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Are online student ratings the "wave of the future"? This chapter introduces numerous advantages and challenges of adopting an online system for student evaluation of teaching; in it, the authors preview the research of the other authors of this volume and suggest areas that universities can investigate when determining the desirability of initiating an online ratings system for student evaluation of instruction.

Charting the Uncharted Seas of Online Student Ratings of Instruction

D. Lynn Sorenson, Christian Reiner

In attempting to "chart uncharted seas," it is sometimes helpful to look back at earlier journeys that were once uncharted but are now well traveled. Consider that, in the 1970s, it seemed unlikely that word processing would be useful anywhere except in a typing pool. Now it is ubiquitous, and typing pools, as such, have ceased to exist. Then, in the 1980s, when the Internet made its arcane and awkward entrance onto the world's stage, it appeared to be a fun toy for playful "techies" or, perhaps, a serious communication device for NASA scientists. It seemed unlikely that it would affect much of anything in the real world or in most of academe. Now, time has revealed its irreplaceable value to all of academe, to business, to government, and even to isolated villagers in newly named countries. In a word, the world will never be the same.

Today nearly every function in society can be—and *is*—performed online: online shopping, online reservations, online chat rooms, online music, online movies, online dating, online counseling, online birthing instruction, and online funeral planning. And, of course, academe has embraced the Web for a myriad of functions: online admissions, online registration, online grades, online libraries, online databases, online research, online teaching, online testing, online conferences, and online universities! Is it such a far reach to imagine the Internet supplanting cumbersome paper systems for the student ratings of instruction in higher education—slowly now at first, and rapidly, even completely, in the future? Will paper ratings go the way of typing pools and slide rules?

The idea of an online student-rating system is a "cutting-edge" proposition (in comparison to a traditional paper-based system). An electronic

system can provide nearly instantaneous recording of data, reduced processing time and costs, more accurate data collection and reporting, easy administration, faster completion for students, and longer, more thoughtful student comments. Dozens of colleges and universities have initiated online ratings of instruction for face-to-face classes—usually creating the systems in isolation, as "islands" unto themselves. Often they have been unaware of "neighboring islands" engaged in the same intense work of developing an online rating system. This volume endeavors to initiate communication and exchange among some "early adopters" in the United States and Australia. Who are the early adopters? How many institutions of higher education have implemented online student ratings of instruction?

Institutions Using Online Student Ratings

Until the publication of this volume, the study reported by Hmieleski and Champagne (2000) stood as the only available data on the number of institutions using online student evaluations. At that time, they found a meager 2 percent of the surveyed U.S. institutions reporting the campus-wide use of online student ratings of instruction. As might be expected, many more institutions evaluate online courses through the Web now.

Current Survey Research. Kevin M. Hoffman (Chapter Two in this volume) provides more recent data about the pervasiveness of online ratings through 2002. Of the hundreds of campuses he surveyed, 17 percent of the responding institutions "reported using the Internet in some capacity to collect student evaluation data for face-to-face courses." Another "10 percent indicated that their institutions planned to initiate Internet evaluations of face-to-face courses in 2003." Still another 18 percent reported that their institutions were "in the process of reviewing Internet options." In other words, nearly half of the institutions responding to Hoffman's survey had initiated some degree of online ratings collection or were considering doing so.

Internet Resources. In an informal search of the World Wide Web in the summer of 2003, Susan J. Clark of Brigham Young University found some three dozen university Web sites with information about their institutions' use of online student ratings to evaluate face-to-face classes, either for entire campuses or for entire divisions, colleges, schools, or departments (see the Appendix at the end of this chapter). An additional twenty-five institutions' Web sites indicated that their campuses were using online ratings solely for online courses. The number of postsecondary education institutions implementing online student ratings is growing. (For updated information on institutions using online student ratings or to share information about an institution's use of online student ratings, go to the Web site for Online Student Evaluation of Teaching (OnSET), http://OnSET. byu.edu.)

This volume can serve as a guidebook for travelers exploring these "islands" of online ratings "sprinkled across the globe." Riding a wave of the

future, the authors have braved uncharted seas to research and create systems where the Internet pervades the process of student evaluation of instruction.

Other travelers who wish to explore these islands of innovation must engage in some important preparation before embarking on the journey. That is, they must first contextualize online ratings within the framework of student evaluation of instruction, in general, and then within the even larger context of the teaching-evaluation process in higher education.

Context

Student evaluations of teaching began in the fifties and sixties. Through the years, they have been driven by many factors: accountability, teaching improvement, legal considerations, and budget concerns, to name a few (Ory, 2000). Student ratings of instruction are "arguably the largest single area of research in postsecondary education" (Theall and Franklin, 1990). In 1996, researchers at the University of Michigan estimated that more than two thousand articles about student ratings of instruction had been printed over the previous fifty years (McKeachie and Kaplan, 1996).

This intense scrutiny, research, and publication have continued; for example, *New Directions for Teaching and Learning (NDTL)* has published three volumes related to the evaluation of teaching within a recent two-year period: *Evaluating Teaching in Higher Education: A Vision for the Future* (K. E. Ryan, editor, 2000); *Fresh Approaches to the Evaluation of Teaching* (C. Knapper and P. Cranton, editors, 2001); and *Techniques and Strategies for Interpreting Student Evaluations* (K. G. Lewis, editor, 2001). An earlier *NDTL* can serve as an excellent resource: *Student Ratings of Instruction: Issues for Improving Practice* (M. Theall and J. Franklin, editors, 1990). In addition, *New Directions for Institutional Research* issued another important resource, *The Student Ratings Debate: Are They Valid? How Can We Best Use Them?* (M. Theall, P. C. Abrami, and L. A. Mets, editors, 2001). All of these New Directions publications provide excellent resources for academics and administrators to review the important contextual issues of teaching evaluation and improvement (of which online ratings of instruction have become a part).

Michael Theall, respected researcher, practitioner, and author on the evaluation of teaching, has suggested a context for good practice in teaching evaluation (regardless of whether ratings are collected online or on paper). In addition to emphasizing that student ratings are an important part of evaluation, Theall (2002) suggests a number of guidelines for an effective teaching evaluation process and system:

- Establish the purposes of the evaluation and who the users will be.
- Include stakeholders in decisions about evaluation process and policy.
- Keep in mind a balance between individual and institutional needs.

- Publicly present clear information about the evaluation criteria, process, and procedures.
- Be sure to provide resources for improvement and support of teaching and teachers.
- Build a coherent system for evaluation, rather than a piecemeal process.
- Establish clear lines of responsibility and reporting for those who administer the system.
- Invest in the superior evaluation system and evaluate it regularly.
- Use, adapt, or develop instruments suited to institutional and individual needs.
- Use multiple sources of information for evaluation decisions.
- Collect data on ratings and validate the instrument(s) used.
- Produce reports that can be easily and accurately understood.
- Educate the users of rating results to avoid misuse and misinterpretation.
- Keep formative evaluation confidential and separate from summative decision making.
- In summative decisions, compare teachers on the basis of data from similar teaching situations.
- Consider the appropriate use of evaluation data for assessment and other purposes.
- Seek expert outside assistance when necessary or appropriate.

(See the Web site http://www.byu.edu/fc/pages/tchlrnpages/focusnewsletters/Focus_Fall_2002.pdf.)

As the possibility of Web-based ratings has arisen within this context of teaching evaluation, some innovators have sought wider support for new online student evaluation systems. Given that the initiation of an online ratings system is a sizable endeavor—involving seemingly "a cast of thousands" and substantial resources—why would any institution want to sail into this "uncharted sea"?

Why Consider an Online Student Ratings System?

A closer look at some of the possible advantages of an online rating system is helpful to understand why colleges are considering and initiating the use of the Internet as an alternative to the traditional paper-pencil rating medium. This discussion about advantages of online course ratings necessarily involves a comparison of online and paper-pencil rating systems because the online ratings usually replace or supplement paper ratings.

Time. An online course-rating system frees up valuable class time because students can complete their ratings outside of class. Not only teachers value this advantage, but several studies have shown that students also tend to perceive saved class time as an advantage (Dommeyer, Baum, and Hanna, 2002; Johnson, 2001; Layne, DeCristoforo, and McGinty, 1999). In

Chapter Seven of this volume, Timothy Bothell and Tom Henderson discuss, among other things, the use of class time for student ratings.

The class-time-saving advantages of online ratings come with some possible problems. Some students are concerned that they and their peers may be less likely to complete their course ratings if they must do them outside of class in their free time, rather than doing them in class (Hardy, 2002; Johnson, 2001; Layne, DeCristoforo, and McGinty, 1999). In Chapter Five of this volume, Trav Johnson reports some student concerns and suggestions on this topic.

Besides freeing up valuable class time, online course ratings provide students with a longer time period during which to complete their ratings. When filling out forms in class, students must do so in a few minutes. Using an online student-rating system increases this time span because ratings are completed outside of class. Because students have more time to complete their course ratings, the quantity and quality of their written responses may increase. When completing online ratings, students' comments may be longer and more thoughtful because they are more likely to provide their feedback when they feel ready to do so and with sufficient time to write all they want to write. Some research has shown that students completing online ratings tend to provide more and longer written comments than students using the traditional paper-pencil process.In Chapter Three of this volume, Nedra Hardy compares students' written comments collected through each medium. In addition, Trav Johnson addresses this issue in Chapter Five of this volume.

An online course-rating system also improves on one of the major weaknesses of paper-pencil course ratings—high turnaround time (that is, the time required for instructors to receive reports of results after students have submitted their ratings). Of the 105 colleges responding to Hmielesk i's previously mentioned survey (2000), 65 percent reported that, on average, it takes three weeks to two months before teachers receive the results of their course ratings. An online ratings system can substantially shorten the time to receive ratings reports, thereby enabling teachers to consider and act on student feedback in a more timely manner.

The administration of course ratings is eased considerably by an online system. An automated Web-based system saves much of the time spent on printing and distributing the rating forms, cleaning up the returned forms and running them through a scanner, and distributing the results. More-over, the use of an online rating system frees up time for department secretaries and others who currently spend hours transcribing handwritten student feedback to ensure students' anonymity.

Flexibility. In some online rating systems, instructors are given the flexibility to adapt and personalize the rating forms. They can easily change or add questions (or both) to elicit feedback according to their individual needs. Of course, most institutions with online rating systems do not allow unlimited "teacher tinkering" with the form. The system has to ensure that the mandated items cannot be changed or eliminated by instructors.

Another benefit of the online system is the flexibility it provides in accessing reports. In most cases, as long as instructors have access to computers and the Internet, they can look at and print their online rating results at their own convenience.

In addition to having personalized rating forms and the ease of accessing reports, teachers can use an online system to obtain midterm and ongoing feedback from students in addition to the required end-of-course ratings. In a study of an online rating system that allowed for ongoing feedback, students indicated that they liked the availability of such a system even if they did not take advantage of it often. To them, it was good to know that they could give feedback if they desired (Ravelli, 2000). The Curtin University School of Physiotherapy has developed a comprehensive system for online feedback, reported in Chapter Eight of this volume by Beatrice Tucker, Sue Jones, Leon Straker, and Joan Cole. In addition, Cheryl Davis Bullock outlines a mid-course online evaluation system in Chapter Nine of this volume. As mentioned earlier in the "Time" section of this chapter, an asset of the online systems is the flexibility afforded to student respondents when completing their course ratings. With the online systems, students gain flexibility as to when and where they complete the rating form, provided they have access to a computer and the Internet. Enabling students to complete the form at their own convenience increases the likelihood that responding students will have the time needed to consider their rating and write all that they want to say in the student comments section.

Quantity and Quality of Written Comments. Research indicates that students provide more and longer responses online than they do using a traditional paper-pencil system (Hardy, 2002; Hmieleski and Champagne, 2000; Johnson, 2001; Layne, DeCristoforo, and McGinty, 1999). The greater length and frequency of written responses may be due to students being less rushed in giving feedback, students feeling that typing their responses is easier and faster than writing them, and students now believing that their handwriting cannot be used to identify them (Johnson, 2001; Layne, DeCristoforo, and McGinty, 1999). Students have also reported that online course ratings allow them more time to consider their answers and provide more thoughtful written responses (Johnson, 2001; Ravelli, 2000; see also Hardy, Chapter Three, and Johnson, Chapter Five in this volume, for their studies about students' written comments).

Reporting. Having used online course ratings for several years now, the Georgia Institute of Technology has experienced several benefits from the electronic reporting of course-rating results. Specialized reports are fairly easy to create and make available to all users; reports can be accessed from a personal computer; the rating results are more accessible to a broader group of individuals (for example, researchers); data are more readily available for analysis across different types of classes and different course sections; and perhaps most important, reports are available almost immediately

(Llewellyn, 2002; Donna C. Llewellyn amplifies and updates these earlier studies in Chapter Six of this volume).

The crucial difference between Web-based evaluation reporting systems and paper evaluation reporting systems appears to be in the time it takes to get the data into the system for the processing of the results. When the data obtained by a paper-pencil system are entered into an electronic system, the same reporting benefits could be realized as those experienced by the Georgia Institute of Technology for the reporting of online ratings. Still, online course ratings have an edge on paper-pencil ratings in regard to turnaround time because of the reduced time needed to collect and enter data in the paper-pencil system.

Costs. Online student-rating systems are generally perceived as less expensive than paper-pencil rating systems. Automating the course-rating process eliminates the paper costs and reduces personnel costs for processing rating forms. Human involvement in the process of collecting, entering, and reporting course-rating data is minimized. One study suggests that conducting course ratings online leads to savings of 97 percent over the traditional paper-pencil method (see Hmieleski and Champagne, 2000). However, Theall (2000) has questioned the generalizability of this study because it "present[ed] the best case for electronic data processing and the worst case for paper-based systems." Bothell and Henderson (Chapter Seven in this volume) have undertaken a more rigorous costs study. They found the overall costs for online systems substantially lower than those for paper-based systems.

Challenges for Online Course Ratings

Online student evaluations of teaching present a number of challenges. Some difficulties are overstated during early preconception (or misperception) stages; others are unforeseen until the implementation (or maintenance) stages. This section outlines some of the common challenges of online student-rating systems.

Response Rates. Response rates are one of the most frequently raised issues in discussions of online student ratings of instruction; they are also becoming the area most often studied (for example, Cummings, Ballantyne, and Fowler, 2001; Dommeyer, Baum, and Hanna, 2002; Hmieleski, 2000; Johnson, 2002; Hardy, 2002; McGourty, Scoles, and Thorpe, 2002a). Some Web-based ratings have yielded lower response rates than paper-based systems. Researchers have suggested possible explanations for the lower response rates: perceived lack of anonymity of responses, lack of compulsion to complete ratings online, student apathy, inconvenience, technical problems, and required time for completing the ratings (Ballantyne, 2000; Dommeyer, Baum, and Hanna, 2002).

Several studies have shown that it is possible to spur response rates and even to obtain response rates of 80 percent and higher (Cummings,

Ballantyne, and Fowler, 2001; Goodman and Campbell, 1999; Ha and Marsh, n.d.; Hardy, 2002; Hmieleski, 2000; Johnson, 2002; McGourty, Scoles, and Thorpe, 2002a). In Chapter Ten of this volume, Christina Ballantyne elaborates on these issues; see also Hardy, Chapter Three, and Johnson, Chapter Five.

Response Biases. Some faculty are also concerned about response bias, which they perceive as linked to response rates. They wonder to what degree the group of responding students is representative of the whole class and to what degree the results are generalizable. For example, some studies have shown that students with higher grade-point averages (GPAs) tend to be more likely to complete online student ratings than students with lower GPAs (Layne, DeCristoforo, and McGinty, 1999; McGourty, Scoles, and Thorpe, 2002a). Researchers who have also studied a number of student-rating biases have found mixed or inconclusive results: gender biases (Dommeyer, Baum, and Hanna, 2002; Layne, DeCristoforo, and McGinty, 1999); year-in-school biases (Layne, DeCristoforo, and McGinty, 1999; McGourty, Scoles, and Thorpe, 2002a); and department, discipline, or course biases (Goodman and Campbell, 1999; Layne, DeCristoforo, and McGinty, 1999; Thorpe, 2002). More research on response bias—especially in regard to online student ratings of instruction—is needed to determine if, how, and to what degree online student ratings may favor responses from certain groups of students.

Instructors are also concerned that a low response rate for online ratings might bias written responses. Some worry that written comments may be predominantly negative because students with low opinions of the course and instructor might be more likely to respond than students with high opinions. Hardy's study at Northwestern University (Chapter Three in this volume) showed no predominance of negative comments in online ratings compared with those found in paper-pencil ratings.

Comparability. Faculty are understandably apprehensive about student ratings of instruction because student evaluations—whether paper or Web based—are usually an important measurement used to make personnel decisions. Are results of Web-based ratings and paper-based ratings comparable? Studies so far have suggested no consistent differences; results are essentially the same overall, even though some variation exists from study to study (Hardy, 2002; Johnson, 2002; and Thorpe, 2002). For more recent research and syntheses on this subject, see Chapter Four in this volume by Debbie E. McGhee and Nana Lowell; see also Chapters Three, Four, and Five in this volume.

Dependence on Technology. Reliance on technology can adversely affect accessibility to an online course-rating system in several ways. Low levels of computer literacy may exclude certain students from submitting their ratings online (Cummings, Ballantyne, and Fowler, 2001). Likewise, computer problems can prevent students from submitting their ratings online (Dommeyer, Baum, and Hanna, 2002). In addition, students who do not have easy access to computers may decide not to submit their ratings.

Using computers in a laboratory may be inconvenient for some students because the computers may be slow (Ravelli, 2000) or because they have to wait in line to get access to the computers.

Problems with technology can detract from the advantages of online course ratings in at least two ways. First, these problems may adversely affect the attitude of potential users and diminish their willingness to use an online evaluation system. Moreover, the group of students entering their course ratings online may be biased because certain students are either excluded from responding or may choose not to respond due to accessibility problems. This is a particularly important issue for disabled student participants. A school that is relying solely on the Internet for collecting student ratings (and reporting results) must account for technology-related accessibility issues. Failure to do so will raise issues of fairness, reliability, validity, and access—and may cause legal liability problems.

Convenience Versus Inconvenience. Because of its adaptability and accessibility, an online course-rating system can meet the various needs of students, teachers, and administrators. However, a study at California State University–Northridge suggested that convenience is not an inherent part of an online rating system (Dommeyer, Baum, and Hanna, 2002). In this study, students reported that it took too much time to complete the ratings online, that the log-on process was complicated, and that they had computer problems. Apparently online systems need to be designed and implemented thoughtfully and with care to fully tap into their potential advantage of convenience.

The feedback from students using an online system can prove crucial for achieving success. Among other things, studies so far have shown that students value an online evaluation tool that is readily accessed and easy to understand and use (Layne, DeCristoforo, and McGinty, 1999; Ravelli, 2000). If students have to wait in line in a computer lab to fill out their rating forms, if they run into computer problems when filling out or submitting the form, or if they have a hard time navigating the system, they will be less likely to complete Web-based ratings.

Initiating, Developing, and Financing an Online System. Transi-tioning from paper-pencil student ratings to online ratings requires a substantial initial investment of resources. Resources spent in this way obviously cannot be spent for other purposes. This can be problematic considering the tight budgets within which many schools operate today. When calculating the initial set-up costs, it is important to consider that purchasing a student-rating system may be cheaper than developing a new one (Ha and Marsh, n.d.). In Bothell and Henderson's study (Chapter Seven) of the costs of paper versus online student-ratings systems, they report that, overall, an online system costs less. But when transitioning from an established paper system (where development costs are already largely met) to an online system, the initial out-of-pocket costs to develop the online system are substantial. On the other hand, on many campuses where old paper-based systems (and their equipment) have become outdated and obsolete,

the need arises to invest in a new system, whether paper based or online. Individual campuses must appraise the needs of their own campuses as they arrive at these junctures.

Anonymity and Confidentiality. Students seem to have dual perceptions about the anonymity of ratings they submit online. These differing student interpretations may suggest reasons for the discrepancies in the results of studies about some students' views: some students view paper-pencil ratings as being more confidential than online ratings, whereas others believe online ratings are more confidential. On the one hand, some wonder if the origin of their online comments remains confidential because they have to identify themselves when logging into the system (Dommeyer, Baum, and Hanna, 2002; Hardy, 2002; Layne, DeCristoforo, and McGinty, 1999). On the other hand, some perceive anonymity as an advantage of an online rating system because their handwriting cannot be used to identify them (Ballantyne, 2000; Dommeyer, Baum, and Hanna, 2002; Layne, DeCristoforo, and McGinty, 1999).

To help ensure confidentiality, student comments can be separated from student identifiers after the data have been entered into the system (McGourty, Scoles, and Thorpe, 2002a). However, simply designing an online rating system to ensure confidentiality is not sufficient to resolve some students' concerns about the confidentiality of their online responses. Students also need to be educated, assured, and reassured concerning the system's ability to guarantee the confidentiality of their responses (Goodman and Campbell, 1999; Layne, DeCristoforo, and McGinty, 1999).

Data Access. Online rating systems allow the storage and use of data in such a way that it will be more easily accessible to a broader, but still appropriate, group of people for various purposes. This raises the question of who should have access to the data (Llewellyn, 2002). Researchers are among those who have marked interest in the data generated by online ratings systems. If and when they have access to these data, at what point do students "start to become subjects of human research" (Zimitat and Crebert, 2002)? In addition to researchers, who besides the instructors whose courses were rated online should have access to these data—chairs, deans, students, the public? Several chapters in this volume address this question; see, for example, Llewellyn, Chapter Six.

Control. As students complete their ratings outside of class, much less control can be exerted over the conditions under which they do so. Some teachers express concern that students may be influenced by peer pressure if they discuss their ratings with others before filling out their forms. Others are concerned that students who are registered for a class can fill out the rating form online even if they never attended class (Ha and Marsh, n.d.).

Culture Change. Colleges that intend to replace paper-pencil course ratings with online ratings face the challenge of changing a well-established customary practice. As Machiavelli observed more than five hundred years ago, "nothing is more difficult to handle, more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to manage, than to put oneself at the head of introducing

new orders" (Machiavelli, 1513). Online-ratings innovators need to understand and effectively deal with the possible reasons for, and expressions of, resistance among the stakeholders affected by the change. To address some of these difficulties and resistance to "new orders," consider the organizational issues and suggestions addressed below.

Organizational Issues and Suggestions

Proposing a change in student evaluations of instruction affects almost every unit and every person in the campus community. Faculty are the most affected by this change; in fact, the effect on them is cumulative, if it is considered that most evaluation systems stay in place for many years. Consequently, faculty are usually the most anxious about evaluation and the most resistant to a change in the system. Faculty resistance to changes in the design of the survey, in the frequency of its administration, and in its medium of administration—from paper to online—is hardly based on faculty affection for the old paper system. Rather, their resistance often seems based more on their preconceived notions about the new system and their lingering doubts about the older system (see Hardy, Chapter Three, for more about faculty preconceptions).

The experience of institutions initiating online evaluations suggests that a campus considering *any* change in the student ratings—whether it be going online, changing the items, shortening or lengthening the survey, changing the evaluation from optional to mandatory, or requiring it more often—had better be prepared to justify the larger concept of evaluation of teaching, the specific process of students rating their instruction, and even the idea that there is such a thing as "good teaching" that can promote "good learning." The previously mentioned *NDTL* volumes serve this purpose well. In addition, William Cashin has created a valuable, short monograph called "Student Ratings of Teaching: The Research Revisited" (IDEA Paper No. 32, 1995). This eight-page review of the literature on student ratings was a useful resource in re-educating the BYU community about the relevant research and the value of student ratings. An additional six IDEA Papers address student ratings and faculty evaluation; these monographs are available on the IDEA Center Web site at http://www.idea.ksu.edu/papers.

Organizational Change Theory. A brief look at organizational theory—especially change theory and practice—is appropriate at this point. Beckhard and Harris (1977) proposed a plan for managing the politics of a transition; they suggested the following steps for securing the support of important stakeholders:

1. Identify target individuals and groups whose commitment is needed.
2. Define the critical mass needed to ensure the effective implementation.
3. Develop a plan for getting the commitment from the critical mass.
4. Develop a monitoring system to assess progress.

Tichy and Sherman also provide a model for moving ahead with an initiative, incorporating the political "buy-in" above. They suggest three stages in the innovation process: awakening, envisioning, and rearchitecting (1994). For a closer look at these processes, see Tichy's useful short "Handbook for Revolutionaries" (1983, pp. 365–448). These organizational studies and "best practices" are based on business models, but their ideas have near-universal applicability for universities and other organizations.

For decades, organizational scholar David A. Whetten has researched organizational behavior and change. He has found that it is not uncommon for those leading an organization and those leading a particular change in that organization to have differences of opinion about the meaning and merit of concerns expressed by those affected by the change. From their perspective, university administrators might be inclined to assume that there is such a thing as a perfect plan for change—hence, zero objections to a planned change constitutes a "perfect score" for the plan, the planners, or both. Obviously, this expectation is unrealistic. Planners cannot control all the factors that affect how organization members will respond to an organizational change. Nor is it a measurable standard; it is difficult to distinguish between resistance to the proposal and strongly worded suggestions for making the proposal better.

For example, university planners excited about an innovation may be tempted to discount *any* opposition. They may be inclined to believe that people inherently resist change in their routine, and therefore assume that all organizational changes will provoke knee-jerk objections. Moreover, the change agents may be so enthralled with their plan that they cannot conceive of any legitimate objection. Regardless, if the change agents "cut corners"—leaving out important stakeholders, disallowing opportunities for feedback, or discounting legitimate objections—the advocates will be shortchanging the stakeholders and themselves by not allowing opportunity for legitimate objections to a proposed plan.

Because student ratings are central to the evaluation of faculty and the overall performance of a university's teaching mission, changes in the student evaluation process are, indeed, likely to provoke strong objections. Hence, it is important that those involved in the planning of changes to the student-rating system are aware of the types of objections they are likely to encounter. In fact, many objections can be anticipated and countered through effective planning and execution of the change plan (Whetten, personal communication, Aug. 2003).

Recognizing Types of Objections. Whetten suggests two types of objections to change (in a student ratings system) that are likely to arise. Those affected by the proposed change are likely to express concerns about the specific proposed change in the student-rating system (for example, "Putting student ratings online will likely decrease the response rate"), or the legitimacy of the student evaluation itself (for example, "Student ratings are inherently biased").

The first type of objection comes from "experts"—those who believe they have an informed opinion about the changes. The second type of objection typically comes from "critics"—those who have a vested interest in making student ratings "just go away." To gain the support of experts, they need to be convinced that the proposal is sound and that the implementation plan is well conceived. Critics capitalize on the lack of agreement among the experts to challenge the legitimacy of the activity with statements like, "If we can't agree on the 'right way' to do this, then why are we doing student ratings at all?" (Whetten, personal communication, Aug. 2003)

By understanding the types of objections likely to arise, planners can first anticipate and then prepare for both kinds of objections.Ultimately they can use the proposed change in student ratings as an opportunity to reinforce the value of student feedback (Theall and Franklin, 1990), the importance of the evaluation of instruction (Cashin, 1995; Braskamp and Ory, 1994), and the significance of learner-centered education (Fink, 2003; Weimer, 2002). By equipping themselves with knowledge and resources about student ratings of instruction and faculty evaluation, change agents are better able to develop an effective evaluations system and to promote it successfully to their colleagues.

As an aside, planners should not assume that they will always be able to recognize the "real" reasons behind a stated objection. Rarely do those raising objections state their assumptions or their motives—sometimes because they are unknowable: "I don't know why I don't like this, but I just know I don't like it." At Brigham Young University, some faculty who had traditionally resented the old paper-based ratings—and had achieved only a wary tolerance of them in the past—found their earlier mistrust of student ratings reemerging when changes in the student evaluation system were proposed. Whetten offers this advice for addressing these kinds of attitudes: Do not waste time trying to ferret out a person's motives because they are often buried or even unknowable. Take objections at face value, but also do not assume that every objection can be satisfied with a reasonable answer (Whetten, personal communication, Aug. 2003).

Anticipating Targets of Objections. "[K]ey dimensions of resistance [to change] are power, fear, and imposition of the will of others" (O'Toole 1995, p. 239). Whetten notes that research on organizational change suggests that affected individuals are most likely to resist changes that are perceived to be unnecessary (for example, proposed change not needed or too costly), or flawed (for example, good idea but poor execution or implementation). What people predictably object to is imposed changes (things they do not initiate) that are disruptive ("I can't get my work done") and arguably unnecessary ("Things are just fine the way they are"). Advocates for a change from paper-based student evaluations to online evaluations—or advocates for *any* organizational change—should be prepared to address issues and answer questions raised about the proposed changes in a number of ways.

Unnecessary Change (Why Change?)

Why do we need to change (to solve a problem, exploit an opportunity, reach a goal, and so forth)?
What or who will benefit? What are the benefits to faculty? To students? To the institution? How will this change help us better accomplish our mission?
Who will bear the costs? What is the cost-benefit ratio? Are the proposed benefits worth the "wear and tear" on the organization and its members?

Flawed Plan or Process (What, How, and When to Change?)

Is the scope of the proposal about right (or too big or too small)?
Are the choices or the planning well informed? (Who decided to change? What information was used? Who was consulted?)
Is the decision process fair and transparent (important stakeholders included, credible representatives selected, periodic progress reports made, a period provided for comment on draft proposals, and so forth)?

(Whetten, personal communication, Aug. 2003)

Often a change in one aspect of the student rating process has a "flypaper" effect; it attracts ideas to change related features and functions. At BYU, the innovation of online ratings was made more complicated by the fact that the university administration mandated that a new survey instrument be designed, that a new data-gathering process be initiated (on the Web), and that a new rate of frequency be required (that is, every class, every semester, every teacher, and every student). In other words, both the instrument and the medium were to be changed. Hence, the content, the medium, and the frequency were *all* undergoing transformation at the same time.

Any change requires strategic planning, and one this all-encompassing requires a myriad of strategies about the "process" of the change. Burke (2002) describes *process* as "how the change[s are] planned, launched, or fully implemented, and once into implementation, sustained" (p. 14). At BYU this process has taken the better part of a decade. With the upper administration exerting pressure to initiate the new system(s), many of the procedures were created by lower-level administrators "just in time." Most BYU faculty and administrators supported the changes, but those who did not were vocal, visible, and visceral. Nevertheless, BYU's development of, and transition to, the online rating system has been a relatively successful process.

Implications, Ideas, and Suggestions for Preempting Legitimate Objections. To facilitate an effective change process, planners must be prepared to answer objections. Whetten offers several suggestions that may be helpful for those considering an organizational change such as initiating Web-based student evaluations.

To avoid the perception (or reality!) of a flawed plan (or process), make sure important stakeholders' views are incorporated into the decision-making process. Make the process transparent (publish periodic reports, make interim reports to the faculty senate, and so forth). If people feel that a process is well informed and fair, they are more likely to accept that the option they preferred was not chosen.

Carefully consider the tradeoff between size, speed, and scope of the innovation; that is, should the changes be made all at once ("Get it over with") or spread out over time ("Prolong the pain")? If it is likely that a proposed change will be perceived as excessive (in terms of size, speed, or scope), justify why this exception to normal, reasonable practice is required.

In addressing the cost-benefit ratio, acknowledge that any change (no matter how large or how often) is costly in terms of financial and other resources. Stipulate what can be done to minimize the costs and express appreciation to those who bear these costs.

To answer questions about the necessity of a change, advocates should not assume that just because they believe that a balanced scale is infinitely superior to an unbalanced scale (or whatever) that others will also believe this and take its assumed merits for granted. Make "nested explanations" available: a paragraph for the casual observer and a detailed report for the expert (Whetten, personal communication, 2003).

Hindsight suggests that "getting *all* the ducks lined up in advance"at BYU would have been impossible. ("Turning the Titanic," "herding cats," and other metaphors come to mind.) Nevertheless, accomplishing any such far-reaching change as a new evaluation system requires considerable planning, collaboration, and consulting. Stakeholders' buy-in cannot be overestimated, but this buy-in does not need to include every single stakeholder or every single faculty member. Isolated pockets of negativity should not be enough to sink a well-designed plan.

A word of advice is offered here about committees, task forces, and other groups involved in planning a change to the student evaluation system. Respected, knowledgeable stakeholders—who are mostly "on board" and known as persons who work in a timely manner to accomplish important goals—make the best members of groups researching possibilities and planning changes. Then, after the committees or task forces have made suggestions, ideas, and proposals, the content and process can be opened up to the faculty senate, technology council, student leadership association, and other groups for feedback, suggestions, and alternative options. At this point, the planners or originators need to fan out across campus—in person or online—to answer questions and gather feedback to improve the plan(s). As more supporters emerge, they can help "carry the ball" to, and for, their colleagues.

All discussions of online-rating collection return to issues of student evaluation of instruction and faculty evaluation in general. These "big-picture" issues are at the heart of an effective system for the evaluation of

instruction and instructors. Within this context, what are some of the other important questions to ask as the process of considering online student ratings begins?

Usually discussion begins with one or more of these questions: "For what reasons might we consider converting our paper-based student rating system to an online system," and "Does our current student ratings instrument need to be changed, updated, or improved?" If so, should it be put online? How long has it been since the form was changed? On many campuses where the student rating system was developed in the seventies or eighties, new research about teaching and learning needs to be incorporated into a new, more effective instrument. At these same campuses, processing equipment has become outdated and obsolete. Some kind of change must happen soon to update these systems. Is it also time to consider converting to online evaluation, as Georgia Institute of Technology did in 1999 (see Chapter Four of this volume).

Assess Readiness. To initiate the change to an online system of course ratings, it is important to assess the readiness of the various stakeholders. Three main groups of stakeholders exist for student feedback systems—students, teachers, and survey administration staff (Ballantyne, 2000). It is important to assess their level of access to computer technology, their level of computer literacy, and their willingness to accept using an online system for student feedback (Cummings, Ballantyne, and Fowler, 2001). The purpose of the assessment is to make sure that the stakeholders are able and willing to use the system (see Chapter Ten in this volume). Readiness may be increased by answering objections early in the process.

Not only do the stakeholders need to be ready to use a Web-based system, but institutions intending to use online course ratings also need to make sure that their institutional technology system is ready to accommodate the use of online course ratings. This includes having adequate human and financial resources to implement and maintain the system and making sure that the system is adequately suited to meet the requirements for obtaining student feedback online (Ha and Marsh, n.d.).

Consider Unique Campus Situations. As campuses learn from and with each other about "best practices" in online student rating systems, they need to keep in mind that circumstances and needs vary from campus to campus. For some campuses, it may be easier to implement an online course-rating system than for others because of their existing technological infrastructure. Campuses may also vary in their budgets and in the levels of computer literacy of their students. Moreover, campuses that offer distance-education courses may have a special interest in online course rating because they can eliminate the time and costs required to mail rating forms. Based on these and other factors, campuses will vary in their approaches to the implementation of an online rating system. For example, BYU initiated its system campuswide at the behest of upper administration. On the other hand, Purdue University's online ratings were initiated by faculty in individual engineering schools—and were used *only* by those schools.

Educate Participants. The best online student-rating system would be of no use if stakeholders did not know how to use it. Educating stakeholders to use the system may involve training faculty about why and how to use the online rating system (McGourty, Scoles, and Thorpe, 2002b) and faculty demonstrating to students how to use the online system (Dommeyer, Baum, and Hanna, 2002)—or vice versa. Moreover, students need to know not only how to use the system but also that teachers pay attention to student feedback (Ballantyne, 2000; Cummings, Ballantyne, and Fowler, 2001; Johnson, 2002; Ravelli, 2000).

Promote Collaboration and Ownership. Yale and Columbia Universities have reached response rates of 85 percent and higher for Web-based ratings. Among other things, some institutions with high response rates appear to be involving faculty and students in ways that they feel ownership in the system.

At Columbia, faculty can provide input concerning the design and future features of the system. Some 20 percent of Columbia teachers are already using the online system either to customize their feedback forms or to obtain more feedback than solely the mandatory course ratings. Moreover, Columbia University has a system in place that allows students to provide feedback about the online course-rating system. One way in which student feedback is acknowledged is through the use of broadcasted e-mail messages in which the dean responds to concerns expressed by students (McGourty, Scoles, and Thorpe, 2002b). As faculty and students have ownership in the system itself, they appear to be more willing to use it (see Chapter Eight in this volume for the description of a highly developed feedback-reflection system).

Create a Convenient System. As mentioned earlier, convenience is not an inherent part of online course-rating systems. The features of an online rating system have to be carefully thought through and designed to make it easy for participants to use the system. Researchers have suggested the following elements of an effective, user-friendly, online course-rating system: ease of access and navigation; an attractive, simple, and straightforward screen; help features to assist with possible problems; confirmation of successful submission of the rating form; and the availability of a printable rating form in a usable format in case the form cannot be submitted electronically (Cummings, Ballantyne, and Fowler, 2001).

Create a Secure System. For students and teachers to have confidence in an online course-ratings system, they need to know that the system is secure. Students need to know that their responses are anonymous or at least confidential (that is, the author of a given comment cannot be identified or respondent identity is not accessible to those viewing rating reports). Existing literature does not seem to distinguish pointedly between anonymity and confidentiality with regard to student feedback. However, the difference between the two concepts is important enough that institutions considering online course ratings need to clarify how they will ensure anonymity or confidentiality of student feedback.

Increase Response Rates. Pioneers of online course ratings have used various approaches to ensure adequate response rates. Their experiences indicate that promotional efforts, incentives, reminders, communication to faculty and students regarding the online system, and communication to students about the use of their feedback tend to be effective methods for increasing response rates (see Chapter Five in this volume for an in-depth analysis of this issue).

Distinguish Between Means and Purpose. Paper-pencil course ratings and online course ratings are two processes (or means) aimed at fulfilling the same purpose—to obtain valid, reliable student feedback on courses and their instructors. When comparing these two modes of data collection, there is the lurking danger of losing sight of the purpose for which these systems are used. This may result in paying undue attention to some issues at the expense of overlooking other more important issues. For example, online ratings have a quicker turnaround time than the paper-pencil rating. However, as Theall (2000) notes, "putting student ratings systems online purely for supposed efficiency will do nothing to improve the poor state of evaluation practice. It will only allow bad information to be misinterpreted and misused more rapidly by those who presently do so in paper-based systems" (p. 3).

Consequently, it is important to understand that although online ratings may alleviate some of the problems of the paper-based systems, other problems exist that cannot be solved through the initiation of a new medium for data collection and reporting. Failure to recognize the limitations of the online course-rating system may obscure its users' view of those problems related to course rating that are *not* solvable through the use of an online course rating but that have to be addressed in other ways.

Collaboration and Conclusion

Those currently using or intending to use online course ratings can benefit from the experience and research of other institutions. This volume provides help in charting previously uncharted seas. Its authors, "early adopters" of online course ratings, provide valuable insights and tools to others who contemplate sailing the same seas. The Web site for Online Student Evaluation of Teaching (OnSET), hosted by the BYU Faculty Center, is another worthwhile navigation tool (see http://OnSET.byu.edu).

As campuses learn from and with one another, they increase the likelihood of successfully initiating and meeting the challenges of effective online student ratings of instruction. Then, as experience with this new collection method grows, planners and implementers will have ample opportunity for local studies and publication of this research. To guard against each campus "reinventing the (proverbial) wheel," collaboration is a byword for success.

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Appendix to Chapter 1. Web Sites of Institutions That Use Online Student Ratings of Instruction

Institution	*Web Address(es)*
Air Force Academy Colorado Springs, CO	Report of issues involved in administering all mid-course and end-of-course surveys online http://home.att.net/bobewell/oleval.htm
Arizona State University Tempe, AZ	College of Engineering and Applied Sciences online ratings https://intraweb.eas.asu.edu/eval
Boise State University Boise, ID	Online Course Evaluation page http://coeneval.boisestate.edu EDTech Online Rating Form http://edtech.boisestate.edu/resources/online_eval/default.htm
Brigham Young University* Provo, UT	Faculty resources for online student ratings http://www.byu.edu/fc/pages/tchlrnpages/onlinestudentratings.html
Carnegie Mellon University Pittsburg, PA	Faculty Course Evaluations (FCE system) www.cmu.edu:8001/hub/online_services.html FCE information http://www.cmu.edu:8001/hub/fce_faculty.html
Columbia University New York City, NY	Web-Based Course Evaluation System (WCES) Overview http://oracle.seas.columbia.edu/wces/about/overview.php
Ferris State University Big Rapids, Michigan	Online SAI (Student Assessment of Instruction) http://www.ferris.edu/htmls/administration/academicaffairs/vpoffice/word_docs/sairecommendations.doc
Georgia Institute of Technology* Atlanta, GA	Course-Instructor Opinion Survey (CIOS) information https://intranet.gatech.edu/cfprod/cios/student_general_help.html Frequently Asked Questions http://www.cetl.gatech.edu/menu_options/cios/CIOSFAQ.htm
Hong Kong University of Science and Technology Hong Kong, China	COSSET (Centralized On-line System for Summative Evaluation of Teaching) information page http://celt.ust.hk/teach_in_ust/evaluation.htm
Indiana University Bloomington, IN	Custom online evaluation using QuizSite www.indiana.edu/best/course_evaluations.shtml
Indiana Wesleyan University Marion, IN	Student log-in page for online evaluations http://survey.indwes.edu
Medical College of Wisconsin	Student instructions http://www.mcw.edu/gradschool/handbook/courseevals.htm
Memorial University of New Foundland, St. John's, Canada	http://www.mun.ca/
Montana State University Billings, MT	Course and Instructor Evaluation Form www.msubillings.edu/support101/eCollege/courseevaluation.htm
Mount Royal College Calgary, Alberta, Canada	Free Assessment Survey Tool (FAST) www2.mtroyal.ab.ca/bravelli
Murdoch University Perth, Western Australia	Student Surveys of Teaching and Units http://www.tlc.murdoch.edu.au/eddev/evaluation/survey/frontpage.html

Appendix to Chapter 1. Continued

Institution	*Web Address(es)*
Northwestern University* Evanston, IL	Online course evaluations (Department of Physics and Astronomy) http://dirac.phys.northwestern.edu/anderson/courses/ctec.html
Pennsylvania State University State College, PA	Instruction Evaluation Sheet http://espse.ed.psu.edu/espse/hale/507mat/CourseInfo/SRTE.html
Polytechnic University Brooklyn, NY	Sample Course Evaluation (Ceval) form http://survey.poly.edu/Ceval/CevalSp.shtml
Purdue University West Lafayette, IN	Purdue Online Evaluation (POLE) home page http://sotdev6.tech.purdue.edu/cgt-eval/
Rice University Houston, TX	Post-Semester Student Survey http://dacnet.rice.edu/courseeval/survey/students.cfm
Smith College Northampton, MA	Recommendations for student evaluation of courses at Smith College http://www.smith.edu/deanoffaculty/Al.html
University of Cincinnati Cincinnati, OH	Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures sample online form http://asweb.artsci.uc.edu/forms_scripts/germanlang/german_form_grad.cfm
University of Colorado Boulder, CO	Faculty Course Questionnaire (FCQ) information page http://www.colorado.edu/pba/fcq/
University of Delaware Newark, DE	Project notes and mock-up for doing Web-based course evaluations http://www.udel.edu/lynam/course-evals/
University of Hawaii Honolulu, HI	Electronic evaluation of astronomy graduate courses home.hawaii.rr.com/intermatter/evaluations.htm
University of Idaho Moscow, ID	Informational site for the University of Idaho's Online Student Evaluations of Teaching http://www.webs.uidaho.edu/studentevals/
University of Illinois* Urbana-Champaign. IL	Evaluation Online (EON) http://www.oir.uiuc.edu/dme/eon/
Chicago, IL	http://www.oir.uiuc.edu/dme/eon/request/index.cfm Online course evaluation form for UIC Radon Course on Migation http://www.uic.edu/sph/glakes/radon_course/final/evaluation.asp
University of Kansas Medical Center Kansas City, KS	School of Nursing student instructions http://www2.kumc.edu/nursing/nursingeval/evcourses/evaluation.htm
University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, NC	Dental Department http://www.dent.unc.edu/academic
University of Northern Iowa Cedar Falls, IA	University of Northern Iowa Student Evaluation of Teaching (UNISET) http://access.uni.edu/acad/uniset.html
University of North Texas Science Center, Fort Worth, Texas	University of North Texas Science Center http://www.hsc.unt.edu/education/edsupport.cfm
University of Prince Edward Island, Charlottetown, PE	Department of Music Student Ratings of Instruction http://www.upei.ca/musicd/academic/sri.html

Appendix to Chapter 1. Continued

Institution	*Web Address(es)*
Western Washington University Bellingham, WA	Instructions for using teaching evaluation forms http://www.ac.wwu.edu/assess/tval.htm
Wellesley College Wellesley, MA	Student Evaluation Questionnaire (SEQ) http://www.wellesley.edu/
Whitman College Walla Walla, WA	Online Course Evaluation help and instructions https://www.whitman.edu/evals/
Yale University New Haven, CN	Yale Herald article about the Online Course Critique http://www.yaleherald.com/article.php?Article521

*Authors at these universities have written chapters in this volume of *New Directions for Teaching and Learning.*

Source: From Clark, S. J. "Use of Online Student Ratings at Institutions of Higher Education: Results of a Web Search." Provo, Utah: Faculty Center, Brigham Young University, 2003. Institutions listed here use online systems to evaluate face-to-face courses for departments, colleges, divisions, or entire campuses (does not include campus systems in which only online courses are rated online). An expanded list of institutions using online student ratings can be found at the Web site for Online Student Evaluation of Teaching, hosted by the Brigham Young University Faculty Center: http://OnSET.byu.edu. The Web site includes resources for those considering or researching online student ratings.