

# Student Experience Survey Response Rate Report

Prepared by the UO Senate’s Continuous Improvement and Evaluation of Teaching (CIET) committee  
Spring 2021

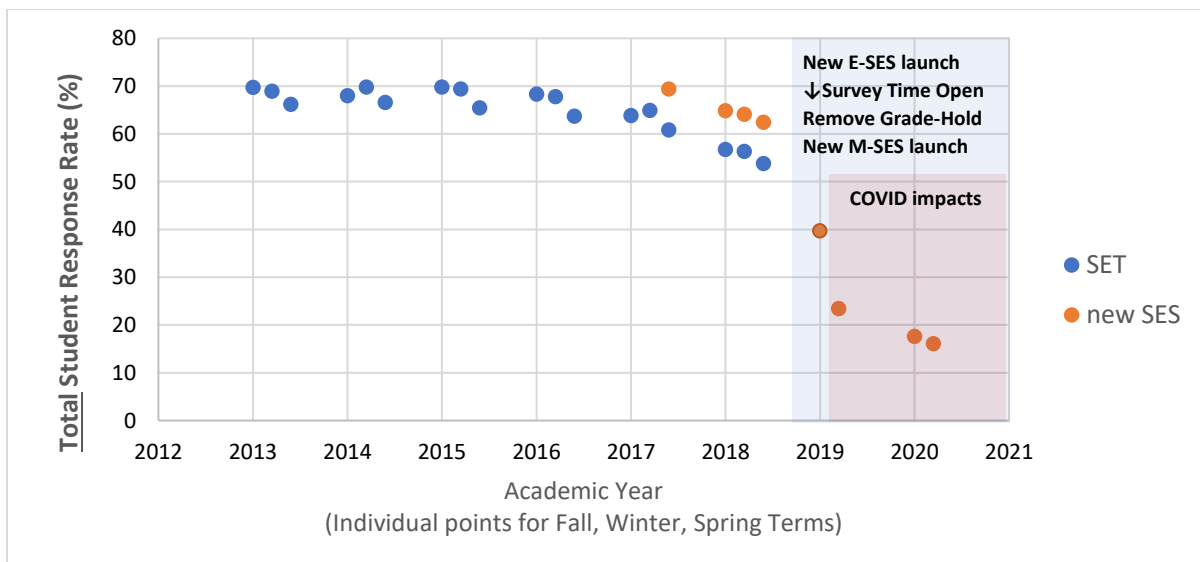
The University of Oregon is making significant, cutting edge changes to its teaching evaluation instruments and practices. Recent research indicates that student ratings may not accurately reflect teaching quality and may be inflected by bias. A research project at the University of Oregon similarly casts doubt on the reliability of numerical course evaluations. Spurred on by these findings, UO is developing a new holistic, criteria-based system that has quickly become a national model, featured in the [Chronicle of Higher Education](#) and by the [National Academies of Sciences](#). UO has consulted with many other universities and several have adopted our surveys. ([Learn more about the project here.](#))

In 2018, the University Senate approved a new Student Experience Survey (SES) to replace the previous numerical student Course Evaluation. The SES is focused on student learning, asks concrete questions about specific teaching practices, and inquires about student contributions to their own learning. In reports, student comments are collated by teaching practice making it easier to digest and interpret student feedback. Early analyses indicated the new student experience surveys elicited more and longer student comments as well as fewer personal comments directed at instructors. You can view a sample of the end-of-course Student Experience Survey [mocked up in Qualtrics](#).

## The decline in response rates

Due to a number of factors, the student response rates have decreased considerably in the last few years and the UO Senate’s Continuous Improvement and Evaluation of Teaching (CIET) Committee is actively working to improve student experience survey responses. The most relevant factors impacting response rates are discussed below.

The CIET is working to further revise policies, change communication strategies, identify positive incentives, and consider survey adjustments in attempts to increase survey response rates.



Response rates from Student Evaluations of Teaching (SET, blue) had been declining slightly from 2013-2018. By 2018, SET Response rates were 55-58% compared to as high as 70% in 2015. The new Student

Experience Survey (SES, orange) was first piloted in Spring 2018, and was launched campus-wide in Fall 2019. Initial pilots of the new Student Experience Surveys in 2018 and 2019 indicated higher response rates with these new surveys. After the new SES was launched, response rates dropped significantly. However, at the same time as the new end-of-course SES was launched, a number of other changes occurred:

- **COVID:** We have only had one term (Fall 2019) of the new SES that was not impacted by COVID and the pivot to remote teaching. Winter 2020 SES occurred right in the first weeks of the pandemic and Spring surveys were completely halted in Spring of AY2019.
- **The availability of surveys decreased.** Historically, surveys were open from Wednesday of week 9 until 7am on the Monday of finals week (~12 days). The survey closing during off-hours produced difficulties for students due to DuckWeb and CollegeNET technology issues that couldn't be remedied over the weekends. Therefore, the availability of the survey was reduced to Monday-Friday of week 10 (5 days).
- **Registrar's Grade-hold policy** was removed so that there was no longer a negative incentive for students to complete their surveys in order to access their grades earlier. This policy had caused issues for students, advisors, and the Registrar's office staff.
- **Midway student experience surveys** were launched for all courses effectively doubling the number of surveys in a term for students.

CIET approaches to increase response rates:

### **Canvas Integration**

Starting Spring 2021, our SES software system (CollegeNET) was integrated with Canvas. The Canvas integration creates a link, automatically populated within every Canvas course navigation, that takes students directly to their SES surveys. This integration will provide a simplified navigation to access course surveys, and allow instructors to more easily promote the surveys to their students. [Learn more here.](#)

### **Assessing Instructor Best-Practices**

This year, we are gathering best practices from instructors with the highest SES response rates. CIET has already reached out to instructors with the highest SES response rates in Fall 2020 and Winter 2021 to hear their strategies for increasing student response rates. CIET invited the 30 instructors with the highest SES response rates across a range of class sizes. Almost all of these instructors had response rates above 75% with the exception of those teaching courses with enrollments over 100 which tend to have lower response rates.

Most instructors with high response rates used **multiple strategies** to increase their response rates including:

- communicating about the survey to their class,
- using class time to complete the survey,
- offering positive incentives to students,
- and citing examples of how they had used student feedback to improve the course.

Nearly every instructor we heard from **communicated about the survey to their class**, reminding students to complete the survey or reiterating the importance of their feedback. Approximately half of instructors reported **using class time** to allow student to complete the SES. The other half of instructors used **positive incentives** of some sort – either offering extra credit to the entire class if the group reached a high response rate, or creating a canvas quiz asking students if they completed the survey either having students upload a screenshot of the “Evaluation completed” screen or relying on the “honor system”.

## **Communications & culture change**

The UO Senate and Provost’s office have partnered to support two Journalism students (Maddie Horn and Hunter Dennis) under the supervision of Professor Deb Morrison, to work on a communications campaign to students and faculty to improve response rates. This year, the group has:

- Created and distributed Twitter communications sent through UO department and college level accounts.
- Re-imagined the format of instructor and student communications about the surveys:
  - o New Instructor-facing emails through the collegeNET system
  - o New Student-facing emails through the collegeNET system
  - o New Global Canvas Announcements to students and instructors when the surveys are available.

The group will continue to develop a communications plan including sharing faculty testimonials of their use of student feedback and more directly addressing students about the importance of these surveys.

## **Changing Availability of the Survey**

In previous years, when the old SET was open for a longer time-period, we received a substantial increase in response rates in the last weekend that the survey was open (Saturday and Sunday before finals week). The CIET committee is considering an increase in the open period for the new SES to give students more time to complete the surveys.

## **Assess student barriers**

The CIET committee recently prioritized collecting student feedback as a goal for the rest of the 2020-2021 academic year. In 2018-19, the CIET committee reached out to student groups to collect feedback about their experience with the previous course evaluation system. Their feedback led to a number of changes in the committee’s work including implementing the midway-SES for courses and further investigating, and eventually removing the grade-hold penalty. CIET will consider re-contacting these student groups and finding other ways to collect student feedback about their experience of the SES.

## Is the new survey longer?

The new SES is slightly longer than the previous student evaluation of teaching survey. We do not collect data on how long it takes students to complete the survey. However, many instructors report students being able to **complete the survey within 10 min** of class time.

Old Course Evaluation	Student Experience Survey
<b>7</b> rating questions (1-5 scale)	<b>13</b> rating questions (Beneficial, Neutral, Needs Improvement scale)
<b>2</b> open text responses (Please comment on the strengths and areas of possible improvement for the course as a whole.)	<b>2</b> open text responses from display logic** (select an element from list, then leave comment about it) **These are Forced Response questions
<b>3</b> multiple choice questions (attendance, hours/week, expected grade)	<b>2</b> multiple choice questions (attendance, hours/week)
	<b>1</b> open text response (added during pandemic – “Describe any challenges you may have faced this session...”)
	<b>1</b> open text response
<b>+ custom questions</b> from departments	

## Students leave more comments in the new SES.

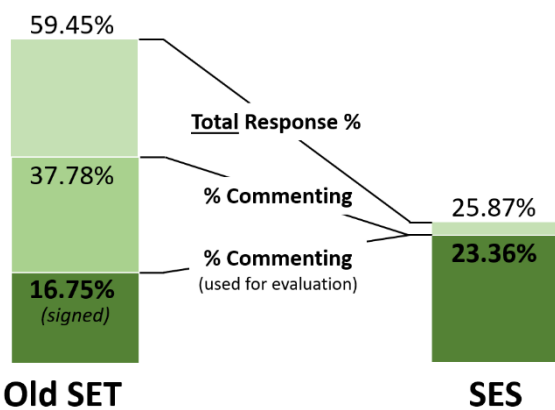
The table below summarizes data about student commenting from the last two years of the old SET and the most recent two years of data from the new SES. The old SET only allowed “signed” student comments to be used for evaluations, so data for the old SET are reported for all comments that are available to instructors as well as only “signed” comments available for evaluators.

Even with substantially reduced overall response rates (as described above), the new SES has:

- increased the fraction of respondents that leave comments,
- increased the number of student comments available to evaluators,
- and increased the number of comments per course.

	Old SET	New SES
Academic Years included	2017 & 2018	2019 & 2020
Terms included	8	4 (paused spring and summer 2020)
<b>Student survey responses</b>	<b>395,830</b>	<b>93,220</b>
<b>Average Survey Response Rate</b>	59.4%	24.2%
<b>% of respondents leaving comments</b> <i>(% of comments signed by students)</i>	64.8% <i>(35.75% signed)</i>	<b>99.2%</b> <i>no ability to sign comments</i>
Average <b>number of comments per student</b> <i>(from signed comments)</i>	1.93 <i>(1.91 signed)</i>	<b>2.99</b>
Average <b>words per student</b> <i>(from signed comments)</i>	28.9 words <b>(38.1 signed)</b>	18.7 words
<b>Comments per Course</b> <i>(Signed comments)</i>	20.4 <i>(8.4 signed)</i>	<b>21.1</b>
<b>Total words per course</b> <i>(from signed comments)</i>	613 <i>(325 signed)</i>	<b>413</b>
Average # of <b>students commenting per course</b> <i>(Signed comments)</i>	11.05 <i>(4.5 signed)</i>	<b>7.05</b>
Average <b>percent of course enrollments commenting</b> <i>(Signed comments)</i>	37.7% <i>(16.7% signed)</i>	<b>23.4%</b>

The increase in student comments available to evaluators is partly because the new SES *requires* text



**Figure 2.** The total percentage of enrolled students responding, commenting, and signing comment by course from either the SET or SES.

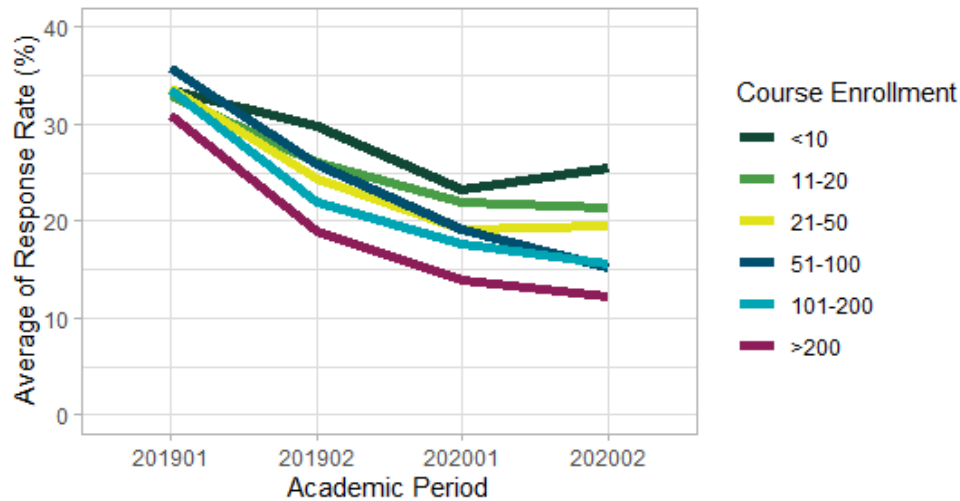
entry on two questions, and partly because only “signed” student comments were available to evaluators. The figure (left) shows despite the reduction in total survey responses and in the percent of enrolled students who leave a response, **a greater percent of enrolled students write comments in the SES that go into evaluation files.** However, the lower response rates are still troubling, especially with potential selection effects related to which students are choosing to complete the surveys. Improving response rates for the SES is still a priority of the CIET.

Additionally, a major goal in the design of the new SES was to improve teaching feedback for instructors, and

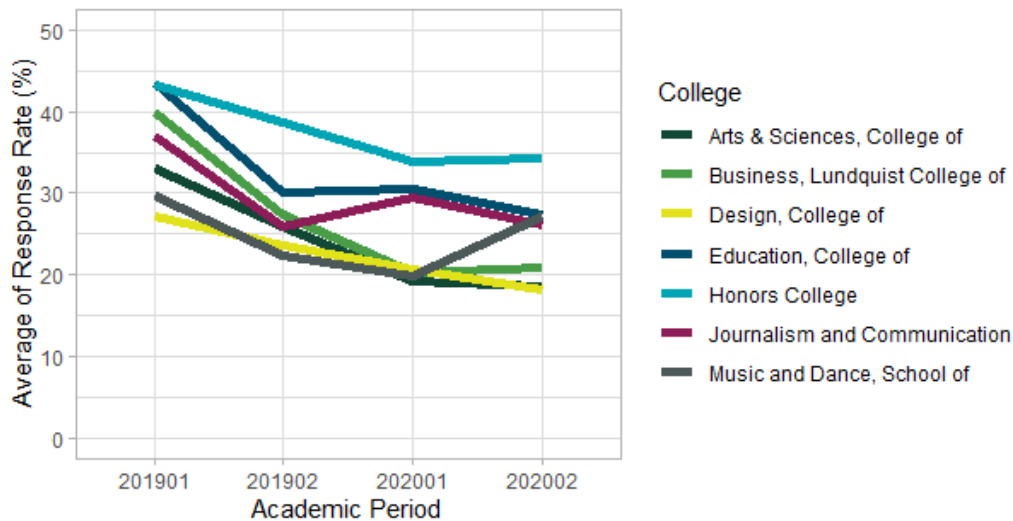
while evaluators only view signed student comments, instructors received both signed and unsigned student comments. Therefore, Instructors are currently receiving less student feedback due the decreased response rates and the CIET committee will continue to work on improving response rates as discussed above.

### Which categories of courses have the largest decline in response rates?

**Class size:** Across all course enrollments, the response rate has declined. However, the decline is largest for larger enrollment courses.



**Colleges:** Across different colleges, LCB has seen the largest decline in response rates.



**Course Level:** 100 and 200 level courses tend to have slightly higher response rates, but the decrease in response rates has been similar regardless of course level.