

## [Guide to CSUSM Online Course Evaluations](#)

### 1. Introduction

Cal State San Marcos implemented Class Climate, a Scantron product, for the campus-wide student course evaluations in the summer of 2006. The majority of evaluations to this point have been paper forms however, with the exponential growth in the use of technology, online evaluations have become a point of interest. Class Climate has seen the growing need for a better online evaluation process and has added features to accommodate this rising demand. Online course evaluations are now dispersed both by email and through Cougar Courses, which offers more flexibility for students to complete their evaluations. Due to the large increase in the number of students that access the internet using their cell phones, evaluations through Class Climate are all mobile-friendly. Evaluations are also secure since students are required to log in to their Cougar Courses account or use their individual password to access the evaluation. As with paper evaluations, reports created with online evaluations will aggregate the data for a class and the final report will be sent to the instructor with their results and any comments left by the students.

Unlike paper evaluations, online evaluations are available to the students for 2 weeks. During this time students are able to log in and complete the evaluation. Through Class Climate, reminders are sent via email notifications to the students every three days starting the end of the first week that evaluations are open. Also, the instructor will receive an email after 1 week that will contain the response rate for the class if the response rate is below 70%. This threshold has been chosen because this was the most recent average response rate for paper evaluations.

Online course evaluations have a lot of advantages over the traditional paper evaluations. Online evaluations save a significant amount of paper, while also giving students a period of time over which they can respond. A study conducted by Institutional Planning & Analysis (IP&A) showed that students using online evaluations were more likely to leave constructive comments than on paper evaluations. While online course evaluations give faculty and students a more flexible and easy-to-use alternative to paper evaluations, there are some drawbacks. The primary concern is that since students must complete the evaluation outside of class, it will be harder to get students to complete course evaluations, which was revealed to be true in our study with online evaluations having a lower response rate than the paper evaluations. However, even though the response rates were lower, the overall scores on the evaluations were relatively close. Strategies to improve response rates, including allowing time in class to complete the online evaluations, are included in this guide. While these are some of the larger benefits and concerns with online course evaluations, we have a complete list in the next section.

### 2. Pros and Cons

#### **Pros**

- Although the response rate was lower when using online course evaluations, the amount of constructive comments left by students was higher for online evaluations over paper

evaluations. Therefore, the evaluations may be more useful since students are more likely to leave comments and suggestions on the course in online evaluations.

- Moving to a full online course evaluation system will save up to 55,000 pieces of paper per semester. Online evaluations will also save money and resources in the form of ink toner, working hours taken to collect and scan the evaluations, as well as equipment upkeep since we need to use a scanner for all of the completed course evaluations.
- Since online course evaluations can be done outside of class, professors do not need to use class time to complete course evaluations.
- Faculty will receive their evaluation reports sooner since there will be no need for scanning the completed evaluations, which, in some cases, can take up to three weeks.

### **Cons**

- In a pilot program conducted by Institutional Planning & Analysis, the response rate of online course evaluations was about 2/3 the rate of paper evaluations. This may negatively affect lecturer faculty, for whom student evaluations of instruction are typically a significant factor used to evaluate their performance. It should be noted, however, that the Cougar Courses module had not yet been implemented.
- Instructors will not have complete control of when the evaluations are available to students like they do with paper evaluations. (Please see Section 3, Timeline for Online Course Evaluations, for possible solutions to this issue)
- The evaluation sample will be different. With online course evaluations, students that do not attend class can still complete the online course evaluation. However, students who withdrew or were dropped from the course will not receive an evaluation.
- As with paper evaluations, students could work together when completing the evaluation.

### **3. Timeline for Online Course Evaluations**

We are providing faculty three available time slots at which time the evaluations will be available to their students.

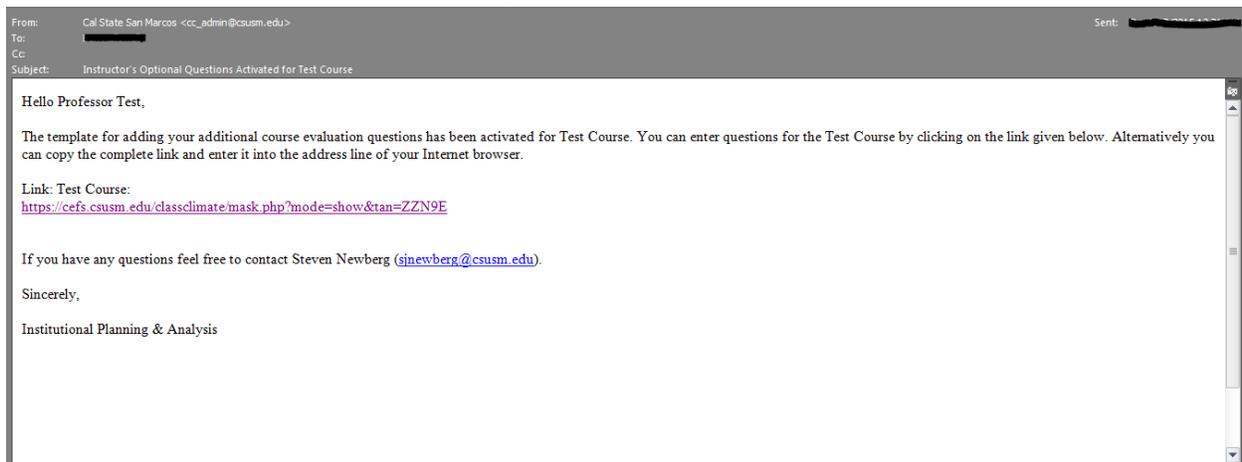
- 1- Evaluations sent to students 3 weeks before and closed 1 week before the last day of regular class meetings (i.e. 11/23-12/5 for Fall 2015)
- 2- Current Time Period: Evaluations sent to students 2 weeks before and closed the last day of regular class meetings (i.e. 11/30-12/12 for Fall 2015)
- 3- Evaluations sent to students 1 week before the last day of regular class meetings and closed at the end of Finals week (i.e. 12/7-12/19 for Fall 2015)

The instructor can tell their college's Course Evaluation Coordinator(s) which time period fits their class's schedule best and that information will be relayed to IP&A to assure they are sent out at the correct period. We will review these time periods after each semester to be sure they meet the instructors' scheduling needs. If we find a need for a new time period or a change to a current time period, we will make the appropriate changes, so be sure to alert your Evaluation Coordinator(s) of any issues that arise with the current time period options.

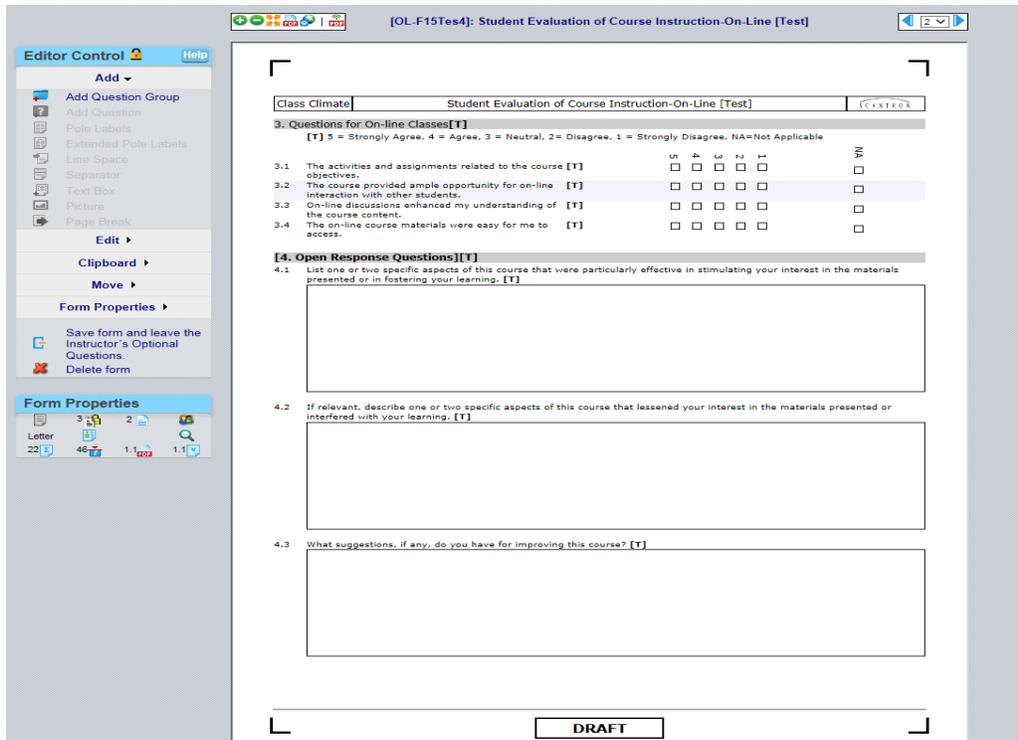
#### 4. Instructor Specific Questions

As with paper evaluations, faculty have the option to add their own questions to online evaluations. The current version of Class Climate allows instructors to add their own additional questions to the online evaluations. It is important to note that the editing session will time out if the instructor is not actively working on the form and the instructor will have to add all of their questions at one time as the link will not work after it is activated. Below is a walkthrough of the process to add additional questions:

1. Class Climate will send out an email to the instructors notifying them that the questionnaire editor is available for them to add their individual questions.



2. The instructor will then need to click on the link that will take them to their individual evaluation form. The instructor will see their course information (which cannot be edited) and after clicking the  button, they will see the below screen:

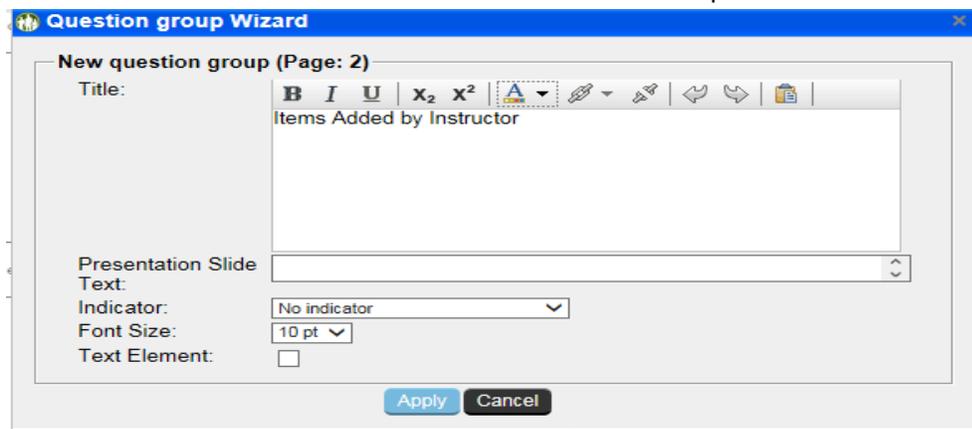


This is where the instructor can start adding their additional questions.

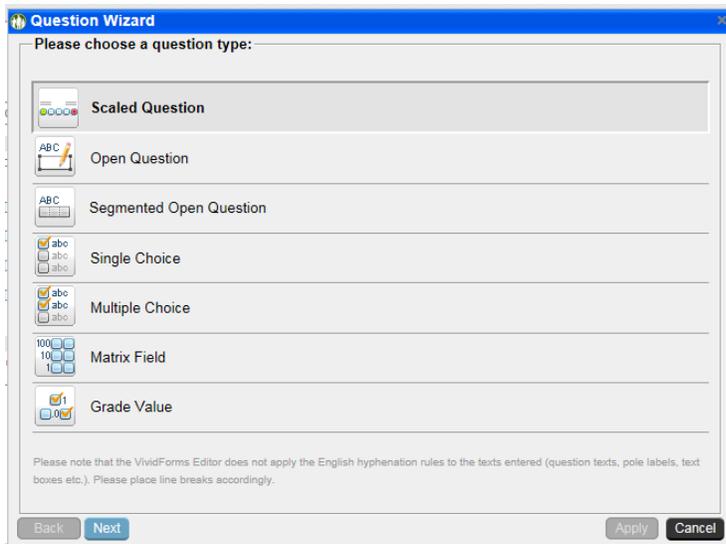
3. The instructor will need to click on the  **Add Question Group** button to start adding their questions.

**NOTE:** The editor is limited to allowing instructors to only add questions at the end of the questionnaire (after the standardized open response questions).

4. The instructor will then need to name the Question Group as shown below:

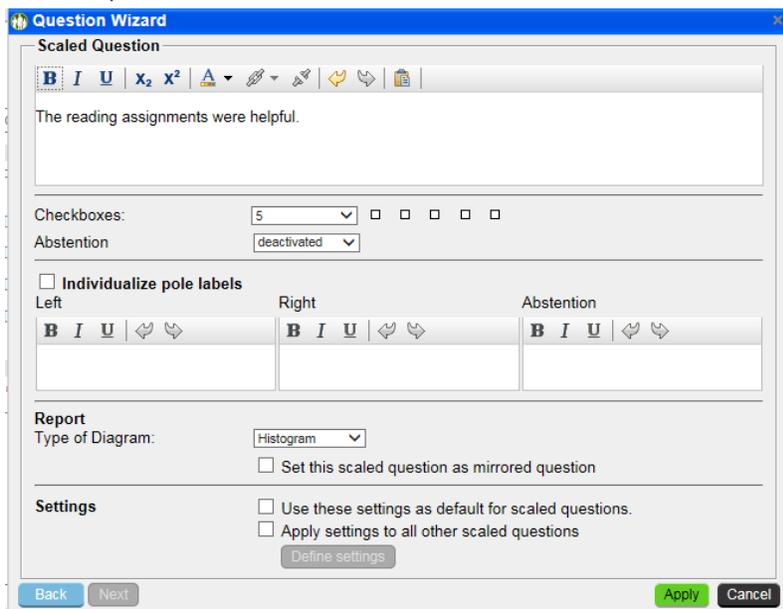


5. The instructor is now able to add individual questions under the Question Group by clicking the  **Add Question** button. This will be where the instructor can choose the type of question they ask:



*NOTE: Typically, a Scaled Question will be used for additional questions and will follow the standard 5 point evaluation scale for the question. An Open Question is also an option if the instructor would like the student to write their response in a text box. A Single Choice question can be used for when the instructor would like to ask a True/False question. The instructor may also add a Multiple Choice question if they want the student to select all responses that apply. If you have any questions with which question to use feel free to contact Ben Hallowell (bhallowe@csusm.edu).*

6. The easiest form of question to use is the Scaled Question as the majority of the evaluation uses this question type. After selecting the question type, the instructor can then formulate their question in the text box provided as below:

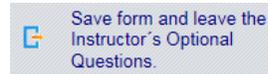


\*The instructor may add a note to use the previous 5 point scale to answer these questions by adding a text box prior to the first question or in the question itself.

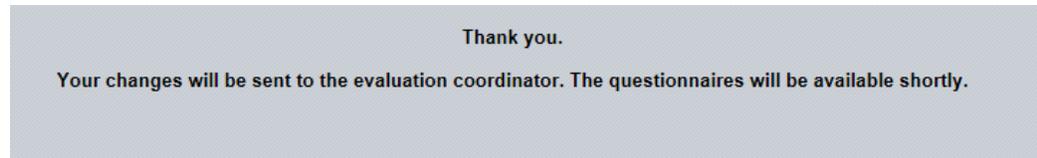
7. For multiple questions, repeat steps 5 & 6 until all questions have been added.

**NOTE:** *The instructor is more than welcome to include multiple additional questions however, with each added question, there is an increase for the student to experience survey fatigue.*

8. When all additional questions have been added, the instructor will have to click the



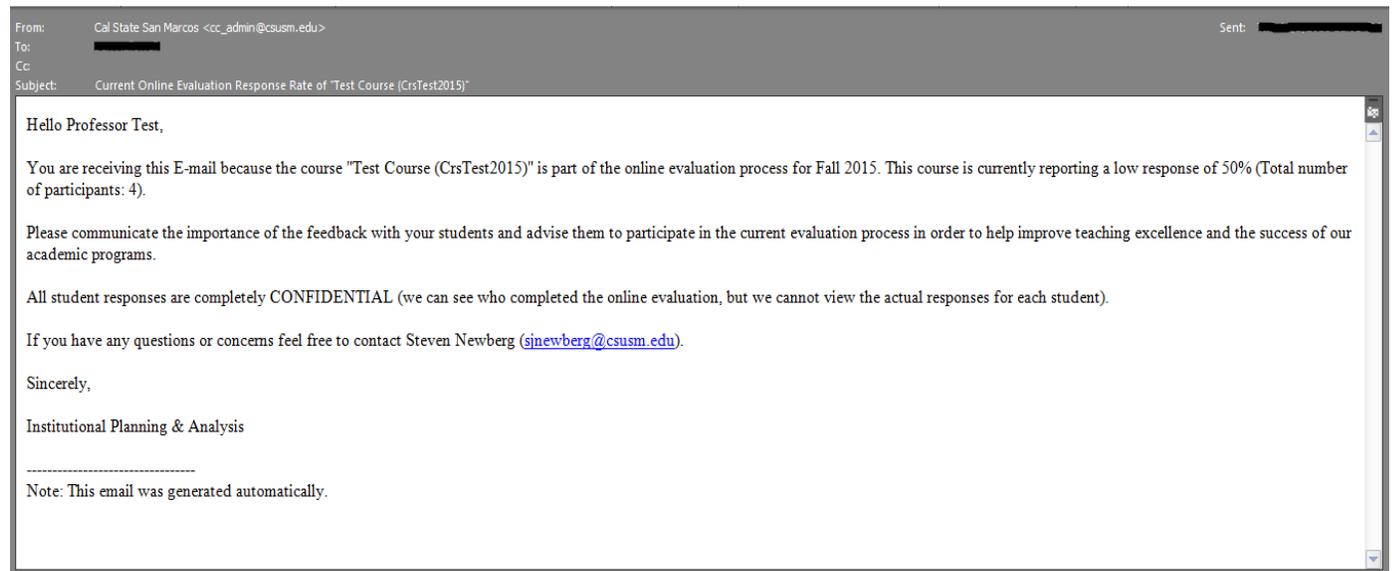
button to make sure they have saved their questions. The following screen will then appear to assure the instructor that their questions have been saved:



If you have any further questions feel free to contact Ben Hallowell or Steven Newberg in Institutional Planning & Analysis.

## 5. Response Rate Reports

Response rate reports are sent out after one full week of the evaluations being available for student completion. These reports are sent in the form of an email to the instructor *only if* the response rate is below the 70% threshold. If the response rate is over 70%, the faculty member will not receive a response rate notification email. Below is an image of what the email will look like:



Once the faculty member has received this email, they can reach out to their students and further express the importance of the student course evaluations and alert them that there is only 1 week left to complete the evaluations. This will also hopefully increase the response rates for online evaluations as the instructors can reach out to their students halfway through the evaluation period.

## 6. Strategies for Increasing Response Rates

The most significant drawback to online course evaluations is the lower response rates. However, studies at other institutions have demonstrated response rates rebound over time as the online course evaluations become more universally accepted and promoted. These are some strategies that faculty can use to increase their response rates when using online course evaluations.

1. Course evaluations can be accessed via PC, tablets and mobile devices. If your class is held in a classroom with computers then class time can be used for students to complete the course evaluations just like paper evaluations. If a course is held in a classroom that does not have computers faculty may schedule time in an available computer lab for evaluation completion or allow 10-15 minutes at the end of class for students to complete the evaluations on their mobile devices.
2. Faculty can discuss the importance of the course evaluations and how the faculty member utilizes the feedback. An example could be noting that they may help improve the course for future students.
3. Another strategy to improve response rates, that we have already implemented, is to send evaluation reminder emails out to students. We currently send the reminders every 3 days starting at the end of the first week of evaluation availability.
4. A friendly, in-class reminder from faculty that evaluations will be going out. Preferably prior to the evaluations being sent to the students so that they can be on alert for the emails/Cougar Courses Link. The evaluations would follow the timelines set forth in Section 3 and in conjunction with the faculty members' preference of time period.
5. Add a course evaluation section to the course syllabus that includes a possible course evaluation period timeline (if the instructor always prefers a specific time period to be used). It could also include a statement on how the faculty member uses the evaluation results to exemplify the importance of completion.

## 7. Faculty FAQ's

1. How can I find out the questions students are being asked?  
-All of the forms we utilize are located on our website for you to view ([Course Evaluation forms](#)).
2. What should I tell my students about the online course evaluation system?  
-Faculty can tell their students that online course evaluation links will be available on their Cougar Courses homepage as well as in their email inboxes. Faculty will also be instrumental in response rates as they can reinforce, at the

end or beginning of lectures or activities, the importance of completing the evaluations.

3. Does the online course evaluation system allow faculty to ask additional questions?  
-Additional questions are definitely an option for faculty. On all forms, there are 4 additional questions available for faculty use to ask any questions they feel are not reflected in the general evaluation form. Instructions on how to add questions to online course evaluation forms can be found on page 3 of this document. These items will not be reflected in the comparison reports, as they are specific to each individual course.
4. What actions will be taken to ensure adequate response rates?  
-We have implemented a new piece of Class Climate software that enables a connection with our Cougar Courses server. This should increase student response as the link will be located on their Cougar Courses homepage, as well as in email form. The system will also send out response rate reports to the faculty a week before the end of the semester so that they can reinforce the importance of evaluation completion to their students.
5. What are the benefits to transitioning to an online course evaluation system?  
-The key benefits to transitioning to online course evaluations are quicker turnaround times for evaluation reports at the end of the semester (dependent on grade submission), no class time needs to be utilized for evaluations, and we can save roughly 55,000 sheets of paper per semester. The quicker turnaround times would be a result of not needing to scan paper course evaluations and so reports would be available days, instead of weeks, after grades are due.
6. How do I increase my response rates?  
-The best way to increase response rates for online evaluations is to remind the students in online discussion forums or via email when the evaluations are available and when they will close (see [evaluation timeline](#)).
7. Will I be able to monitor response rates while the course evaluation is open for students?  
- Yes. Response rate reports will be sent out after one full week of the evaluations being available for student completion. These reports are sent in the form of an email to the instructor *only if* the response rate is below the 70% threshold. If the response rate is over 70%, the faculty member will not receive a response rate notification email.
8. How will I know when my evaluation results are available?  
-There is a course evaluation timeline posted on our website ([Course Evaluations](#)) with general timetables of when to expect major milestones in the semester evaluation process, including report distribution.

9. How do I save a copy of my course evaluation results?  
-The best way to save your course evaluation results is to open the pdf file that is sent through your campus email and save it as a pdf to a secure location. Once the file opens from the email, go to File->Save As->PDF, and then you can select a secure location to save the file to.
10. Can I see my results from past semesters?  
-If you were not able to save your reports from the email sent in prior semesters, evaluation reports are always available with a request sent to the Dean's Office of your designated College.
11. Who will have access to the results of my course evaluations?  
-The only access to your course evaluations will be granted to the evaluation coordinator and Dean/Assistant Dean associated with your College, as well as your Department Chair. Other than these select few individuals, no one will have access to your course evaluations and reports other than you.
12. What if I am an instructor and I am taking courses?  
-You should have a student account to access Cougar Courses where you will see and be able to complete the evaluations for courses you are currently enrolled in. For courses you are currently teaching, you will be getting the results via email approximately 4 weeks after the last week of classes.
13. Are students who withdrew from the course included in the evaluation process?  
-We have a process in place that removes students who have withdrawn from the class prior to the evaluations being sent out.
14. Would faculty give input regarding appropriate weeks in the semester to have the evaluations be accessible to students?  
-We have adopted 3 periods during the closing weeks of a semester that will be available for the instructor to choose from (page 2 of this document). The instructor can tell their college's Course Evaluation Coordinator(s) which time period fits their class's schedule best and that information will be relayed to IP&A to assure they are sent out at the correct period. We will review these time periods after each semester to be sure they meet the instructors' scheduling needs. If we find a need for a new time period or a change to a current time period, we will make the appropriate changes, so be sure to alert your Evaluation Coordinator(s) of any issues that arise with the current time period options.

## Course Evaluation Coordinators By College:

- **College of Science and Mathematics:**
  - Laurie Schmelzer (x7201)* [lschmelz@csusm.edu](mailto:lschmelz@csusm.edu)
- **College of Humanities, Arts & Behavioral/Social Sciences:**
  - Angela Baggett (x8025)* [abaggett@csusm.edu](mailto:abaggett@csusm.edu)
  - Leo Melena (x4275)* [lmelena@csusm.edu](mailto:lmelena@csusm.edu)
- **College of Education, Health and Human Services:**
  - EDUC, KINE/HD: *Donna Matanane (x4291)* [matanane@csusm.edu](mailto:matanane@csusm.edu)
  - NURS: *Carrie Dyal (x7540)* [cdyal@csusm.edu](mailto:cdyal@csusm.edu)
- **College of Business Administration:**
  - Jennifer Martin (x4269)* [jmartin@csusm.edu](mailto:jmartin@csusm.edu)
  - Whitney Worley (x4228)* [wworley@csusm.edu](mailto:wworley@csusm.edu)
- **Extended Learning:**
  - Elizabeth Rosales (x8785)* [erosales@csusm.edu](mailto:erosales@csusm.edu)
- **First Year Programs:**
  - Adam Petersen (x7327)* [apetersen@csusm.edu](mailto:apetersen@csusm.edu)

## 8. Student FAQ's

1. How do I find the course evaluation system?
  - There are two ways to access the online course evaluations as a student:
    - You may use the link below and then enter the individual specific password that has been sent to you through your student email.  
<https://cefs.csusm.edu/classclimate/online/>
    - You may also find a link on your Cougar Courses homepage for each online course evaluation.
2. Can I get to my course evaluations through Moodle?

-Yes. Our current system setup has a connection to Moodle which will allow you to view and complete your evaluations from your Moodle homepage.

3. Are the evaluations really anonymous?

-Yes. Your responses are 100% anonymous. There is no way for anyone to go into the system and track your responses back to you.

4. I keep getting email reminders to complete my evaluations. How can I get them to stop?

-Evaluation reminder emails are set up to ensure ample opportunity for the student to evaluate their instructor. The reminders will be sent out every few days during the evaluation period until they are completed or until the evaluation closing date. Once you have completed the evaluations, either from the Moodle link or the link emailed to you, the reminders will stop.

5. What can I do if I missed the course evaluation deadline?

-Unfortunately, you have missed the opportunity to evaluate the class. The deadline is made before finals so that students may focus all their attention on finals during that last week.

6. How can I see my grades if I do not want to evaluate courses that are on my list?

-You will still be able to see your grades on the official grade posting date even if you do not complete your evaluations.

7. Not all of my courses for evaluation are appearing on my list. Why not?

-Some courses, such as Independent Studies courses, do not get evaluated due to low enrollment and difficulty to keep anonymity. Therefore, not all courses will appear on your list. If there is a course missing that you believe should have an evaluation feel free to contact your College's Dean's Office (see question 11 for contact information).

8. What if I have two instructors for a course?

-You will receive two separate evaluations, one for each instructor but under the same course. You will need to respond to both in order to evaluate both instructors.

9. I have a course that has a lecture and a discussion section. What do I do?

-You should receive two separate evaluations for each section unless the instructor prefers to only have one evaluation completed for both sections.

10. There is an instructor I don't recognize in my evaluation list. What should I do?

-The best thing to do is to contact the Dean's Office for your respective College and they will work with IP&A to correct the issue.

CHABSS Dean's Office

Office: Social and Behavioral Sciences Building 4115

Phone: 760-750-4200

Email: [chabss@csusm.edu](mailto:chabss@csusm.edu)

CSM Dean's Office

Office: Craven Hall 6211

Phone: 760-750-7200

Email: [csm@csusm.edu](mailto:csm@csusm.edu)

COBA Dean's Office

Phone: 760-750-4211

Email: [cba@csusm.edu](mailto:cba@csusm.edu)

COEHHS Dean's Office:

Office: University Hall Suite 421

Phone: 760-750-4311

11. There is a course I don't recognize in my evaluation list. What should I do?

-The best thing to do is to contact the Dean's Office for your respective College and they will work with IP&A to correct the issue (see question 10 for contact information). This mistake may be due to dropping the course after the enrollment lists have been received.

12. Can I modify an evaluation that I have already submitted?

-No. Once submitted, the evaluation cannot be edited. In addition, if you do not complete the evaluation in one sitting you will not be able to complete it later. You will have to restart the evaluation from the beginning.

13. I submitted an evaluation for the wrong Professor!

-If this issue arises, please contact your College's Dean's Office and they will work with IP&A to take appropriate action in assisting you.

14. Why do evaluations close before finals?

-This deadline has two reasons. One is that the campus does not want you to have to focus on things other than your finals during Finals Week. The second reason is so that you, the student, evaluate the course as a whole. If you are to evaluate the course after a disappointing finals experience, it may have an adverse effect your view of the course as a whole.

15. I can't fill out my evaluations because Moodle is down. What do I do?  
-Typically Moodle will only be down for an hour early in the morning while the system performs backups. Otherwise, there should be no issues. However, if there are any issues while trying to login to Moodle, feel free to email the help center at [cchelp@csusm.edu](mailto:cchelp@csusm.edu).
16. I can log into Moodle, but I can't get my evaluations screen to come up.  
-If you cannot see your evaluation screen please contact cougar courses support via email ([cchelp@csusm.edu](mailto:cchelp@csusm.edu)) or the Student Help Desk (x6505).
17. I'm a new student and I am not familiar with the online evaluation system. What should I do?  
-One suggestion would be to speak with fellow students or your professors about the process. You may also send inquiries to Steven Newberg ([sjnewberg@csusm.edu](mailto:sjnewberg@csusm.edu)) if questions still remain.
18. How can I get more help?  
-You can always contact the College's Dean's Offices or Steven Newberg ([sjnewberg@csusm.edu](mailto:sjnewberg@csusm.edu)) with any questions you have about your course evaluations.
19. Does it really matter if I complete these evaluations?  
-It really does matter if you complete these evaluations. It is important for you to provide constructive feedback for the instructors so that they can gauge how the course is perceived by students. In turn, they will aid in course improvements if necessary.
20. Will my instructor know if I completed the evaluation?  
-The instructor will not know if any specific individual has completed the evaluation. Instructors do receive the total number of responses, without any identifying information, in their final report as well as a response rate report about half way through the process.
21. Are my responses confidential?  
-Though the instructors will not know what responses an individual student has made, the responses are shared with the instructor as averages on the final report and the comments will also appear on their reports. But again, they cannot be traced back to any login, email or Moodle user.
22. If the instructor does not know if I complete my evaluation, how am I able to receive reminders?  
-The reminders are sent from the central evaluation system and based on which passwords have and have not been utilized to complete the evaluations. Therefore the instructors do not administer the reminders going out to the

students and do not know which students have not yet completed the evaluations.

23. I am receiving email notices to complete evaluations for courses which are not in my major, why?

-You will be asked to complete an evaluation for each course you are enrolled in, whether it is within your major's field or not. Courses are continually being improved upon and your feedback on all courses is appreciated and utilized in these improvements.

24. Are all of the course evaluations released at the same time?

-Yes. The only difference in release time is for courses that end after eight weeks, in which the evaluations will be released within two weeks of the end of the eight week period. All other courses will receive their course evaluations two weeks prior to finals week.

25. I receive an error that my credentials are invalid when I attempt to log into the Moodle. What do I do?

-The best thing to do is contact the Student Help Desk (x6505) or the cougar courses support ([cchelp@csusm.edu](mailto:cchelp@csusm.edu)).

26. When I try to access my evaluations, I receive an error indicating the 'tasks are not accessible'. What's wrong?

-This could be an issue with internet connection, the Class Climate Evaluation system or perhaps moodle. If this error occurs please contact the Student Help Desk (x6505) or Steven Newberg ([sjnewberg@csusm.edu](mailto:sjnewberg@csusm.edu)). We will do our best to quickly resolve the issue.

27. What is the incentive for completing my evaluations prior to or on "Evaluation Day"?

-There are no incentives for completing the evaluations prior to the "Evaluation Day." We encourage students to complete the evaluation at a time that fits their schedule as well as falls within the timeline given (2 weeks).

28. I dropped (or withdrew from) this class – why are you asking me to evaluate it?

-This issue could be due to the date of the course enrollment report that is pulled and did not indicate your withdrawal from the course. If this issue occurs please contact Steven Newberg ([sjnewberg@csusm.edu](mailto:sjnewberg@csusm.edu)) in IP&A.

29. Is it possible to evaluate the same course more than once?

-No. Each link/password can only be used once and therefore you will never be able to evaluate any course more than once.

30. I do not have time to complete my evaluation right now. Will my answers be lost if I stop in the middle of the evaluation?

-Unfortunately, your answers will be lost if you stop in the middle of the evaluation. The system does not save responses for unfinished evaluation forms therefore you will have to log back in to complete the entire evaluation again.

31. How can my responses be anonymous if I have to log-in?

-There is an individual password connected to your cougar courses link however the password cannot be tracked back to your individual responses on the evaluations. And in turn, cannot be tracked back to your CSUSM login.

32. If responses are confidential, how am I able to receive email reminders that I have not yet completed my course evaluation?

-The reminders are sent from the central evaluation system and based on which passwords have and have not been utilized to complete the evaluations. These passwords are not connected to your login information or your responses in any way. It only serves as an indicator for response rates. Once you complete your evaluation, your responses are completely anonymous.

33. Will evaluation results be available to faculty before grades are posted?

-No. Protocols are taken so that evaluation results are only released AFTER the faculty member has posted their final grades. This procedure assures that the evaluations will have no impact on any final grades.

34. How will I know the online course evaluations are available?

-You will receive an email to your student inbox as well as a link to your evaluations on your Cougar Courses homepage. These should be available two weeks before finals week and if you do not receive the email or see the link by then please contact your College's Dean's Office.

35. How can I tell if I have completed all of my evaluations?

-The link to each course will disappear from your Cougar Courses homepage after each evaluation is completed. In the case of email reminders being sent, they will stop being sent to you as soon as each evaluation is completed.

36. Are course evaluations mandatory?

-The course evaluations are not mandatory however they are very important to course improvements.

37. How are the results of course evaluations used?

-The results of course evaluations are used to improve portions of courses that are identified by students as needing improvements.

38. Who do I contact if I have more questions about the process or if I have difficulty accessing my evaluations?

-Feel free to contact the Dean's Office of your corresponding College or Steven Newberg ([sjnewberg@csusm.edu](mailto:sjnewberg@csusm.edu)).

**CHABSS Dean's Office**

Office: Social and Behavioral Sciences Building 4115

Phone: 760-750-4200

Email: [chabss@csusm.edu](mailto:chabss@csusm.edu)

**CSM Dean's Office**

Office: Craven Hall 6211

Phone: 760-750-7200

Email: [csm@csusm.edu](mailto:csm@csusm.edu)

**COBA Dean's Office**

Phone: 760-750-4211

Email: [cba@csusm.edu](mailto:cba@csusm.edu)

**COEHHS Dean's Office:**

Office: University Hall Suite 421

Phone: 760-750-4311