

Blue® makes online course evaluations easy for Institutional Research and IT

GEORGIAN
YOUR COLLEGE • YOUR FUTURE



“I find eXplorance support is always there for us. We’ve never not been able to get them on the phone or by email.”

Tony Podziemski,
Institutional Research & Evaluation Analyst

“eXplorance is a great vendor to work with. I wish all our vendors were like them.”

Grant Strasser, Manager, Business Systems

CLIENT:

Georgian College, Barrie, ON Canada

NO. STUDENTS:

11,000 Full-time
28,000 Cont. Education

CHALLENGE

The college needed to transition gradually from paper-based course evaluations to a complete, online Learning Experience Management system that could grow with them.

SOLUTION:

Blue Learning Experience Management (LEM) software system implemented by eXplorance Professional Services and integrated with Blackboard Learn™ for a successful phased rollout.

BENEFITS

- Increased response rates by 7% with Blackboard integration
- Setup by IT in less than one day
- Tight integration with current systems, including Banner® by Ellucian, Blackboard Learn™, Oracle® HR
- Outsourced upgrade work with excellent professional services

Technology should bend to the way the customer wants it, not the other way round.

That's the experience Georgian College had recently, when they purchased and implemented Blue Learning Experience Management (LEM) software from eXplorance to replace their current paper-based system and automate their surveys and course evaluations.

ENSURING A SUCCESSFUL ROLLOUT IN PHASES

The Institutional Research department teamed up with IT Services at Georgian College to conduct the rollout. They knew, above all, that it would take time and discussion to have a successful transition from paper-based processes to online.

"We wanted to go at a pace where everyone was comfortable," said Tony Podziemski, Institutional Research & Evaluation Analyst at Georgian College. "We were introducing a lot of change: a new questionnaire, new processes, new technology. We also wanted to ensure we were reaching our students in the ways they prefer to communicate."

Institutional Research worked closely with IT to find a replacement system and launch the project. They surveyed several providers, but when they looked at the technology behind it, Blue came out ahead of the class.

"For any new software project here at Georgian College, we insist on tight integration with our current systems," said Grant Strasser, Manager, Business Systems at Georgian College. "Blue demonstrated deep integration capabilities, in addition to all the features available."

BLUE MEETS RIGOROUS TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

Blue also met other important requirements, such as accessibility standards. "The Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities (MTCU) has mandated that all colleges and universities in Ontario be compliant with the Accessibility for

Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)," said Podziemski. "We were happy to see that Blue met these standards already."

Podziemski coordinated with various stakeholders throughout the organization to set processes and gain consensus on the new system. They started with a small pilot to test the technology, then ran two pilots in one academic year of 20 classes each. Instructors volunteered to be part of the pilot project.

Strasser was impressed by how easily he could make changes in Blue to accommodate the phased rollout.

"It's very easy to make changes in Blue when you want to add more classes or sections," Strasser said. "We didn't have to do any coding or write any forms. We just created a link to our database with the appropriate business rule. All our clerical staff need to do is go in and click a button in Banner using baseline functions."

"This capability was very important," added Podziemski. "Our committee was very careful in selecting which courses would go live first with the new technology, so we needed this to be easy. We have a filter in Blue that picks up the flagged courses - it works quite nicely."

Blue connects to the college's student records database and uploads the data from there using business rules. It's also integrated with Banner, their Blackboard Learn (LMS), and their HR system, Oracle and Microsoft SQL database.



TECHNICAL FEATURES ASSIST ROLLOUT PROCESS

Georgian College also made use of Blue's flexible confidentiality in their phased rollout. Blue provides varying levels of confidentiality, which provides both confidentiality and enough flexibility to make adjustments as required during a pilot phase.

"We have to assure students and faculty that this is a confidential process," said Podziemski. "At the same time we didn't want to be paralyzed because everything was locked down in a blinded system. You need to be able to make adjustments during a pilot. Flexible confidentiality gave us just the right balance between the two."

Last year, Georgian College upgraded their Blackboard Learn, which includes a mobile interface for the LMS. When Georgian College discovered that Blue could be made available from the Blackboard mobile interface, they decided to upgrade their version of Blue.

BLACKBOARD MOBILE INTEGRATION HELPS INCREASE RESPONSE RATES

"We're finding more and more that students are interacting with the organization through their mobile phones," said Strasser. "That's where students are living right now."

With the new version of Blue, course evaluations and surveys appear once students enter their online virtual classrooms in Blackboard, either on a desktop computer or their handheld devices.

The new capability helped increase response rates during the pilot.

"We increased our response rates by an average 7 percent after going live with the new Blue forms on Blackboard mobile," said Podziemski.

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES GET TOP MARKS

To manage the upgrade, Georgian College hired eXplorance Professional Services to take care of a lot of the heavy lifting. Professional Services provided services such as a review and clean-up of data, review of practices, training, and consulting for optimization of future projects.

"We have so many IT initiatives going on right now, our IT staff are fully booked," said Strasser. "To have a third party that could do the upgrade, as well as provide a value-added service that is really useful to our business, was invaluable."

The phased implementation is going well, and faculty have been giving favorable

reviews. Instructors especially like the faster turnaround and higher level of data in reports. They also like no longer having to take up class time for paper-based class evaluations.

“One of their favorite reports is the Question Ranking report, which shows the five questions that performed the highest, and the five that performed the worst,” Podziemski said. “They can see immediately what is working and what isn’t in their classrooms.”

With Blue, Georgian College has found a flexible tool that is also easy to use. So easy, in fact, that it’s starting to look less like work and more like fun.

“I actually had fun rolling out the course evaluation,” concluded Strasser. “We didn’t have to stop to try to figure things out or read a manual. It was pretty easy; it just worked. And it was fun -- we sat down and half an hour later I had everything working and I could hand it over to IR.”

