

Improving the Process of Course Evaluation: The Online Solution for the University of Kentucky

Overview

For the past five years, the Office of Institutional Research has administered online course evaluations for academic units who request them. Just over 1,900 sections were evaluated using online forms in fall 2012. The online mode constitutes 43% of all course evaluations handled by the Institutional Research (IR) staff. The growth in online ratings has placed some strain on the efficient coordination of the teacher-course evaluation process. The IR Office has used online survey software—first SNAP and later Qualtrics—to evaluate courses and professors. In terms of analysis and reporting, IR's current online course evaluation process involves: 1) importing the Qualtrics dataset into SAS; 2) running the SAS program to analyze students' responses and generate the separate types of reports; 3) distributing the reports to college contacts; and 4) having the college contacts send the reports to instructors and administrators. Thus, the cobbled-together reporting process now takes four steps. This is an extremely inefficient process compared with today's commercial course evaluation software. However, most evaluation software possess the functionality to cut the number of steps in half by automatically analyzing students' evaluations and distributing a series of reports in PDF files to instructors and administrators immediately after grades have been turned in.

Finding a Solution

In January 2013, a committee was formed with the charge of recommending a consistent university-wide technical solution for students' evaluation of courses and teaching based on best practices in the field related to instrument design, administration, data collection, report format and use of results. Furthermore, the previous task force's findings and recommendations from 2010 were included and considered in the evaluation of this technical solution via incorporating previous research and team members from the effort.

Committee Members:

Anna Bosch, College Arts & Sciences

Laura DeCanto, College of Engineering

Mia Alexander-Snow, Director of Institutional Planning

Roger Sugarman, Director of Institutional Research

Patsy Carruthers, Director of Academic Technology

Carol Yu, Institutional Research

Mary Watts, College of Engineering

Tara Rose, Director of Assessment

Connie Baird, Director of Distance Learning

Doyle Friskney, Chief Technology Officer

Jason Conley, Information Technology

Evaluation

Three vendors (eXplorance, CoursEval, and Scantron) and their respective software solutions were identified for further study by the group based upon the previous group's findings, current use at UK, peer references and technical requirements.

CourseEval is TCE software used currently by the Colleges of Pharmacy, Dentistry, and Nursing so they were strongly considered due to the existing online footprint. Scantron has for many years printed the bubble sheets used in the traditional paper-based course evaluations at UK so their Class Climate software was evaluated due to the ease of a phased-in approach to online evaluations. Finally, eXplorance's Blue was considered due to reports of their advanced technical approach, as well as their strong endorsement from the University of Louisville.

The committee attended various webinars and question & answer sessions during which the companies discussed:

- Distinguishing features of their software
- Procedures involved in administering the evaluations
- Features of the online rating form
- Visualization options for reporting the results
- Process of sending the findings to instructors and administrators
- High-level functional and technical requirements as outlined, previously

Next, the committee called at least two references given to them by each of the software vendors. As anyone would expect, each reference gave positive feedback on the product from each vendor. However, the group solicited every lesson learned to see how each implementation might compare to an online implementation at UK. In the case of eXplorance, several committee members traveled to the University of Louisville to discuss their assessment of the company's software.

Recommendation

The committee's unanimous choice of software was eXplorance - Blue. Overwhelmingly, eXplorance - Blue was the winner on every evaluation point with a few exceptions. The decision was based on several factors: the crisp, attractive online rating form and the ease of administering the evaluations, and the visual appeal of the graphs and other elements of the customizable reports. In addition, it should be mentioned that Scantron lost the support of some committee members due to its plain, visually bland online form. CoursEval did not appear to be a viable option because it did not offer a way to conduct paper-based evaluations that could be easily integrated into the current reporting process. Furthermore, eXplorance - Blue technically was the superior product with

Web Service integration available with UK's SAP SLCM and a proven track record with Blackboard's LMS systems. These advantages delivered a higher quality product than Scantron's Class Climate, which was integrated via legacy APIs unique to Class Climate and had no track record with either SAP SLCM or Blackboard LMS.



Introducing Blue by eXplorance™

Blue is Enterprise-class Feedback Management Software. The Blue feedback management software system is an automated, comprehensive system of tools for designing, testing and distributing feedback forms. Blue not only captures and analyzes the results in the most efficient & organized fashion, it also allows an organization to dynamically capture, analyze and act on findings that it receives from its stakeholders. <http://www.explorance.com/>

eXplorance - Blue Next Steps: What the University Needs to Know

Implementation

The implementation of eXplorance will occur over the next 14 months, October 2013 – December 2014. An eXplorance pilot sub-committee will oversee the implementation as we progress towards an online environment. Currently there are 9 Colleges and 2 Academic Support Units that participate in the University TCE process fully and 3 colleges that have select departments participating. The table below indicates when participating colleges/units will be approached to gauge interest in participating in the pilot - changing from their current process (online or paper) to the online eXplorance option. After each semester (within the 14-month implementation period) a panel presentation or seminar will be scheduled to discuss the results and lessons learned with the participating faculty/instructors and potential eXplorance users. The goal is to have transparent communication in order to improve future teacher/student course evaluation experiences.

Fall 2013	Spring 2014	Summer 2014	Fall 2014	Spring 2015
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arts & Sciences Business & Economics Distance Learning Engineering Undergraduate Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agriculture Communication & Information Studies Design Fine Arts Health Sciences Education Social Work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undergraduate Qualtrics Users 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Graduate Qualtrics users Graduate School Nutritional Sciences (Medicine) 	Colleges/Departments not currently participating in the University-wide TCE Process

The members of the pilot sub-committee are the persons responsible for the implementation pre-planning, with additional staff assisting with full implementation and rollout.

Pilot Sub-Committee Members:

Buddy Hall, Academic Technology – Project Manager
 Dan Cleland, Assessment – Project Technical Lead
 Roger Sugarman, Director of Institutional Research
 Patsy Carruthers, Director of Academic Technology
 Tara Rose, Director of Assessment
 Carol Yu, Advanced Analytics

Additional Staff Assisting in Implementation:

Leah Simpson, Assessment
 Sara Jewell, Assessment
 Virginia Lacefield, Academic Technology
 Jason Conley, Enterprise Architect

Frequently Asked Questions

Why is the University moving to an online environment? The current online course evaluation process involves: 1) importing the Qualtrics dataset into SAS; 2) running the SAS program to analyze students' responses and generate the separate types of reports; 3) distributing the reports to college contacts; and 4) having the college contacts send the reports to instructors and administrators. Thus, the cobbled-together reporting process now takes four steps. This is an extremely inefficient process compared with today's commercial course evaluation software.

What is the difference between Qualtrics and eXplorance? Qualtrics is a basic survey tool. There are limited reporting features and the data cannot be linked in any way to student demographic data. Any data analysis has to be done manually. eXplorance will link to SAP, all data will automatically be generated and analyzed in the system and will provide timely feedback through visual reports rather than an excel file of raw data.

I am already using an online TCE form; can I continue to use Qualtrics instead of eXplorance? You will have the option of continuing with Qualtrics through Fall 2014 with support from APAT. Beginning in Spring 2015, Colleges/Departments/Units may choose to continue using Qualtrics for a premium fee (specific pricing is still to be determined and based on demand), or they could manage the process within their unit and will be responsible for manually pulling the courses, creating the evaluation, deploying the evaluation, collecting and analyzing their own results. Also beginning in Spring 2015, APAT will fully support University-wide, at no cost, any TCEs using eXplorance.

I am using the paper method; do I have to move to online? We will be watching adoption of eXplorance, and at this time we are uncertain of the timeframe when paper TCE support from APAT will retire. We envision this occurring within the next two years. At that time, Colleges/Departments/Units may choose to continue using the paper method for a premium fee (specific pricing will be determined based on actual demand), or they could manage the process within their unit and will be responsible for manually pulling the courses, creating the evaluation, deploying the evaluation, collecting and analyzing their own results, and acquiring scanning services to read the bubble sheets. Also beginning in Spring 2015, APAT will fully support University-wide, at no cost, any TCEs using eXplorance.

Will I need to learn how to use the system? Faculty/Instructors will not necessarily have to learn how to use the system unless they choose to. APAT will request at least one representative for each College (or department if they choose) to learn how to use the system. Training and workshops will be made available to anyone assigned as an eXplorance TCE contact.

I am concerned with student response rates. How is APAT addressing this issue? While online evaluations often produce response rates that are lower than traditional paper forms, several universities have identified a number of practices (below) that can be used to boost students' participation in the process for high response rates:

- developing detailed public relation campaign to introduce the online evaluations;
- explaining the importance of the evaluations to students and how they are used;
- requiring students to opt out of online evaluations;
- providing broad access to online evaluations through the Bb course shell, emailed invitations, and an evaluation portal on the web;
- sending periodic response rates to faculty;
- reminding students several times during the evaluation window to complete their ratings;

- scheduling a portion of class when students can use their smart phones, tablets, and laptops to complete the evaluation;
- offering prizes to a random selection of students who complete the evaluations; and
- permitting participating students to view their grades early.

APAT will be exploring all options to help increase student response rates. Furthermore, in 2008 Institutional Research had piloted online course evaluations. The results are summarized in an IR Brief: http://www.uky.edu/IRPE/ir/tce_pilot_su2008.pdf. Evaluations did decline somewhat, but only by about one-tenth of a scale point on average.

Will there be any form of marketing to encourage students to participate? At this time, APAT hopes to have a substantial marketing campaign similar to successful campaigns used by other universities. APAT is also interested in working with students to help develop a campaign as well as support the TCE process through UKs growing social networking connections.

Will there be any incentives to move to the online version? There will not be any incentives to participate in the eXplorance method, however, APAT is looking into offering awards for both faculty and student engagement.

What is the benefit for faculty to use eXplorance? Create/edit/revise supplemental questions each semester as needed, improved visualization options for reporting the results – including trend data, reports created and deployed in a timely fashion in order to improve for the next semester, links to student demographic data.

What is the benefit for students to use eXplorance? Students can access with any kind of device – laptop, desktop, tablet, smart phone, and screen reader; access through any browser; and any kind of internet connection. eXplorance provides anytime, anywhere accessibility.

I'd like to participate, what do I do? If you are interested in participating, don't wait for us to contact you...contact us today at InstitutionalEffectiveness@uky.edu