have a wide range depending on strategies used to rectify it
  - When no incentive is given (i.e. reminder emails, rewards for completion), response rates for online course evaluations have often been reported to be lower than paper evaluations by 8% to 13%[24]
  - Evidence of online versus paper response rates is often anecdotal, as rates were often not strictly calculated for paper evaluations, and thus should be interpreted carefully[26]
  - Including incentives (i.e. reminder emails, rewards for completion) can increase response rates by 7% to 25%[13, 21, 24]
- Students who feel that their feedback matters are more likely to complete an evaluation, regardless of the delivery medium
  - Many students do not feel that faculty take evaluations seriously, and therefore choose not to complete them[18, 20, 25]
  - Few instructors, when asked, state that they have made changes to a course based on evaluation feedback[5, 20]
  - Faculty who take the time to explain to students how evaluation feedback is used and who emphasize to students that their responses are valued and will

be used for course improvement experience a boost in response rates by as much as 20%[1, 2, 4, 8, 13, 21, 23, 30]
    - Research shows that the single biggest factor affecting whether or not students participate in evaluations is the engagement level they feel from faculty members[8, 20, 29]
- Online evaluation responses, even when lower than paper evaluation response rates, tend to be large enough and robust enough to have statistical validity
    - Given 80% confidence intervals for all calculations, Nulty (2008) provides several suggested "rules of thumb" for response rates and validity of responses:
        - For classes of 20 or fewer students, a response rate of 58% is needed for results to be considered valid[22]
        - For classes of 50 or more students, a response rate of 35% is needed for valid results[22]
        - As class size increases, the required response rate for valid results continues to decrease[22]

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