

Revitalizing Newhouse Cocurricular Assessments for Undergraduate Students

Student Engagement in Assessment Mini-Grant

Kit Fletcher, Assistant Director of Academic Operations

Office of Academic Affairs, S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications

Background

- Most Newhouse majors are accredited by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC)
- ACEJMC requires two direct and two indirect measures to assess 10 shared learning outcomes
- Newhouse majors share schoolwide pre-/post-test (direct measure) and senior exit survey (indirect measure) that encompass ACEJMC learning outcomes
- Newhouse Assessment Committee conducts item-by-item comparison of senior post-test and first-year pre-test results to identify areas of improvement and revise assessment measure → compare demonstrated student competency with self-reported skills in exit survey

Challenge: low senior participation rates decrease data quality and hinder analysis

Goal: increase senior student responses to **33%** on both post-test and exit survey

Method: offer limited-time graduation cord incentive to motivate student engagement

Challenges & Solutions

	Challenges	Solutions
Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Student participation rates are extremely low (avg. 18.5% in 2024)Students don't know about the post-test and exit surveySurveys given at busy time (end of semester)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Offer an incentive (funded by IE mini-grant)Engage students in required classes and through other academic channelsAdminister surveys earlier in April
Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Surveys offered across inconsistent platforms (Qualtrics, Watermark, etc.)Post-test is perceived as prohibitively long to complete	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Use Qualtrics with personalized links to track individual responsesEmphasize actual time to completion (roughly 15 minutes) based on historical survey data
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Inconsistent messaging to students (and other stakeholders) about post-test and exit survey, as well as why this feedback matters	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Strengthen communications with students using frequent remindersCollaborate with staff and faculty to develop messaging, select incentive, and engage students

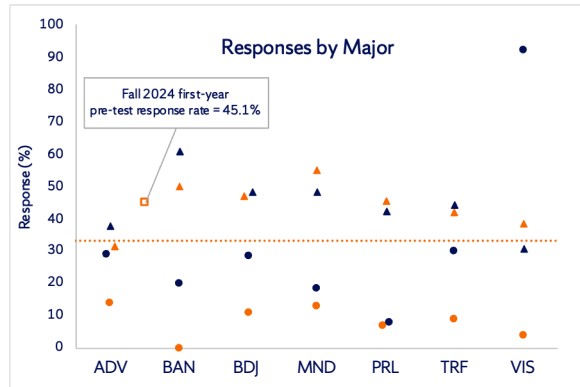
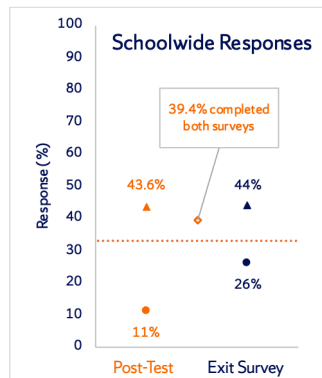
Conclusions

- Incentive + strong message = **success!**
- Capturing attention quickly is key → 54.6% of post-test responses, 51.7% of exit survey responses on first day
- Graduation cord incentive capitalizes on Newhouse students' drive and sense of competition
- Competition between departments motivated faculty to engage students and led to increased participation
- 81 post-test surveys and 39 exit surveys started but not completed → does the ask outweigh the reward?
- Post-test may still be too long for students → more respondents start and abandon than the exit survey
- Focused conversations with Newhouse collaborators (e.g., Career Development Center, Student Success) were critical to learn from and implement expertise
- Variables to explore: guaranteed vs. potential incentive, survey length, timeline to administer senior surveys

Next Steps

- Determine whether continued funding can be obtained to offer future incentives
- Update pre-/post-test as needed to keep questions current and collect useful data for faculty to analyze
- Explore ways to shorten pre-/post-test to encourage student participation
- Apply strong messaging and other lessons to pre-test in Fall 2025 and future senior assessments
- Deepen connections between academic pathways and assessment → work with faculty in required senior classes to encourage student participation

Results



	Responses	Response Rate	2024 → 2025
Post-test	207	43.6%	+32.6%
Exit survey	209	44%	+18%

187 seniors earned graduation cords (39.4%)

Engagement Ranking (completions of both surveys)

Broadcast & Digital Journalism	46.1%
Bandier	44.4%
Magazine, News & Digital Journalism	41.7%
Public Relations	41.2%
Television, Radio & Film	39.8%
Advertising	29.9%
Visual Communications	26.9%

Responses Over Time

Date(s)	Post-Test	Exit Survey
Apr. 3	113	108
Apr. 4-Apr. 9	45	50
Apr. 10-Apr. 15	27	28
Apr. 16-17	22	23

An average of **56%** of exit survey respondents gave optional written feedback on how well Newhouse conveys ACEJMC learning outcomes.

Thank You

Karen Baum, Keonte Coleman, Natalie Dascoulias, Aileen Gallagher, Hua Jiang, Shawna Lawrence, Bridget Lichtinger, Suzanne Maguire, Karen McGee, Julie Walas, Wes Whiteside, Newhouse Assessment Committee, Syracuse University Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Newhouse Class of 2025

S Syracuse University
Newhouse School of
Public Communications