

Revision to the SES: Attendance Questions

Austin Hocker

Academic Data Analytics & Teaching Engagement Program Office of the Provost

The end of term student experience survey (SES) includes a set of questions about how students “supported their own learning.” One question asks about student attendance and then provides an opportunity for a comment about why the student attended class with that frequency:

How often did you attend class?

- 90-100% of the time
- 75-90% of the time
- 50-75% of the time
- 25-50% of the time
- 0-25% of the time
- This was a fully online class.

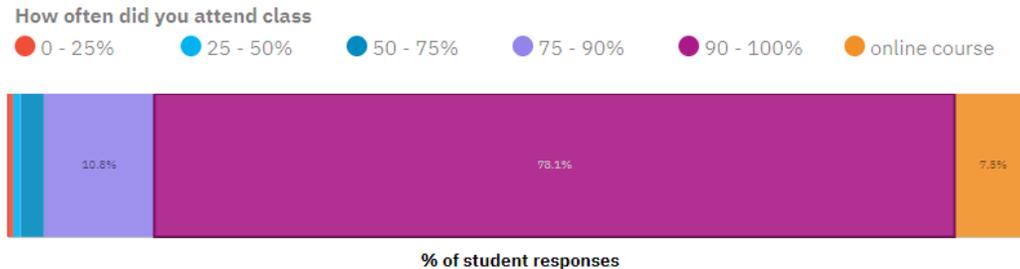
Students are asked an open-ended question for each response (except for “This was a fully online class”)

Question: Why did you attend class _____% of the time? (Response is not required to continue)

At the request of the UO Senate Continuous Improvement and Evaluation of Teaching Committee (CIET), this report summarizes how students respond to these questions and is designed to help the committee consider modifications to the survey.

How often do responding students report attending class?

Most respondents indicate attending class 90-100% of the time.



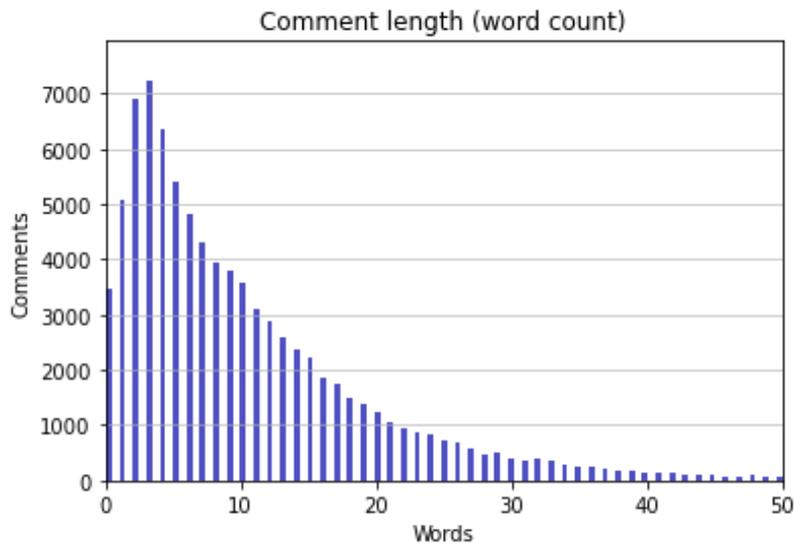
How do students respond to the open-ended attendance questions?

Why did you attend class _____% of the time? (Response is not required to continue)

From 135,595 student survey responses, there were 89,031 total text responses to the attendance question (**65.7% of survey respondents provided a comment**). Of those responses, 1,884 (2.1%) were blank, less than two characters, or contain no letters and were omitted from this analysis. A total of **87,147** responses were included for analysis.

Student responses are 62 characters or 10.5 words long on average (median of eight words). Compared to other SES comments, these responses are less than half the length of other comments on average (all other comments average 134 characters, 22 words).

Histogram of comment length in words



This histogram is trimmed to show the majority of responses more clearly. The longest student comment was 309 words.

What are common themes in how students respond to the attendance question?

We used a hybrid approach to identify common themes from student responses, pairing Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) with close reading of comments. LDA is a topic modeling technique that identifies underlying themes in text by looking for latent groupings of words. We use LDA as an exploratory tool to present groupings of comments that a researcher can then analyze and synthesize into the common themes presented here. Common themes in student responses about their attendance, along with example comments are below.

1) To receive participation points or because it was necessary/mandatory/required

"To receive participation points"

"Participation points are necessary for this class"

"Because attendance counts toward final grades."

2) Don't want to miss content, want to earn a good grade

"I didn't want to miss anything important and I want a good grade."

3) Class is fun/interesting/engaging

"I found the class to be incredibly interesting and engaging"

4) Missed some class with reason (illness, personal/family issues/work schedule)

"There were a couple instances when COVID circumstances interrupted my ability to attend class but I attended almost every week."

"I only missed on the days that I was really sick"

"I'm a full-time student and I have a job and an internship"

5) To work on class projects/assignments or because of group discussions/group work

"It was great time to work on assignments and group projects."

"It was nice to be able to interact with other students and go over assignments"

"The session was really helpful when it came to doing coursework"

6) Pay money for school

"I pay for school and see skipping as a waste of my money."

"Because I paid for it"

Summary

Overall, the most common student responses are relatively short and infrequently include specific feedback about teaching. Comments most commonly indicate that students attend class because it is mandatory, or because they don't want to miss some content. The majority of these themes in student responses don't feel particularly informative for either instructors or for evaluators. For example, attending class because it is "required," students "want to earn a good grade," or because students "pay" for class are unlikely to be very informative for instructors.

Conversely, comments about students attending class because of "group work" or opportunities to complete assignments could be useful for instructors aiming to structure class time in a way that could increase motivation for attending class. However, these comments are relatively uncommon relative to the other themes presented here. In performing this analysis and reading thousands of student comments, very few responses to the attendance questions contained information that we perceive would be informative for an instructor or evaluator. The few comments that did contain useful student feedback are often related to another, more specific question about teaching (e.g., instructor was supportive or class time included student-student interaction or active learning).