

Blue[®] Helps CNA-Q's Institutional Research and Planning do More in Less Time



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Kelly Saretsky,
Director of Institutional Research and Planning at
College of the North Atlantic - Qatar.

CLIENT:

College of the North Atlantic - Qatar

CHALLENGE:

As a leading technology college, CNA-Q needed a course evaluation and survey system that could provide professional-looking, streamlined forms for complex course setups that involved disparate systems.

SOLUTION:

Blue course evaluations

BENEFITS

- Reduced time spent creating reports from 1 to 2 weeks to 1 to 2 hours.
- Able to turn around prepared survey requests in under an hour.
- Creating the majority of their reports in Blue, instead of a spreadsheet application.
- Excellent technical support, even across 8 time zones.

Canada's College of the North Atlantic (CNA), based in Newfoundland, has built a campus in Qatar (CNA-Q), as part of the largest international post-secondary agreement involving a North American institution. Valued at over \$1 billion, the agreement has brought high quality technical training programs to the region — today, the college is Qatar's leading comprehensive technical school.

CNAQ's Institutional Research and Planning (IRP) closely monitor campus community needs and climate. As a technology-focused institution, CNA-Q makes full use of modern technology to collect, analyze, and disseminate institutional data. Two important methodologies are course/instructor evaluations and surveys.

HOMEGROWN SYSTEM PROVIDED TOO LITTLE CONTROL

To manage data gathering and analysis, IRP used to rely on a custom-built system. While the application was excellent and had many advantages, as a custom-built system it also had several limitations.

"There was a lot of back and forth with the developer during evaluation periods," says Kelly Saretsky, Director of Institutional Research and Planning at CNA-Q. "Even though we had very good support for our requests, we wanted to be able to make changes ourselves. Just to clean up data we would sometimes have to submit a request, shut down overnight, and wait until the next day to proceed."

SUPPORT ACROSS 8-HOUR TIME ZONE DIFFERENCES

CNA-Q first implemented Blue in late 2008 and ran their first course evaluation in 2009.

In less than six weeks, eXplorance worked with the CNA-Q IT team to link up Blue to their different systems. Data from the student system feeds into a Business Intelligence system, provided by Microsoft SQL Server Analytics Services, which cleans the data up before it is fed into Blue.

"Training was really good," Kelly says. "It involved our research staff as well as our IT staff. It was more than worth it."

The team is especially impressed by the support they've received for Blue.

"Every time I've had to contact eXplorance, they've always gotten back to me the same day. I find that pretty remarkable considering the time zone difference," says Charlotte Alexander, Research Analyst at IRP.

"We've had previous experience with other software that was not just expensive but challenging to implement. It was very difficult to get the support we needed," Kelly says. "We are usually the ones that have to accommodate the time zone difference. It makes a big difference when someone can accommodate ours."

IMPRESSIVE SURVEY FORMS AND REPORTS

Today, IRP's staff of four uses Blue to manage all the college surveys and course/instructor evaluations. IRP runs one full course evaluation during the fall and winter semesters, and conducts about five surveys a week to students, faculty, staff, alumni, and other members of the campus community. These include alumni surveys, student satisfaction surveys, surveys for accreditation, labor market surveys, and satisfaction surveys for things like cafeteria and IT services, among many others.

With the new Blue software, online forms and reports look more in line with the school's reputation as a leading technology college.

"Students used to have to fill out separate forms for each instructor. Now, they get one email containing links to all the forms they have to complete," Kelly says. "They also no longer have to fill in any of their personal or demographic information. It's a much more seamless experience for the student."

GETTING MORE DONE IN LESS TIME

IRP especially appreciates the time-savings they've seen from the new system.

"It used to take about one to two weeks to create a report," she says. "Now it takes about two hours."

"We put a lot of effort into how the reports look," says Erin Stepney, Research Analyst at CNA-Q. "A typical report includes charts that show frequencies and open-ended questions. We also decide on a case-by-case basis whether we want to show gap analysis, results by demographic information, gender analysis, or other special groups."

"Before, we had to extract our data to a spreadsheet application and create reports in there, which meant we were re-creating reports every time. With Blue, we have projects set up that we reuse every semester. We just update the data, and generate a new report. It's so much faster."

PROVIDING MORE SERVICES TO THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY

At the end of the day, it's about having the right tools available for promoting informed decision-making.

"Like many institutes of higher learning, we're developing a culture of evidence-based decision-making," Kelly concludes. "Having the right data available is critical to that objective. We're pleased to have Blue assisting us in this mandate, and we're looking forward to being able to do even more as the tool continues to expand."