LAU Saves Time, Money and Paper on Course Evaluations and Surveys

> " We are now in a 100% paperless environment... and we are getting much better quality responses.
>
> Julia Edith Barrientos Ortiz,
> Manager of Planning and Evaluations at UDLAP.

CLIENT:
Lebanese American University

SOLUTION:
Blue® course evaluations and surveys now used to survey 7,500 students, 800 faculty and staff, and 30,000 alumni

CHALLENGE:
Paper-based course evaluations were slow and expensive

eXplorance

BENEFITS

- Same- or following-day turnaround on evaluation and survey results

- Integrates easily with in-house Banner® and Blackboard systems

- Web-based forms reach a widely dispersed audience

- Outstanding technical support and smooth implementation

The Lebanese American University (LAU), an American university and one of the Middle East's rising stars, is growing fast.

But not just in size, in stature, too.

On course with its 2005-10 Strategic Plan, the university has recently achieved accreditation candidacy by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges.

And it opened the doors of two important new schools: a School of Medicine and a School of Nursing.

The Strategic Plan focuses on academic excellence, putting its academic core at the heart of the university and creating a student-centered environment.

With such a strong student focus, course evaluations and school surveys are essential.

The university invested a great deal in conducting these accurately and well.

To manage course evaluations, LAU used to rely on scanned paper forms. But the old technology was costly, time-consuming, and slow.

THE OLD EVALUATION SYSTEM WAS COSTLY AND SLOW

Evaluation forms were printed on special paper that was expensive, with distribution of print reports burdensome.

"It was a very lengthy process," says Tarek Sarouni, a member of the university's IT team and Chief Application Administrator for Blue.

The time-consuming process slowed them down, and hamstrung professors waiting for the results.

"Fall course evaluations wouldn't get into the hands of course instructors until June or July, much too late to do anything about it in the same academic year," says Tarek.

The processes consumed a lot of paper, as well.

"In 2007-08, we printed 10,500 sheets of paper for the reports, which took eight to 10 hours of continuous printing and packaging!

"We also went through 15,000 sheets of high-density paper to create the evaluation forms themselves."

LAU administrators knew they needed to automate their evaluation systems. The question was how to best meet all their needs.

"We had several requirements," says Tarek. "Security and confidentiality were critical, of course. Our students need to feel absolutely safe when giving their opinions if we want valuable results.

"We also needed a system that could connect easily to our Banner system, which runs on an Oracle database," he continues.

"And, we wanted course evaluation software that could handle multiple instructors for a single course."

LAU conducted lengthy assessments before selecting Blue to provide Web-based course evaluations for the student body.

"We contacted many companies before deciding on eXplorance's Blue evaluation and survey solutions," says Tarek.

"Blue answered all our needs, especially its ability to connect easily to our LAU systems."

MAXIMIZING THE INVESTMENT

LAU maximized its investment in course evaluation software by adding Blue to its suite of applications, providing a consistent user experience to students, faculty, staff, and alumni.

"Blue allows us to get more out of our investment because I can use one main application to fit two purposes," says Tarek.

On-site management of surveys has provided many added benefits.

"It's much quicker now that everything is in-house. We get our results as soon as the survey is complete," says Tarek.

"We now regularly survey approximately 7,500 students, 800 staff and faculty members, and 30,000 alumni using Blue."

SERVICE THAT IS TOP OF THE CLASS

LAU is very pleased by the support and service they have received from eXplorance.

"Implementation was very smooth," says Tarek. "We pull course list, faculty, and student information from our Banner system, without any problem, to create our evaluation and survey forms."

They were especially impressed by the high-grade service.

"eXplorance completed the entire implementation from a remote location, in a time zone that was seven hours behind ours!" says Tarek. "They worked on our schedule, calling us when it was 5 a.m. their time."

"eXplorance has incredible support. They are really outstanding."

FASTER, GREENER, AND MORE RESPONSIVE

Using Blue, LAU has met another of its goals:
to eliminate the vast amount of paper used during these processes.

"We are now in a 100% paperless environment," Tarek reports.

But the greatest benefit LAU has seen since making the switch to Blue is the speed and quality of responses.

"When the academic body gets a report the same day the forms were completed, they can act upon the results immediately. This sometimes saves us money, but more importantly, it makes our entire academic body more responsive," says Tarek.

While response rates are not as high as they were when evaluation forms were conducted in class, they are noticeably improved in quality.

"With students completing course evaluations on their own time, we are getting much better quality responses," says Tarek.

"We've also observed that with Web-based evaluation forms, students are providing more comments."

LAU is looking to get even more out of its application by thinking of creative ways it can use Blue in the future.

"We're also looking forward to integrating Blue with our Blackboard and Banner systems," says Tarek.

"We're considering different possibilities for ensuring high response rates, and full integration will be integral to achieving that."