

Course-based Student Feedback Forms: Proposal for a New System Fall 2005

Introduction

As part of Augsburg College's commitment to providing a high quality education, we have solicited feedback from students at the end of each course through a system in place for over a decade. Our commitment to listening to students and including their voices as part of a comprehensive effort of institutional self-assessment is unwavering. It is, however, time to improve the existing course feedback system in order to provide higher quality information in a more timely and efficient manner. ⁱ

We therefore propose that the Augsburg College Faculty approve the adoption and required use of the "Augsburg Common Form" made available to students on-line beginning Fall 2005.

We will use support software chosen by IT found to best satisfy our needs.ⁱⁱ The data collected will be delivered electronically to the Provost, Department Chair, and course instructor simultaneously within a week of grades being sent to students. The Provost's Office would be responsible for making data available to the Committee on Tenure and Promotion. Student participation remains voluntary as is our current practice. A formal evaluation of the new system will be conducted in Fall 2007, co-coordinated by the Director of Assessment, the Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning, the Assistant Director of IT, and a member of the Faculty Senate. The report will be brought to the Senate and Faculty by October 1st 2007.

This recommendation is based upon piloting the form for two semesters with faculty volunteers. In Fall of 2004 we had 89 courses with an overall response rate of about 57% (835 of 1461 evaluations) In Spring 2005 we had 100 with a response rate of 62% (1121 of 1800 evaluations) Feedback meetings with groups of faculty who participated in the have generally been very positive; the two challenges issues seem to be response rate and some individual concerns on data presentation possibilities.

Features of the Proposed System

1. Quality of the Information

The substantive content of the Augsburg Common Form (ACF) is based on Chickering and Gamson's 7 Principles of Good Practice.ⁱⁱⁱ This research based, widely acknowledged and used, conceptual model allows us to ask questions about practices that the research indicates improves teaching and learning. It is a conceptual foundation that makes sense for all of the types of learners and learning opportunities (traditional classrooms, hybrid courses, various student populations). The open ended opportunities for comments are provided. ^{iv} It makes sense as a foundation for our institutional common form.

Clearly, not everything worth knowing about a course learning experience can be captured in a single form. Thus, we will add the opportunity for individual faculty and departments to have a customized portion of a web-based form which will allow for questions particular to lab courses, experiential education, specific AugCore learning outcomes etc. This option will be one criterion for choosing support software. A data base of questions will be available as will faculty development guidance from the Assessment Committee and CTL about how to design such customized portions. The customized sections need to be appropriate in scope (one should not add 100 other “have to know” questions) and methodologically sound.^v

In addition, it is very important to reiterate that this ACF is one component of a comprehensive set of options for assessing how effectively we do what we do. There may be questions individual faculty or departments wish to ask that they should ask. Paper and pencil responses in class, collected by the instructor and used for improvement should be used regularly by faculty. Assessment should also be formative and gathered at different points during the semester. It is flawed thinking to expect that a single form at the end of the course can meet all our goals. It is weak assessment practice to try and do so. Thus, we must consider what the single form at the end of the course can, in fact, *do best* and recognize how it complements all the other forms of formative assessment, evidence of student learning, peer review, and self-reflection that we must have. What the ACF does best is to provide patterns of data, over time, on meaningful items.

2. Usefulness of Data and Efficiency

The data need to be presented in a form useful to faculty and other stakeholders. We should be able to see patterns as well as specific responses in a visual way that encourages consideration of the data so faculty will use what they learn to sustain and improve their teaching practices. Not every comparison that an individual might want will be available; nonetheless, the ability of the software to make comparisons will be a deciding factor.^{vi}

With respect to efficiency, the on-line system allows us to deliver information quickly, avoids “the keeping track of packets of forms” problem, and eliminates dependency on faculty picking up packets, finding class time to hand them out, the returning of packets, hand processing and storage issues.

3. Benefits for Students

With this system, students will have a window of time (typically 3 weeks before the end of the day semester and adjusted accordingly for program type and schedule) in which to complete the form rather than one-shot on one day. Students will have the opportunity to take as much time as needed and to type responses. Their confidentiality is better protected because there is no handwriting to identify. Other institutions have found that students write more

comments with online evaluations^{vii}. They will be assured of having the opportunity to give student feedback. They can have privacy when writing.

Some students may view this on-line option as more work than filling it out in class.

4. Voluntary Participation of Students

Currently, all faculty members are expected to hand out course evaluation forms every term, for every course.^{viii} Students may or may not complete the form which is one of the reasons why faculty members are required to leave the room. We recommend that we keep this policy of voluntary participation in place. Some institutions do require completion (with consequences such as withholding final grades), but this does not seem an appropriate fit with Augsburg culture, nor is the practice of giving prizes for students who do the forms etc. Yes, there is some tradeoff in a possibly lower response rate, but that's what voluntary participation means, in part. We will need to work hard as a campus to make the change to this new system, where both the majority of students and faculty, see this opportunity as one that benefits the community.

5. Response Rate

Nationally, response rates for on-line or web based forms vary as widely as do institutional attitudes towards course evaluations. Institutions' response rates range from 20% to nearly 100% depending on how they implement the evaluation system^{ix} However, effective practices are emerging from ongoing research -- several of which were applied to the 2004-2005 pilot.^x With our current paper and pencil form, our completion rates appear to be relatively high (each faculty member is generally familiar with what percent of those students present on a given day complete the forms), although we do not have systematic data. We have tried to make clear in this proposal that the trade-off in quality of data is worth it.

Our target overall rate for responses should be approximately 70% averaged over time. Individual faculty members rates may vary and often for reasons that make sense.^{xi} But we see the benefits as compelling: data quality, protection of student identity, efficiency, and usefulness of the findings. Furthermore, sampling is a norm in research. We should give 100% of the distribution the opportunity to participate; we do not need a 100% response rate to draw meaningful conclusions about patterns of practices over time.

Conclusion

Augsburg faculty have done amazing work in the last decade on curriculum, teaching effectiveness, program development, and technology. As we implement the AugCore Curriculum, dive head first into AQIP assessment, and meet the expectations of a changing world of higher education, we believe this new course feedback system will be a valuable tool.

ⁱ Our current course “evaluation” system allows students fill out the forms in class (which may contribute to a slightly higher response rate); students have an opportunity to report their perceptions of course and instructor effectiveness in an open ended way, global ratings of course and instructor can provide a normative basis for interpretation. The Dean’s (Provost) Office has worked hard over many years to keep this system working. However, the current form and operational system are dated, cumbersome (limited coding done by hand), and based on a conceptual framework not consistent with current thinking on teaching and learning. There also appear to be divergent patterns of instructor compliance with protocols (informal evidence from students who report that not all faculty leave the room; some take the envelopes themselves; a few do not give out the forms at all; some forms are administered at the beginning of class, some at the end; some give 15 minutes, others 5; students report some faculty make directive comments about the forms, some encourage them, some disparage them). While we have not conducted a systematic study of this, the patterns of informal data indicate this. Although we assume most faculty take the opportunity for course feedback seriously and with good intentions, there is slippage in the current system. In addition, despite yeoman’s work by the Dean’s Office to process the handwritten forms, over the course of time, some packets of forms are difficult to locate in the archives, some do not make it from Chair’s Office to Faculty member; some faculty members do not return the packets to the Chair or the Dean’s Office; some adjuncts don’t get the word etc.) Finally, it is argued that the quality of the data currently collected is limited. While our current form offers open ended space, many completed forms typically scan with “fine, OK, good, good.” It is fairly unusual to find a form with thoughtful narrative. While this type of data may tell an instructor that a student did not have any major complaints in a particular area, it typically tells an instructor little or nothing about what works well and why. “Class time is “OK” doesn’t do much to help with what to do next time. The global items, the only ones quantified at the institutional level, give an overall sense of student response, but they are overwhelmingly in the good and excellent category and fail to provide much basis for meaningful normative (comparative) analysis.

No system is perfect; there are always tradeoffs in effectiveness and efficiency in any system we would use. That said, we can do *far better* than what we currently do.

ⁱⁱ The current recommendation from IT is the product CoursEval 3 package from Academic Management Solutions (<http://www.academicmanagement.com/index.asp?app=cou>). See appendix for sample outputs.

ⁱⁱⁱ Chickering, A., & Gamson, Z. (1987). Seven principles of good practice in undergraduate education. *AAHE Bulletin*, 39, 3-7.

^{iv} Our pilot data and the research (for example Anderson, Heidi M., Cain, J., & Bird, E. (2005). Online Student Course Evaluations: Review of Literature and a Pilot Study. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 69(1) Article 5) indicate that open-ended responses are typically longer and more thoughtful when completed on-line. The current form has been piloted twice and revised.

^v Syracuse University has an excellent data base we may use. Please see <http://cstl.syr.edu/cstl/T-L/IBank.htm> There is also an excellent guide on the use of student rating systems. Please go to: <http://cstl.syr.edu/cstl/T-L/stdrate.htm>

^{vi} We have no systematic comparative data at all in our present system.

^{vii} Anderson, Heidi M., Cain, J., & Bird, E. (2005). Online Student Course Evaluations: Review of Literature and a Pilot Study. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 69(1) Article 5.

^{viii} Whether the College wishes to continue that practice is an independent policy question to which this system can flexibly adapt.

^{ix} Most institutional first attempts are poorly thought out and yield response rates below 30% (Duke University School of Law, California State University). Though some have response rates over 70% (Denison University, Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology, University of Denver). If students know their feedback is valued, they will give it. The attitudes of both the faculty and students can greatly influence response rates.

^x BeTA Project <http://www.tltgroup.org/resources/F-LIGHT/2004/03-04.html#BeTA>

^{xi} Some faculty may be concerned that students who do not participate represent some sort of bias. Sampling always runs this risk, but there is no evidence to suggest that the 30% who loved your course will not participate and the 70% who thought is OK or not are the ones represented. See the annotated bibliography below. Again, the goal here is patterns over time. Efforts to explain individual responses by individual student need to be put to a different in a different form or assessment method by individual faculty.

Appendix A

An initial bibliography on online course evaluations

This list is not exhaustive but can serve as a starting point for further exploration.

Anderson, H., Cain, J., Bird, E. (2005) "Online Student Course Evaluations: Review of Literature and a Pilot Study." *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education* 2005; 69 (1) Article 5.

The literature review revealed several studies that found no statistically significant differences between delivery modes. Two also noted that students provided more comments in the online forms. Response rates varied widely. The University of Kentucky College of Pharmacy, driven by the faculty's desire for more timely return of results (3-4 months typically), launched a pilot study of online evaluations in 3 courses. The response rates for the 3 courses were 85%, 89%, and 75%. The 9 courses using the paper forms averaged a 80% response rate (consistent with the 2 previous years also about 80%). The comments on the online forms were more frequent and longer than the paper forms. Students liked the online form better than the paper form and thought they could provide more effective and constructive feedback online.

Cummings, R. and Ballatyne, C. (1999). "Student feedback on teaching: Online! On target?" Paper presented at the Australasian Society Annual Conference, October, 1999.

Murdoch University School of Engineering ran a pilot in 1999 of online course evaluations using the same form online as on paper. Students found the online form easier, faster, and felt it offered greater anonymity. The school has a 50% mandate for response rate in course evaluations. Typically paper evaluations had a 65% response rate. The online pilot averaged 31% with 4 of the 18 courses over the 50% mandate. The response rate range was a wide 3% to 100%. Because the pilot was inadequately promoted, some faculty didn't know they were using online forms and didn't adequately prepare students. Students noted that they felt no pressure to fill out the online evaluations. The investigators concluded that the quality of responses was the same because they received the same amount of comments online which is what is used most from the evaluation form.

Dommeyer CJ, Baum P, Chapman KS, Hanna RW. "An experimental investigation of student response rates to faculty evaluations: The effect of the online method and online treatments." Paper presented at Decision Sciences Institute; Nov. 22-25, 2003; Washington, DC.

The College of Business And Economics at California State University, Northridge did a study with 16 professors to see how the method of evaluation affects response rate and if online treatments (incentives) affect the response rate. Each professor taught 2 sections of the same undergraduate business course. The same form was used in both methods. Instructors were randomly assigned into 1 of 4 groups using different incentives: 0.25% grade incentive for completion of an online evaluation (4 courses), in-class demonstration on how to do the online evaluation (2 courses), if 2/3 of the class submitted online evaluations students would receive their final grades early (2 courses), or a control group (8 courses). The online evaluations averaged a 43% response rate and the paper evaluations averaged 75%. Looking at just the control group, their average response rate was 29%. In the individual cases the incentives had the effect of increasing response rate (grade incentive 87% response rate, demonstration 53%, and early final grade 51%).

Fraze, S., Hardin, K., Brashears, T., Smith, J., Lockaby, J. (2002) "The Effects Of Delivery Mode Upon Survey Response Rate And Perceived Attitudes Of Texas

Agri-Science Teachers." Paper presented at the National Agricultural Education Research Conference, December 11-13, Las Vegas, NV.

Texas Tech University studied 3 modes of surveying a random group of Texas Agri-Science teachers. The 3 modes were e-mail, web, and paper. No significant difference in the reliability of the responses was found. However the response rates were 60%, 43% and 27% for paper, web and e-mail respectively.

Handwerk, P., Carson, C., and Blackwell, K. (2000). "On-line vs. paper-and-pencil surveying of students: A case study." Paper presented at the 40th Annual Meeting of the Association of Institutional Research, May 2000 (ERIC document ED446512).

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro did a study of using an online version of a feedback survey for determining why students selected or did not select Greensboro. They found the online version generated more comments though had a lower (26%) response rate than the paper version (33%). No significant difference was found in the response content between the two methods.

Layne B.H., DeCristoforo J.R., McGinty D (1999). "Electronic versus traditional student ratings of instruction." *Res Higher Educ.* 1999; 40:221-32.

At a southeastern university 66 courses made up of 2453 students did a comparison of response effects between paper-and-pencil and online using the same form. Half did online and half did paper-and-pencil forms. The online response rate was 47% and the traditional group was 60%. Also, 76% of the online forms provided comments compared to 50% of the traditional forms. No significant difference was found in methods.

Liegle, J. and McDonald, D. (2004). "Lessons Learned From Online vs. Paper-based Computer Information Students' Evaluation System" Paper (refereed) presented at 21st Annual Information Systems Education Conference.

Georgia State University College of Business ran a voluntary pilot from 2002 to 2003 using an identical online version of their paper course evaluation form in the Department of Computer Information Systems. Faculty feared an online form would yield lower scores and lower response rates. In particular, the fear was that few students would submit online evaluations, poor students would "take revenge" on the faculty and good students wouldn't bother. The paper form had a 67% response rate and the online form had a 82% response rate. This likely due to the fact that the CIS department had easy access to computer labs for students to take the evaluations online. Using a question on teacher effectiveness, the study found no significant difference between the methods. Good students participated in the same numbers and weaker students did fewer online evaluations.

Matz, C. (1999). "Administration of web versus paper surveys: Mode effects and response rates." Masters Research Paper, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. (ERIC document ED439694).

In a survey of academic reference librarians in North Carolina, Matz found no significant difference in response contents between the methods used. The online form had a 33% response rate and the paper form had a 43% response rate.

Monsen, S., Woo, W., Mahan, C. Miller, G. & W. "Online Course Evaluations: Lessons Learned." Presentation at The CALI Conference for Law School Computing 2005

Yale Law started online course evaluations in 2001 with a less than 20% response rate. The current 8-question form is run by student representatives and has a 90% response rate. Students cannot see their grades until they fill out the evaluation. Northwestern University

School of Law started online course evaluations in 2004. So far they have a 68% response rate which compares to a 70-80% paper response rate. Northwestern is against using any penalties (withholding information from a student until they fill out an evaluation). The University of Denver Sturm College started online course evaluations in 2002 with a pilot of 10 courses. The pilot had a 83% response rate. Continuing into 2003 the pilot expanded to 80 courses (with a 81% response rate) and then expanded to all of their offerings (with a 64% response rate). Currently they maintain a response rate around 70%. Duke Law started online course evaluations in 2003 when their scantron machine broke and the expense of replacing was too great. They proposed a goal of 70% response rate and used the same form online. The first term averaged a 66% response rate (with 29% of the 82 courses reaching the 70% goal). In spring 2004 the average was 60% (with 30% of the 119 courses reaching the 70% goal). In fall 2004 the average was 52% (with 8% of the 93 courses reaching the 70% goal). In spring 2005, after dropping non-law students from the pool, the average was 67% (with 41% of the 117 courses reaching the 70% goal). The school is considering several penalties for failure to fill out an evaluation – withholding registration, withholding grades, or withholding free printing.

Sax, L., Gilmartin, S., Keup, J., Bryant, A., and Plecha, M. (2002). Findings from the 2001 pilot administration of Your First College Year (YFCY): National norms. Higher Education Research Institute, University of California.

The YFCY distributed its survey that assesses student development during the first year in college using 3 methods: online, online or paper, and paper. In a pool of 57 schools, 16 used the alternative methods of distribution. The study found no significant difference in responses between the methods. The response rate overall was 21%. The online only method response rate was 17% and the online or paper group had a 24% response rate.

Schawitch, M. (2005) "Online Course Evaluations: One Institute's Success in Transitioning from a Paper Process to a Completely Electronic Process!" Presentation at the Association for Institutional Research Forum, June 2005.

The Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology piloted an online course evaluation in 2002 with a small group of faculty. Over the academic year the pilot had a 70% response rate. 77% of students preferred the online mode and faculty reacted positively to the pilot. In 2003 the entire campus adopted the online form. Over the 3 terms, the online evaluations had response rates of 86%, 78% and 67%. In 2004 the 3 terms had 75%, 71% and 67%. Historically paper evaluations had a 85-87% response rate. They are investigating various incentive possibilities.

Thorpe, S. (2002) "Online Student Evaluation of Instruction: An Investigation of Non-Response Bias." Paper presented at the 42nd Annual Forum of the Association of Institutional Research, June 2002.

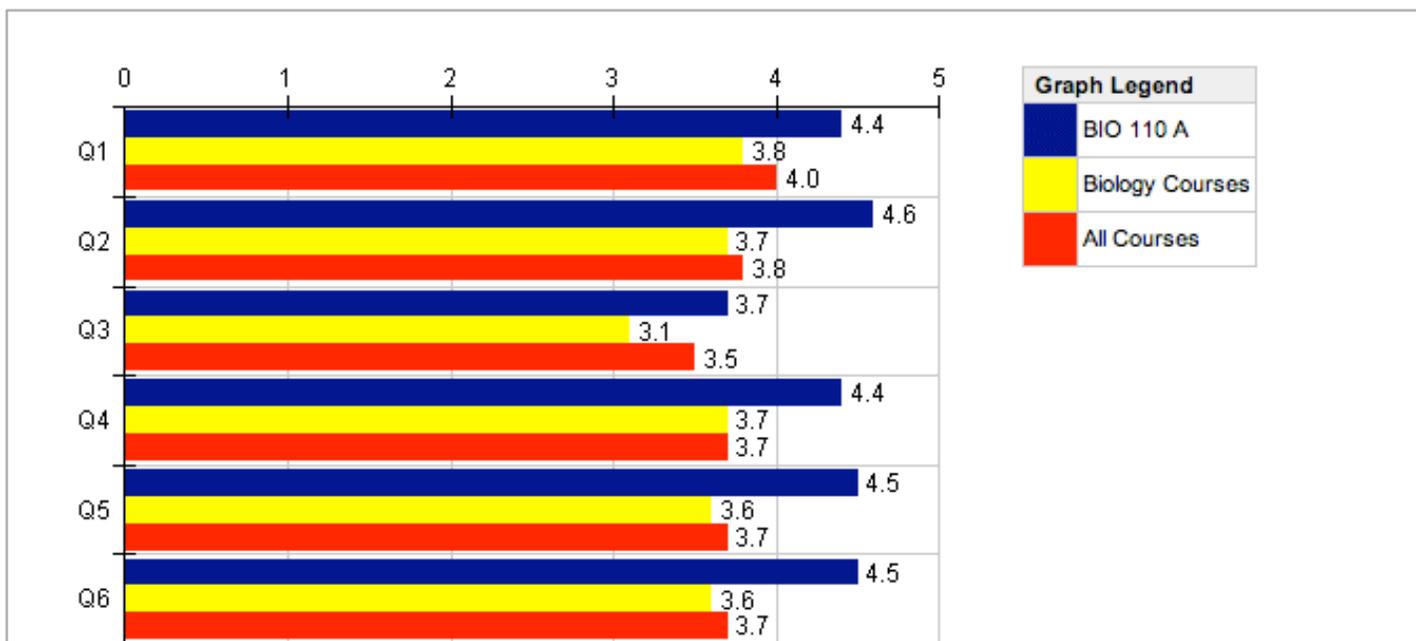
Drexel University studied whether significant differences exist in student responses to course evaluations given on paper and online in 3 courses. Response rates in the 3 classes for paper and online (respectively) were 37% and 45%, 44% and 50%, 70% and 37%. In comparing students who responded to the evaluations across the 3 courses the study found that women were more likely than men to respond, students who earned higher grades were more likely to respond, and students with a higher overall GPA were more likely to respond. For two courses the online evaluations had a slightly higher average item rating. For the other course 2 significant differences were found: students doing the online evaluation were less likely to participate actively and contribute thoughtfully during class and to attend class when compared to the paper evaluation group. But the responses overall were not significantly different.

Appendix B

Sample reports from CourEval 3.

Course and Teacher Survey Summer 2004	AMS University College of Liberal Arts
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Course: BIO 110 A - General Biology 1	Department: Biology
Course Director: Dr. Matthew Farls	Resp. Rec'vd / Expected: 32 / 59



Course Survey Questions		BIO 110 A									--- Comparisons ---			
		Responses					Course				Biology		All	
		[SD]	[D]	[N]	[A]	[SA]	Med.	S.D.	N	Mean	Mean	--+ ¹	Mean	--+ ¹
Q1	The syllabus helped me understand the goals and expectations of this course.	2	0	1	8	21	5	1.03	32	4.4	3.8	=	4.0	=
Q2	The various elements of this course combined well in helping me learn (for example, class assignments, texts, readings, laboratory assignments, email, course website, and internet access).	1	0	1	8	21	5	.84	31	4.6	3.7	=	3.8	=
Q3	The added classroom technology (for example, computers, videos, and slides) helped me learn.	1	0	18	2	11	3	1.04	32	3.7	3.1	=	3.5	=
Q4	This course improved my analytical thinking, creativity, technical skills, or competence.	1	0	2	11	18	5	.86	32	4.4	3.7	=	3.7	=
Q5	I would recommend this course to other students.	1	0	3	6	22	5	.90	32	4.5	3.6	=	3.7	=
Q6	My overall rating of this course is very good or excellent.	1	0	3	5	23	5	.90	32	4.5	3.6	=	3.7	=
Number of Courses / Survey Responses used for Comparisons:											112 / 1,706		631 / 9,157	

Responses: [SD] Strongly Disagree=1 | [D] Disagree=2 | [N] Neutral=3 | [A] Agree=4 | [SA] Strongly Agree=5

¹ This Course compared with others: [- -] Much Lower, [-] Lower, [=] Similar, [+] Higher, [++] Much Higher

Question:	Please comment on the elements of the COURSE you found particularly effective. You may also use this space to identify areas for COURSE improvement.
Response Rate:	18.75% (6 of 32)
1	Written comment of respondent will appear here. This has been edited during testing. Note: This response was modified by Manager on 02/22/2005.
2	Written comment of respondent. Note: This response was modified by Manager on 07/15/2005.
3	Written comment of respondent will appear here. Modify for training. Note: This response was modified by Manager on 08/18/2005.
4	Written comment of respondent will appear here.
5	Written comment of respondent will appear here.
6	Written comment of respondent will appear here.

Question:	Please add your final comments.
Response Rate:	12.50% (4 of 32)
1	Written comment of respondent will appear here.
2	Written comment of respondent will appear here.
3	Written comment of respondent will appear here.
4	Written comment of respondent will appear here.

Faculty:	Farls, Matthew J
Question:	Please comment on how effective the INSTRUCTOR was in teaching this course.
Response Rate:	50.00% (16 of 32)
1	Written comment of respondent will appear here.
2	Written comment of respondent will appear here.
3	Written comment of respondent will appear here.
4	Written comment of respondent will appear here.
5	Written comment of respondent will appear here.
6	Written comment of respondent will appear here.
7	Written comment of respondent will appear here.
8	Written comment of respondent will appear here.
9	Written comment of respondent will appear here.
10	Written comment of respondent will appear here.
11	Written comment of respondent will appear here.