

Some Guidance

Online Course Feedback Surveys

Suggested Practices

Student feedback surveys are an essential tool for enhancing course quality and demonstrating teaching effectiveness. However, the shift to online administration has contributed to lower response rates, which can limit the reliability and usefulness of the results. Responsibility for addressing systemic issues related to survey response rates rests with the Provost's Office, which oversees the administration of this process, rather than with individual faculty members.

For faculty who are personally interested in gathering feedback from a broader group of students, the college offers a range of strategies. These approaches, while primarily supported by anecdotal evidence, have been connected to increases in student participation without compromising academic integrity.

Note: Response rates are not within the sole control of faculty and are not to be used as a measure of teaching effectiveness for purposes of retention, tenure, or promotion.

Strategy 1: Dedicate In-Class Time During the Survey Window

Consider giving students structured, supervised time to complete the survey during class.

How to implement:

- Choose a day during the survey window, ideally early to mid-class, not at the very end. Students who finish early may simply pack up and leave if it is the last activity.
- Direct students to the survey link in Canvas (it is in the left menu under "student feedback"). Be sure you active this in your course navigation settings so student can see it.
- Step out of the classroom once students begin. Your absence encourages candid responses and reinforces that the survey is confidential.
- Ask students to let you know (by raising a hand, sending a quick chat, or coming to get you) when everyone has finished, so class can resume smoothly.

Strategy 2: Offer Meaningful Extra Credit (Without Grade Inflation)

A small incentive might increase motivation to participate, as long as it is tied to completion, not to positive ratings, and does not materially distort final grades.

Recommended approaches:

- CSUSM offers students a completion certificate, or they can take a screen shot of completed evals from their dashboard.
- Add 1-3 points to a single low-stakes assignment (e.g., a quiz or participation score), not to a major exam or final grade.
- Offer a small homework drop (e.g., drop the lowest score) contingent on a verified response.
- Add a bonus point to a participation or engagement category that has a hard ceiling, so students near the maximum are not unfairly advantaged.
- Be transparent: tell students explicitly that the incentive is for completing the survey, not for any particular rating, and that you cannot see individual responses.

What to avoid:

- Consider not tying the incentive to a course-level threshold (e.g., "if 80% of the class responds, everyone gets a point"), this creates peer pressure and may skew responses.
- Avoid large point values (5%+ of the grade) that could meaningfully inflate a final grade regardless of academic performance.

Strategy 3: Communicate Purpose and Impact

Students are more likely to complete a survey when they believe their feedback will be read and acted upon. Make the purpose concrete.

- At the start of the semester, briefly explain how you use feedback: "Last semester, students told me the readings were too dense, so I replaced two of them."
- Close the feedback loop at the end of the course with a short "You said, we did" summary, even one or two changes you made based on prior cohorts builds trust.
- Remind students that survey responses are anonymous and are not available to you until after final grades are submitted.

Strategy 4: Send Targeted Reminders

Timely, personal-feeling reminders outperform generic automated messages.

- Send a brief, direct Canvas announcement or email at the start of the survey window: include the link, the deadline, and one sentence about why responses matter.
- Send one follow-up reminder 2–3 days before the deadline, not multiple reminders, which can feel intrusive and backfire.
- A brief verbal reminder at the start of the class session closest to the deadline is often the most effective nudge of all.