Proposal for Paper Evaluations

José Muñiz

17 March 2017

For the Spring 2017 semester, we have around 120 in-person courses that use paper evaluations; these courses have an average enrollment of 14 students (a list of programs using paper evaluations is at the end of this document.) Prior to this semester, each individual paper evaluation’s open-ended comments have been transcribed manually. The process of transcribing comments has traditionally required about 4-5 weeks of additional work (depending on other responsibilities) and is a major determinant for how long it takes to return the results of paper evaluations.

# **Scan and merge**

For the Fall 2016 semester, we piloted a program (with the Murphy Institute) to scan each individual evaluation’s comment page and then merge the collected comments to the evaluation report. While this process still requires several manual steps, it *drastically* reduced the amount of time required to process evaluations for Murphy. I recommend using the “scan and merge” process for all paper evaluations moving forward. Below, I outline the “scan and merge” process, discuss some of its limitations, and finally review some alternatives.

## The process

Under “scan and merge”, the paper evaluations are opened, staples removed, and sheets are sorted into two piles (scales, with quantitative data; and comments, with open-ended comments). Both piles are then scanned (as separate PDFs) and renamed according to their courses. After the quantitative data is manually entered, a PDF is generated with the results, and merged with the same course’s comment PDF.

Once the evaluation report is merged with the comment scan, the reports for courses in a program can be collected, and sent as a group to programs. We would then send reports to individual instructors.

## Limitations

There are three limitations to this approach:

1. *The maximum file size for email attachments is lower that the size of some scans.* The scanner delivers scans via email attachment. For larger classes the size of this attachment has been larger than CIS allows. They will hold the attachment, and then ask for an email to approve releasing it.
2. *Renaming scans.* The scanner does not allow the user to name the scan being produced. Therefore, each scan must be opened and renamed.
3. *Respondent’s handwriting.* Part of what makes transcribing comments so difficult (and time consuming) is the handwriting of respondents. Scanning comments transfers the labor involved from OFDIT to the individual reading the evaluation.

While these limitations are serious, they do not reduce the relative utility of “scan and merge” against transcribing. Finding workable solutions to all three of these limitations will be difficult, at least in the short-term.

# Alternatives

1. *Moving to Scantron.* As of Fall 2016, Baruch College still uses Scantron-based paper evaluations for their courses. We could rent time on their machine to process the *quantitative* (scale questions) part of the evaluation. However, entering this information is already relatively painless and quick. In fact, Baruch separates their comment questions and then processes them separately. Ultimately, we would have to re-design our quantitative pages, print them on Scanton paper, rent the time to scan them, and would still be left with the same problem as described above.
2. *Moving all courses to online evaluations.* Not all in-person courses use paper evaluations. In-person courses in DSAB, for example, use the same online evaluations generated from ASSESS. However, moving the remaining in-person courses to ASSESS is highly problematic. For a variety of reasons, students in these courses have an *extremely* low usage of their SPS email accounts. In part, this is because many of those programs are one or two course certificate programs, in part, this is because they have little other need to use their SPS email accounts. Given that current online response rates are in the high-40s to mid-50s (among students who *do* use their SPS email) the response rates among these students should be expected to *much lower* if moved to ASSESS.

Programs using paper evaluations

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Program | Comment |
| CPAC | ECE/EDUC/and (some) FIN/EC/CN courses |
| ILAW |  |
| HRL |  |
| JSM | LABR (and related)/PADM/HCA/NYTWU |
| PROM | Undergraduate level |