



Paper versus Online Survey Delivery The IDEA Center

The use of online technology to deliver the IDEA Student Ratings of Instruction system has increased dramatically since 2002. Because of this, it was important to investigate if survey delivery method (paper versus online administration) has an impact on student ratings using the IDEA system.

A total of 651,587 classes using paper forms and 53,000 completing ratings online between 2002 and 2008 were included in the study. Table 1 presents the frequency and percentage of classes completing ratings in both formats across the seven-year period. The percentage of classes using IDEA Online noticeably increased across the years.

Table 1
Frequency and Percentage of Classes Using Paper and Online Survey Delivery

Year	Delivery Method		% Online	Total
	Paper	Online		
2002	65,169	578	0.9	65,747
2003	72,833	919	1.2	73,752
2004	77,888	1,407	1.8	79,295
2005	93,866	3,325	3.4	97,191
2006	98,526	6,727	6.4	105,253
2007	114,059	12,457	9.8	126,516
2008	129,246	27,587	17.6	156,833
Total	651,587	53,000	7.5	704,587

The results of this study revealed more similarities than meaningful differences for either faculty ratings (using the Faculty Information Form) or student ratings (using the Diagnostic Form), suggesting that ratings are not impacted by survey delivery method.

The most notable difference was found in response rate, as students were more likely to complete ratings on paper. As shown in Table 2, the paper delivery resulted in a 78% response rate for both the IDEA Diagnostic and Short Forms. In contrast, while the overall average for online survey delivery was 55%, those using the longer Diagnostic Form had a slightly higher average response rate (56%) compared to the Short Form use (53%).

Table 2
Average and Standard Deviations for Student Response Rates by Type of Survey Method and IDEA Form Type

Form Type	Paper			Online		
	Avg.	SD	N	Avg.	SD	N
Short	0.78	0.17	219,050	0.53	0.23	20,173
Diagnostic	0.78	0.17	432,537	0.56	0.24	32,827
Total	0.78	0.17	651,587	0.55	0.24	53,000

Response rate was impacted by class size for both paper and online survey administration (see Table 3) with higher response rates generally found in smaller classes.

Table 3
Averages and Standard Deviations for Response Rates by Type of Survey Delivery and Number of Students Enrolled

Number Enrolled	Paper			Online		
	Avg.	SD	N	Avg.	SD	N
< 10	0.86	0.16	89,505	0.61	0.25	9,144
10-14	0.82	0.16	114,040	0.54	0.23	12,308
15-24	0.78	0.16	252,752	0.54	0.23	20,116
25-39	0.75	0.16	147,711	0.54	0.24	8,134
> 39	0.68	0.18	47,579	0.54	0.24	3,298
Total	0.78	0.17	651,587	0.55	0.24	53,000

Even though there were differences in response rates, there were no meaningful differences when the results of the ratings were compared between the two types of survey delivery. Specifically, the study found the following similarities.

- Instructor ratings of the importance of the 12 IDEA learning objectives did not differ meaningfully between survey methods. The percent of instructors rating each objective as essential or important was very similar between formats.
- Student progress on those important and essential objectives was comparable. Students report similar progress regardless of survey delivery method.
- Students consistently reported greater progress on objectives the instructor rated as important or essential regardless of survey delivery method.
- Student ratings of teacher and course excellence were comparable, regardless of survey delivery method.
- Students viewed instructor use of the 20 teaching methods similarly across survey delivery methods.
- The pattern of correlations between student ratings of teaching methods, progress on objectives, and global measures of teaching effectiveness were very much alike.
- The correlations between student/course characteristics and global measures of effectiveness (i.e., excellence of teacher and course) for ratings completed online paralleled those using paper.

Summary

Overall, the current findings suggest that survey delivery method, whether paper or online, does not impact student ratings when using the IDEA Student Ratings of Instruction system.

While response rate was found to be higher with paper administration, response rate was not meaningfully correlated with student ratings for either paper or online survey administration. Nonetheless, differences in response rate can affect representativeness and confidence in results. Improving response rates should continue to be a goal for campuses using online delivery. [Best Practices for Online Response Rates](#) provides some strategies that might help facilitate student responses to online surveys.

For a detailed discussion of this research, please see [Technical Report #16: An Analysis of IDEA Student Ratings of Instruction Using Paper versus Online Survey Methods 2002-2008 Data](#).