Online Student Evaluation of Teaching

FAQ (as of December 4, 2019)

Below are some common questions regarding Online Student Evaluation of Teaching. Please note that any reference to the AFUM contract pertains to the 2017-2019 contract. Policies and procedures will be modified, if necessary, to comply with the new contract when published.

Q. What is the software used for the online evaluation process?
A. UMaine uses Explorance Blue (https://explorance.com/solutions/course-evaluations/)

Q. When are students asked to complete the Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) form?
A. The 2017-2019 AFUM contract (Article 10, Section B2b) states that SETs should be completed during the last two weeks of the course, unless by mutual agreement of the faculty member and administration. Students in courses using paper forms are given the SET in class during the last two weeks. Students in courses using the online SET receive the first prompt email the Monday of the second to last week of classes. Reminder emails are then sent periodically throughout the two-week period. Online SETs close at midnight on the last day of classes.

Q. Can I set my own evaluation dates if using the online system?
A. At the moment, standard evaluation dates are being used for online SETs as describe above. However, flexibility may be provided in the future, provided it stays within the two-weeks before the end of classes.

Q. If conducting the evaluation online, can I still administer it in class?
A. Yes, in fact we encourage you to do so. This is a potential method for raising the response rate.

Mode and Forms

Q. Are units/faculty permitted to use customized forms and/or questions?
A. The AFUM contract states that academic units may develop or revise their own evaluation form or procedure (Article 10, Section B2). Consequently, faculty must use the form or forms identified as standard by their academic unit.

Q. What forms are available in the Online SET system?
A. The default form is the short form but academic units are permitted to use their own forms, as long as the form is used for the whole unit, per the AFUM contract. Further, faculty have the option of adding 7 Likert and 3 open-ended customized questions through a Question Personalization process.

Q. How many academic units are currently using online evaluations for face-to-face courses?
A. All online courses are evaluated using the online evaluation system. 30 units or programs have moved to using online evaluations for face-to-face courses for fall 2019.

Q. Can students complete online evaluations using their smartphone or other mobile devices?
A. Yes

(UMaine Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, 1.11.20)
Q. How does the online SET system handle courses taught by multiple instructors?

A. Students evaluate each instructor and instructors receive the report for their own evaluation. The online forms are designed with a common set of questions relevant to the course and individual sets of questions for faculty. **Instructors must be listed as one of the instructors of record in order to be evaluated in the online SET system.** *(Updated for accuracy 05-01-2020)*

When the course is taught by multiple instructors, students will see the screen below. They then can select one or both instructors. Subsequent screens will present them with items pertaining to the instructors, followed by items pertaining to the course.

![UMaine Online Student Evaluation of Teaching – Fall Session Setting_0990](image)

Q. What are the benefits of using the online SET system?

A. The online SET system has a number of benefits:

- Faster turnaround time for instructor and departmental reports
- Data can be linked to other student data (e.g., gender, first generation status, academic performance history)
- Custom questions can be included in the evaluation
- Online SET allows students more time to provide feedback

Q: How can I make use of the enhanced capabilities of this system?

A: The Office of Institutional Research and Assessment can provide ongoing support and training for faculty on how to add questions and, if interested, analyze results for supporting teaching and learning.

**Data Storage**

Q. Where are the SET data stored?

A. The paper form raw data are stored in two places: (a) OIRA password-protected computers and (b) OIRA’s FERPA-compliant Box folder for use in creating the college- and departmental-level norms and other aggregate analyses requested by administration or academic units. The online SET raw data are also stored in password-protected computers and Box, but also the Explorance Blue evaluation system. Access to Blue through the portal is implemented through UMaine’s authentication service and the Blue hosted data center is SOC 2 Type 2 certified.

**Access to Data**

Q. Who has access to the SET results?

A. The AFUM contract is silent on this topic. Currently, the academic unit chair, administrative staff, and OIRA staff have access to SET reports. When requested, reports have also been shared with deans.

Q. How can faculty access their old SET reports?
A. Faculty contact their Chair’s office for SET paper reports. In the event reports cannot be located, faculty may contact OIRA. For online SET instructor reports, faculty should log into the Blue Course Evaluation System (accessible through the UMaine Portal). Online SET instructor reports prior to 2020 are also stored in Box and shared with the Chair and administrative staff for the academic unit.

Q. **Who has access to the signed and unsigned comments?**

A. The AFUM contract states that unsigned comments are not to be included in the personnel file, unless by mutual consent (Article 10, Section B2d). Comments on paper forms are handled by the administrative staff member in the unit. Students completing the evaluation online can indicate if they would like to sign their comments. If so, the signed comments are included in the instructor reports that are shared with the instructor and unit. If not, the unsigned comments are sent to the instructor in a separate report that is only distributed to the instructor.

**Response Rates**

**Q: How does the response rate for online evaluations compare with paper forms?**

A: Preliminary response rates by instruction mode:

- 2018-2019 Face-to-face (lectures and seminars) with >= 5 students:
  - Mean: Fall - 77% paper, 58% online; Spring – 75% paper, 53% online
  - Median: Fall - 79% paper, 56% online; Spring – 76% paper, 50% online

There is anecdotal evidence that providing student’s class time to complete the online SET has yielded higher response rates. The Office of Institutional Research and Assessment will be conducting a survey in January to collect information on methods used for encouraging students to complete SETs (e.g., providing class time, sending email reminders). We will then examine the relationship between these methods and response rates.

**Q. If using the online system, can I track response rates throughout the evaluation period?**

A. Yes, response rates can be tracked in the Blue Course Evaluation System.

**Q. How can response rates be improved?**

A. There is an abundance of literature on increasing online SET response rates. Instructors can increase this by communicating with their students about the importance of the SET—and critically—how they use the results to improve their teaching.

General tips:

- Remind students of the evaluation deadlines and the importance of feedback
- Provide in-class time for completing the evaluation
- Assure the students that the evaluations are confidential
- Perhaps offer a class incentive (e.g., extra credit assignment) based on the class response rate


(UMaine Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, 1.11.20)
Q. Is there a minimum response rate that must be achieved for results to be considered for promotion and tenure?

A. No, however the AFUM contract (Article 10, Section B2g) states:

“When either fewer than 10 students respond or the response rate is less than 60% the following language shall appear on the response survey: “Care should be used in evaluating teaching effectiveness utilizing these results when fewer than 10 students respond or the response rate is less than 60% for an individual class”.

(UMaine Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, 1.11.20)