

Online course evaluations way of the future; paperless system will save time, money

MARISSA MILLENDER
FOR THE WICHITAN

Students may notice a change come course evaluation time – there will be no pencil or paper.

Starting this semester, course evaluations university-wide will be done online. Courses in the Dillard College of Business, West College of Education and Fain College of Fine Arts tried the online evaluation system in past semesters, but most drew a low response.

“I’m in favor of it,” Dr. Roy Patin Jr., professor of finance, said. “We need to continue to remind students to do this.”

Patin said the number of student responses in his classes was very poor.

“In a class of maybe 35, about 10 responded,” he said.

Patin used the online course evaluation system in spring and fall of 2007. The number of responses declined from spring to fall, he said.

“We need to find a way to publicize this better,” he said. “Students could do a better job than administration, I think. We have to find a way to get a bulk of students involved, no matter how you do it.”

Patin said despite the online evaluations having a low number of responses, he still prefers them to be done that way.

“I did not like taking class time to do that,” he said. “We’re in the electronic age. Students weren’t excited about doing it in class.”

However, he said, a downside to

the setup is the possibility of inaccurate results. Evaluations may be at one extreme or the other.

“With any survey, if you do not get a good number of return, you may have biased results,” he said.

Ayse Kaya, marketing instructor, also said she prefers the online evaluations, but does not like the rate of response.

Kaya saw 29 to 40 percent participation in her classes.

“It’s the instructor’s responsibility,” she said.

In fall 2007, she did not offer incentives to encourage participation, but said she is considering it for this semester.

“Usually those who fill it out are unhappy,” she said.

Kaya said she would like to be able to view the names of students who had participated in order to help with extra-credit incentives.

“I think participation will go up,” said Dr. Emerson Capps, associate provost and dean of graduate studies.

The online evaluations were first done through web-based courses – courses that used WebCT or were supported online. Faculty members reported positively about the evaluations being done this way so the West College of Education tried it out.

In Fall 2007, the program expanded to most of the Dillard College of Business Administration and all of the Fain College of Fine Arts.

“That gave us a large enough pool of students to see what problems we may run into,” Capps said.

When evaluations were done on paper, the forms were handled through Information Systems. They printed an estimated 17,000 copies of the evaluation form each semester.

“It will save an enormous amount of money for Information Systems,” Capps said. “It will save time for professors and students and it will save a lot of trees.”

Faculty in the West College of Education had response rates closer to 100 percent. Out of a class of about 25, Dr. Jane Owen, assistant professor, had all but two or three of her students participate.

“I didn’t have any problems,” Owen said.

If possible, she arranged for her students to spend the first couple minutes of class in a computer lab to complete the evaluations. “It was quite a process,” she said.

Despite the hassle, Owen said she prefers the evaluations to be done online as opposed to on paper.

“It seems to make sense to me,” she said. “You can ask and encourage, but that’s the student’s choice. That’s who we’re here for after all!”

Dr. Martha Burger, associate professor in the West College of Education, said professors should check who is participating and remind those that aren’t.

“We really work hard to get 100 percent,” Burger said. “But we do run the risk of students not doing it.”

She said one idea for advertising the system is to send e-mail messages to students reminding them of

the importance of their voice.

A high number of faculty agree that doing evaluations online is better than on paper, but some think the system needs work.

Mass Communication Instructor Sandra Grant said one-fourth to one-third of her students participated online.

“We ask people what they think at the wrong time of the year,” Grant said.

Evaluations are given, in most cases, one to two weeks before finals. Students are usually stressed, busy and tired and don’t want to be bothered with evaluations.

By this time, faculty should know their students and how they feel about the class, she said.

She said students who filled out the online forms either had an ax to grind or had something very positive to express.

“We should try it again. If we continue to get low number, we should try something else,” she said.

Dr. Phillip Wilson, chair of the management department, had responses of 18, 19, 36, 40 and 70 percent.

“That is disappointing,” Wilson said. “I prefer them done online if we get better student participation. Information is easier to process.”

He said the responses don’t come from middle-of-the-road people. Students who are more involved are more passionate about the evaluations.

New House bill to limit college expenses

KIMBERLY STILES
FOR THE WICHITAN

The U.S. House of Representatives voted Feb 8 to limit the rising cost of college education.

The College Opportunity and Affordability Act is a comprehensive reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. The bill passed 354-58, despite criticism from the Bush administration.

Among provisions included in the legislation is the creation of a user-friendly website to help families better understand the costs associated with college.

The Education Department site will group schools according to tuition and the rate at which tuition has increased at each institution.

“To solve the college-cost crisis,

we’re empowering consumers with meaningful information about college costs and holding institutions and states accountable for keeping higher education affordable”, said California Rep. Buck McKeon, the ranking Republican on the education committee.

The new legislation includes both an increase the maximum eligible Pell grant amount and revisions to the student lending industry.

Low-income students will be eligible to receive a Pell grant year round.

In recent years, students have increasingly turned to alternative lenders to fund their education, which typically are more expensive than federally subsidized loans.

With the legislation, private lenders will be required to inform students of their funding options, including the cheaper federal alter-

natives.

Currently, students applying for federal financial aid – both grants and loans – must submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

The bill aims to simplify the application process, creating a two-page FAFSA-EZ form available to low-income families.

Also included in the legislation, is increased accessibility to federal funding for minority students, students with disabilities and military personnel.

According to the Government Accountability Office the average college student spends \$900 per year on textbooks – a situation Congress hopes to improve.

Universities will be required to provide students with information on textbook costs earlier, to encourage financial planning.

Also, publishers will have to provide university faculty with full textbook costs before they choose to purchase materials for a class.

House Democrats and Republican agree the bill is necessary to combat the increasing cost of higher education.

According to the US Department of Education the average annual tuition and fees for in-state students at four-year public universities is \$6,200, and \$23,700 at private four-year universities.

“The bill will create a higher-education system that is more affordable and fairer and easier to navigate,” said Rep. George Miller, D-Calif., Chairman of the Committee on Education and Labor.

The House bill is similar to one passed in the Senate earlier this year, and the two will eventually have to be merged.

MSU Democrats, Conservatives join forces to encourage student voting

LISA MOORE
FOR THE WICHITAN

MSU Democrats and the MSU Homebound Conservatives share a common goal: to get students informed and voting.

“That’s our goal. We’re trying to get everyone registered,” said Mary Payton, president of the MSU Democrats.

The groups are organizing rallies to spread the word not only on national candidates, but also local ones. The Conservatives’ rally is Feb. 19 at 7 p.m. in the Clark Student Center. The Democrats’ rally is Feb. 28.

Attending the Democratic rally will be local politicians Roger Wan, running for congressman, Cecil Yoder, and Kelly Mestas, both running for Sheriff.

“We want students to think for themselves and be interested in politics,” said Chase Thornton, president of the Homebound Conservatives. “We want students to vote and get involved.”

Fliers will be printed and made available to students detailing presidential campaigns and their individual platforms.

“We try to emphasize to vote on the person and not on the party,” Thornton said. “It’s not really a party line, it’s an ideology line.”

Payton emphasized that they’re not pushing Clinton or Obama, but instead, are pushing for students to vote. At the Democratic rally, a place will be set up to fill out voter registration cards, get them notarized, and have them mailed by the organization.

Payton said often students may fill out the card, but don’t make the effort to send it.

Thornton said his organization is going classroom to classroom around the university to spread the word about politics and getting students involved. They are also targeting the younger generation by visiting senior classes at area high schools.

“We’re trying to catch the seniors that are 18, or will be by election time,” Thornton said. “If they get interested in politics now, they’ll be more likely to continue to vote in future elections.”

He said one problem is that the younger generation sometimes vote in line with their parents and don’t take the time to think about what really matters to them.

“There’s a lack of feeling that your vote matters,” he said. “Many students are not involved in politics.”

Payton referenced MTV’s “Rock the Vote,” a program designed to turn the younger audience on to politics. Many college students don’t have time to watch hours of TV. Radio programs could do a better job of getting the message out in a way more students are likely to encounter, she said.

Programs like the “Colbert Report” and “The Daily Show with Jon Stewart” get the message out about politics in a way that’s encouraging to the younger audience and still informative, said Thornton.

“It’s a dry topic,” he said. “[Advertising] is going to have to be quick and convenient.”

The system is in place to help people, but students need a reason to get involved, Thornton said.

“I think a lot of students will vote because of the Iraq situation,” Payton said. “For me, it will be about education.”

Students will not vote based on rallies. They will vote based on their values, Payton said.

Both parties feel that candidates haven’t always catered to the needs

of the younger generation, but gradually that is changing.

“College students are not the voting majority,” Payton said, “but if we can get more students involved in voting, they will see us as a more unified and informed group that they will want to focus on.”

The MSU bookstore and student activities are also trying to get students on campus informed and involved in the voting process.

“We want to take away the excuse that they weren’t informed,” said Jim Johnson, assistant bookstore manager. “In the age of the internet and cable TV, there’s no reason why anyone should not know how to vote or who the candidates are.”

The bookstore hosted an all day President’s Day celebration on Monday with free refreshments, cookies, informational packets outlining each candidate’s platforms, and free voter registration cards available to students, faculty and staff.

Johnson said they decided to do it this year because Texas matters as a primary and it’s still a wide-open election.

Residents of Texas will have the opportunity to vote for their candidate on Tuesday March 4.

Campus briefs

- **As One Gospel Choir performance/ canned food drive; Saturday, Feb. 23, 7:30 - 9:30 p.m.**

- **Athletics luncheon every Tuesday and Thursday at Pelican’s on Midwestern Parkway at noon; video replays, coach updates; Cost \$8.**

- **UPB presents open mic night; Thursday, Feb. 21 at 7:30 p.m. in CSC Shawnee Theatre**

- **Sadie Hawkins Social; Feb. 29, 8 p.m. - 1 a.m.; CSC Atrium**

- **What Employers Want Seminar; Feb. 20, 12 - 2 p.m.; CSC Comanche Suites**

- **How Mustangs Round up A’s and B’s Seminar; Tuesday and Wednesday 2 p.m. - 4 p.m.; Dillard 329**

- **Walk in Their Shoes Exploration Day; Thursday, Feb. 21, 12 - 3 p.m.; CSC Comanche**

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