

USEK's Office of Quality Assurance and Institutional Effectiveness Gets more Data with Lower Costs



“The learning experience of our students is our focus, and Blue provides the right tools to help make that happen.”

Dr. Georges Yahchouchi,
Deputy President for Quality Assurance and Teaching & Learning and the Director of the QAIE Office

CLIENT:

Holy Spirit University of Kaslik (USEK)

LOCATION:

Jounieh, Lebanon

NO. STUDENTS:

~8,000 students

SOLUTION:

Blue® course evaluations software

BENEFITS

- Increased coverage from 25% to 95% of courses
- Realized response rates of 88% to 93%
- Increased ROI by extending software capabilities to other needs, such as climate surveys

The Holy Spirit University of Kaslik (USEK) is a private Catholic university headquartered in Mount Lebanon. The university aims to bring vital education to the broad spectrum of students living in Lebanon and the Middle East, emphasizing cultural and religious pluralism.

Recently, the university sought out institutional accreditation and after several years of hard work, in 2012, was awarded European Institutional Accreditation. Today, they are working on international programs accreditation, and, toward this end, have become members of the International Network of the Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education (INQAAHE), the European University Association (EUA) and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) in the USA.

The university has undertaken several initiatives in order to achieve accreditation. In particular, they established the Quality Assurance and Institutional Effectiveness (QAIE) Office, which supports the university in assessing and improving administrative and academic performance and providing excellent educational experience for the students through enhanced quality of teaching and learning.

PAPER PROCESSES NOT AS SIMPLE AS FIRST ENVISIONED

USEK started out the process of data gathering on course feedback as many universities have done, with paper-based forms that are manually gathered, scanned, and tabulated. While the method seemed at first glance the simplest, it turned out to be long, tedious, and limiting.

“We had a short window in which to distribute evaluation forms, following mid-term exams and prior to the final exam,” said Deputy President for Quality Assurance and Teaching & Learning and Office Director Dr. Georges Yahchouchi. “It was cost prohibitive and time consuming to evaluate more than 25 percent of our courses.”

It also took a long time to get the data they wanted.

“It took over five weeks to prepare, distribute, collect, and tabulate the forms,” said Yahchouchi.

With the need for better quality data pressing, USEK decided to implement Blue course evaluations software by eXplorance, an online course evaluation system that automates the process of course evaluation data gathering and analysis.

OUTSTANDING COVERAGE

The results have been staggering. With a fraction of the labour and time, the QAIE Office has been able to produce almost four times the amount of coverage, obtain higher quality data, and save annually on paper and ink costs.

“We are now evaluating 95 percent of our courses, and getting response rates of 88 to 93 percent,” Dr. Yahchouchi enthused.

“Students receive two reminders both by SMS and email if they haven’t completed the form. They can receive the form in either English or French,”

Nathalie Bouldoukian, Deputy Director of the QAIE Office

STREAMLINING PROCESSES BY INTEGRATING WITH BANNER

A key component of their recent success with course evaluations is the close integration of Blue with their Banner student information system. This integration allows the university to automate much of the process, as well as use tools such as grade holding in order to increase response rates.

“Once the project is launched, students receive an email containing a link to the course evaluation forms they are required to complete,” the Deputy Director of the QAIE Office, Nathalie Bouldoukian said. “They receive a similar message as an SMS on their mobile phones.”

Since Blue forms automatically reformat for mobile devices, students can complete the evaluation forms right from their mobile devices if they wish.

“Students receive two reminders both by SMS and email if they haven’t completed the form. They can receive the form in either English or French,” she said. “All this information is pulled directly from Banner, so I know it is up-to-date.”

The university also puts on a campus-wide communications campaign to encourage students to voice their opinions. “We emphasize to our students that it just takes three minutes of their time to be a part of the teaching and learning evaluation.”

BUILDING A CULTURE OF TRUST AND COMMUNICATION

USEK takes a unique approach to surveys, opting for partial confidentiality as opposed to fully anonymous course evaluations. Blue provides the ability to do this by establishing settings that determine the level of anonymity.

“Our Office takes student feedback very seriously,” said Yahchouchi. “We established a committee that reads every single comment from our students, and responds to those directly that require it.”

To ensure students feel they can make comments openly, the QAIE Office does not distribute students’ additional comments directly to the instructors. Comments are seen only by the QAIE Office, the President, and the concerned committee.

Their approach has been working. Recent surveys of the student body have shown that they have increasing trust in the course evaluation process.

“We run a well-being survey on our campus, and one of the questions asks the student if he or she believes the university takes their responses into consideration,” he said. “Response on this question improved significantly this year.”

INCREASING ROI BY EXTENDING SOFTWARE CAPABILITIES

USEK has also been able to get more than course evaluation data from their Blue system. Since Blue offers general survey capabilities, the university has decided to maximize their investment by conducting other surveys using the system.

“We now run the general well-being survey using Blue, with all the same capabilities such as automated email, SMS messages, and reminders,” said Bouldoukian. “We also run a new survey which is required for international accreditation, the Course Self Assessment Form by Faculty (CSAF). This is a course assessment survey done by faculty, where they evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the courses they are teaching.”

EASY TO USE

The QAIE Office has two administrators, who create the projects and reports, and distribute the forms themselves.

“We find Blue very easy to use,” said Bouldoukian. “We had a wonderful trainer, and we’ve been able to create all our own projects right from the start.”

The QAIE Office is also pleased by the support they’ve received from eXplorance. “The support has been excellent,” she said. “We always get our needs met in less than 24 hours. The difference in time zones has never been a real issue — eXplorance has always been flexible with us.”

Overall, USEK is extremely pleased with their decision to implement Blue. Higher quality data, more consistent coverage, and lower costs have helped realize their goal of gathering the right information for improving teaching and learning.

“With Blue, our students can be a part of the teaching and learning evaluation in less than three minutes,” concluded Dr. Yahchouchi. “Their learning experience is our focus, and Blue provides the right tools to help make that happen.”

