

## **Analysis of Incentives to Increase Response Rates for the Student Opinion Survey (SOS), Spring Term 2011**

With the transition to the online system for collecting SOS data, response rates declined from an historical average of approximately 78% for the in-class Scantron form procedure to 67.2% the first term the online system was used, spring term 2009, and then to 33.1% in spring term 2011. A decline as expected; this has been the experience of other institutions that have transitioned to an online system. However, the decline in the response to 33% at Georgia College was higher than expected. The attached Excel workbook contains a table on the first worksheet (DATA) which documents the response rate over time by college and department.

During spring term 2011 an attempt was made to increase the response rate; three modifications to the procedures used to administer the SOS were made:

- All courses were available to be assessed (in the past, faculty members and their department chair, selected two courses per term to be assessed; students felt that this resulted in courses being selected that faculty members thought would be assessed positively, thus resulting in biased results)
- Courses with fewer than ten students would not be available for selection (this change was made because of the possibility that faculty members could identify individual responses from courses with lower enrollments; this will be changed to classes with fewer than 6 students during fall 2011)
- Students' grades would be withheld until the end of the term (when grades were "officially" reported by the registrar's office) unless students completed either the SOS survey for each class they were required to assess or to complete an alternate survey requesting information about why they chose not to assess a class. This meant that students could not see their grades for any class until they had fully participated in the SOS process.
- The time frame for responses was narrowed, allowing the institution to "blitz" advertise to students the availability of the survey.
- Academic Affairs partnered with SGA officials to message the importance of the SOS to the university.

The results clearly indicate that these changes dramatically increased the response rate, the absolute number of students eligible and the absolute number of students participating (see attached Excel workbook, worksheets DATA and GRAPHS). **For the university as a whole, the response rate for spring 2011 was 16.2% greater than in fall 2010 (33.1% to 49.3%), the number of students included in the process increased by 34.5% (from 22,056 to 29,656 students) and the number of students participating in the process increased by 100.1% (7,301**

**to 14,612).** Every college and department showed a dramatic increase in the response rate with the exception of the following:

- Biology and Environmental Sciences – an 8.9% increase compared to the College of Arts & Sciences increase of 20.8%. The reason for this difference may be due to the 94.5% increase in students eligible to participate (1519 to 2968) and the 136.1% increase in the number of students participating (645 to 1523) and the already high response rate (42.5%) in fall 2010.
- Special Education and Administration – decreased by 5.6% ((50.2% to 44.6%); nothing in the data, comparing Special Education and Administration with other College of Education departments, indicates why this decline occurred.
- Kinesiology and Outdoor Education – decreased by 1.5% and increased by 1.4% respectively; nothing in the data, comparing Kinesiology and Outdoor Education with other departments in the university, indicates why this decline and very low increase occurred.
- Nursing – decreased by 7.1% (39.3% to 32.8%). It is clear this decline is caused by “respondent burden”. The number of nursing students eligible increased by a phenomenal 240.5% (1174 to 3998) and those participating increased by 179.7% (469 to 1312). Because nursing courses use multiple instructors each student in a course must complete an SOS survey for each instructor, this surely results in students opting out of the process.
- College of Health Sciences – decreased by 6.9%. This decline is simply a reflection of the impact of the nursing department which comprised 77% of the COHS students eligible and 68% of the COHS students participating.

These results clearly show that the changes made during spring 2011 had a positive and dramatic impact on the response rate. With the inclusion of the SOS survey policy statement in course syllabi beginning in fall 2011 and modifications in communication techniques with students (using Facebook and cellphone applications to inform students and provide alternative mechanisms to participate) it is anticipated that response rates will mirror those of the past.

One cause for concern was revealed in this analysis; nursing students are “overburdened” with the current process. A modified procedure and/or instrument need to be developed to reduce the burden the current procedure places on these students.