INTRODUCING
LEARNING EXPERIENCE MANAGEMENT (LEM) FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

How to keep up with the pace of change and meet the expectations of all stakeholders

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CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This whitepaper poses some fundamental questions about the higher education space:

- What is the real mission of higher education?
- What challenges hamper reaching that mission?
- How can an institution meet these many challenges?

Delving into these issues raises further questions that can challenge many deep-seated views, both inside and outside academia.

For example, to measure the effectiveness of teaching and learning, is it enough to rely only on course evaluations by students?

Is the instructor the only factor in successful learning or are there other factors to consider?

What is the real goal of gathering feedback from the classroom?

Is it to get a snapshot of the performance of each instructor—to use as the primary basis for their promotions and raises—or is it to promote continuous improvement of the entire institution?

Can better feedback be gathered, and a more complete analysis delivered, by integrating data collected from other stakeholders and ecosystem players?

This whitepaper considers all these questions, and offers unique answers to higher educators seeking to help their institutions remain competitive and achieve their true mission.

THE MISSION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Institutions of higher education have always played an important role in shaping society. Governments and employers rely on higher education to provide an effective learning environment for students.

Everyone wants students to graduate with the necessary knowledge, skills and competencies to enter the workforce, meet the needs of employers, create valuable innovations, and have a positive impact on society.

This is the mission of higher education institutions. And the outcomes of this mission shape the workforce, markets, and national economies for years to come.

HIGHER EDUCATION FACES MANY CHALLENGES

As you know, today's colleges and universities face a changing landscape with an ever-evolving set of challenges:

• Advances in technology create many new options for learning.

• Competition for students is on the rise; for example, enrollments in online-only for-profit colleges have fallen since 2009 in the face of increased competition. [1]

• Higher education budgets are on the decline; for example, since 2008 the average U.S. state has cut per-student spending by 28%. [2]

• Governments are pushing for higher standards; for example, Obama explicitly mentioned accreditation reform in his 2013 State of the Union report. [3]

• Some of the new technologies used by most students today include mobile devices, the cloud, social media, and all the resources of the web for finding information, on demand. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are on a "high-speed trajectory" attracting millions of participants.[4]

All these technologies give students more choices than ever before, and threaten to reshape the entire paradigm of higher education.

With so many assumptions of the past changing so quickly, colleges and universities must rethink their approaches, so they can continue to attract and retain students, and accomplish their mission.

[1] Goldie Blumenstyk, *Nonprofit Colleges Compete on For-Profit's Turf,* The Chronicle of Higher Education, 21 June 2013, page A3
[2] Jordan Weissmann, *A Truly Devastating Graph on State Higher Education Spending,* The Atlantic, 20 March 2013
[3] Barack Obama, *The President's Plan For A Strong Middle Class & A Strong America,* 12 February 2013, page 5
[4] *NMC Horizon Report: 2013 Higher Education Edition,* The New Media Consortium, 2013, page 12

BUT YESTERDAY'S FEEDBACK SYSTEMS CAN'T KEEP UP

Many of the tools and systems used in academia were never designed to meet the challenges of today. For example, most existing evaluation and feedback systems are geared to assessing instructor performance alone. These evaluation systems do not support a process in which improvements by either faculty or students are compared to an initial benchmark.

What's more, these feedback systems are designed to be backward-looking, gathering course evaluations only once at the end of term. Sadly, many faculty and students have lost their belief in these tools:

- **Faculty** members fear that end-of-term course evaluations are little more than a "popularity contest" that determines their future raises and promotions.

- **Students** seldom see their institutions take any action on their feedback, since improvements to a course are applied only in the following term. This can lead to lower response rates and less engagement among students.

The bottom line is that the systems in place to measure progress in many institutions of higher education are inadequate for today's challenges.

TEACHING INVOLVES MANY STAKE-HOLDERS...

As all educators know, effective teaching is far more than a simple transaction between a vendor and a customer. In fact, higher education is a relatively complex and intensive process that occurs over a long term, measured in years.

The higher-education market space involves a complex interplay of many stakeholders, including:

- Applicants, students, and alumni
- Faculty, department chairs, deans, and provosts
- Facilities management and support staff
- CIOs and IT teams, with security policies to govern access
- Corporate and private donors
- Local, state and national government policy-makers
- Future employers

Yet existing feedback systems only gather evaluations from students. These systems fail to tap all the other rich sources that could shed light on the question of how to improve the process of higher education.

... PLUS A COMPLEX ECOSYSTEM OF PROVIDERS

It's clear, as one education blogger put it, that "engagement happens both inside and outside of a classroom." [5] This is proven by the complex ecosystem of organizations in place to provide the many goods and services that support the mission of higher education. These include:

- Facilities such as labs, libraries and sport centers
- Learning material providers, journal and textbook publishers
- IT infrastructure platforms such as CRM, ERP, LMS and SIS
- Central databases, security and equipment vendors
- Accreditation assessment solutions

All these organizations help shape the learning environment and play a role in determining the student's experience.

Yet existing feedback systems cannot integrate data from the many players in this ecosystem. This further limits the effective reach of these systems.

Among the many useful functions this integration could provide:

- Pre-populating certain fields in advance to streamline evaluation and survey forms, and boost response rates.
- Performing sophisticated analysis based on student, instructor, and course data already in the institution's databases.
- Comparing results over time across the hierarchical faculty structure or between vendors to ensure continuous improvement.

[5] Robert Talbert, *Education as a complex adaptive system?* The Chronicle of Higher Education, 27 September 20

MULTIPLE MEASURES ARE NEEDED, NOT JUST EVALUATIONS

Fortunately, some promising beacons are lighting the way forward. According to the latest research, effective teaching can be measured... although it's not always done.

This view is based on the three-year Measures of Effective Teaching study sponsored by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. This involved 3,000 volunteer teachers from different areas of the U.S., with impartial observers studying the experience shared between teachers and students.

In a recent op-ed piece in the Washington Post, Bill Gates summed up the study's key findings. "What the country needs are thoughtfully developed teacher evaluation systems that include multiple measures of performance," he wrote. Among these measures, he lists student surveys, classroom observations by experienced colleagues, and results against standardized tests or benchmarks.[6]

In other words, the best feedback and evaluation metrics for colleges and universities are based on a rich set of inputs from multiple sources.

Student course evaluations are only one measure of the learning environment. For a more complete metric, evaluations must be combined with a measure of learning progress, plus independent peer assessments such as 360-degree reviews.

Gathering all three inputs and weighing these factors is essential to gain an objective view on how to improve the entire teaching and learning experience.

[6]Bill Gates, *A fairer way to evaluate teachers,* Washington Post, 3 April 2013

THE WAY FORWARD: LEM

To remain competitive and accomplish their mission, colleges and universities need a new type of system to give them a well-rounded picture of the higher education space.

They need a system that can reach and engage all stakeholders, gather and analyze inputs through numerous channels, and deliver real-time, accurate information to stakeholders and decision-makers.

They need a system that can combine factual feedback on the learning experience with forward-looking predictive analytics.

This kind of system can help colleges and universities foster a continuous cycle of improvement, and effectively meet the expectations of students, employers, governments and all other stakeholders.

To refer to this type of next-generation feedback and evaluation system, eXplorance, Inc. has coined the term "Learning Experience Management" or LEM.

WHAT IS LEM?

As we've seen, accomplishing the mission of higher education involves multiple stakeholders and a complex ecosystem of organizations providing related goods and services.

Learning Experience Management (LEM) is a multifaceted practice designed to support this mission.

LEM takes place as a recurring cycle that ensures continuous improvement across all the dimensions of a professional development process.

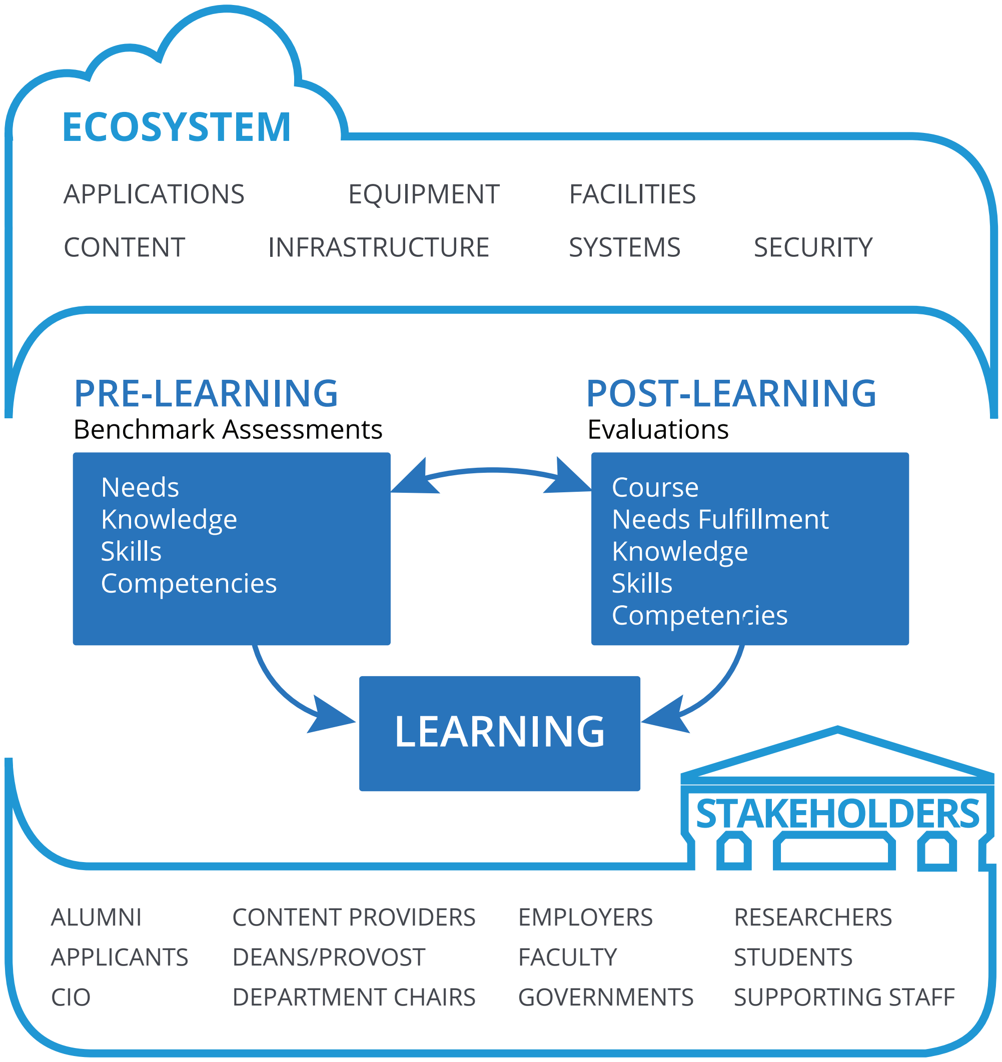
An effective LEM system must include a comprehensive set of enterprise-class automated evaluations, tests, feedback surveys and workflow. These tools enable colleges and universities to benchmark, evaluate, analyze, improve and monitor every aspect of the learning experience.

As shown in **Figure 1**, LEM deals with two out of three phases of the education process: before and after the central process where knowledge, skills, and competencies are transmitted to the student. This core process remains the domain of the faculty.

For the **pre-learning** phase, the LEM system supports an in-depth assessment of the current needs, knowledge, skills, and competencies of each student and faculty member. This assessment is used to create an initial in-depth set of benchmarks.

For the **post-learning** phase, LEM supports a rich set of course evaluations, and an effective way to measure both faculty and student improvement against the original benchmarks.

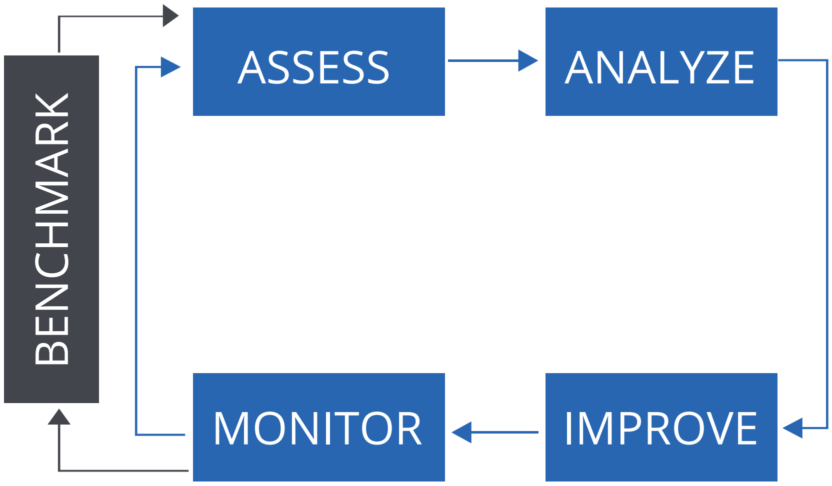
FIGURE 1
Pre-Learning
Post-Learning



HOW DOES LEM WORK?

The key functions of LEM can be broken down even further. As shown in **Figure 2**, an effective LEM system involves a continuous cycle through five key functions:

FIGURE 2



Benchmark: LEM sets the path to improvement by creating a set of benchmarks. These are based on a weighted selection of initial student training requirements, government accreditation, and employer needs.

Assess: Feedback is gathered through online course evaluations, 360-degree peer reviews, and stakeholder surveys. These can take place numerous times during the teaching term.

Analyze: The results are automatically analyzed, translated into suggested improvements, and reported in real-time.

Improve: The findings can trigger automated actions, such as a survey or a 360-degree review to probe deeper into any issue. These findings can also spark deliberation by appropriate decision-makers.

Monitor: These improvements are continuously monitored against the initial benchmarks to ensure that the learning experience is providing a high "return on expectations."

LEM IN ACTION: TWO REAL-WORLD SCENARIOS

Consider this common scenario: Partway through the term, an instructor wonders if his teaching methods are meeting his students expectations.

The LEM system gives him the ability to conduct interim evaluations at any time. These evaluations monitor his students' feedback and sentiment, giving him factual real-time information he can use to make timely interim improvements, long before the end of the course.

In this example, both students and instructors directly benefit from engaging in this feedback process.

When results are tied to an improvement cycle rather than strictly to teacher or student performance, higher education institutes have discovered that stakeholders are more willing to engage. The institution can thus achieve higher response rates sustained over time.

A second likely scenario: A student registering for university must pick between two different courses running at the same time. She's curious about the experience of other students who chose either option.

When she logs into the student portal, the LEM system enables her to access the feedback processed from previous terms. Far more than a "popularity" rating for each instructor, the system provides detailed information on each course from the viewpoint of different stakeholders, including alumni and potential employers. She can also see factual data about the improvement rates of each course.

All this helps her make an informed decision, and sets her expectations accordingly. When a freshman glimpses the benefits of the LEM system right at the outset of her university experience, that encourages her to engage with the feedback evaluation process from that moment on.

HOW DO YOU MEASURE THE BENEFITS OF LEM?

Based on many scenarios like these, the effectiveness of an LEM system can be measured in terms of "return on expectations" or ROE. ROE can be defined as a holistic measure of all the benefits realized from any training program or initiative, both qualitative and quantitative.

In other words, ROE conveys "what success looks like" to all the stakeholders involved. "ROE is a positive measure that pulls an organization together in the quest to define and achieve the target," explain Jim and Wendy Kirkpatrick from Kirkpatrick Partners.[7] Their firm promotes the well-known Kirkpatrick model for evaluating training, first published in the 1950s and updated in 2009.

The Kirkpatricks also call ROE "a collaborative agreement that unites an organization in working towards a common goal."

Certainly ROE is a more flexible metric than return on investment (ROI), but it can include all the measures that typically make up ROI, plus others that ROI cannot encompass.

Another advantage: ROE is highly customizable. It can be defined uniquely by each different college and university, and then calculated according to whatever formula they devise.

Figure 3 shows the most likely ways for a college or university to measure ROE, both short-term and long-term.

[7]Jim and Wendy Kirkpatrick, *Return on Expectations: The ultimate demonstration of training value,* TrainingZone.co.uk/Siftmedia, 25 August 2009

FIGURE 3

SHORT-TERM	LONG-TERM
Student retention	Student registrations
Student progress, compared to initial benchmarks	Institutional reputation among all stakeholders, especially alumni, donors, and future employers
Satisfaction level, for all stakeholders	Increased budgets
	Workforce readiness ratio

HOW DOES LEM WORK?

Ten years ago, one software developer determined to help higher educators deal with their challenges by finding a way to continuously improve their operations. The result is Blue® by eXplorance.

Blue is an enterprise-class LEM solution with a successful track record of 10 years. Blue is installed at 200 colleges and universities, where it's used to evaluate over 1 million courses per year. Every year, Blue replaces about 50 million paper evaluation forms and 25 million pages of reports, saving almost 1,000 trees.

eXplorance strongly believes that LEM can help higher education institutions attract and retain students, and better achieve their mission. A next-generation system based on continuous improvement, not individual performance, that merges predictive course corrections with preventive feedback actions to engage all stakeholders in a sustained way, will deliver a high ROE (return on expectations).

The bottom line is that LEM yields increased value for all stakeholders in the higher education space. To learn more about how LEM can help your college or university attract and retain students, engage stakeholders, and achieve its mission, please view the Introduction to LEM video.

https://youtu.be/pf5PPj7J5Gs

ABOUT EXPLORANCE

At eXplorance, we believe that improvement is at the heart of progress. By providing tools that assess knowledge, competencies, and skills, we assist organizations in developing a culture of improvement. Blue helps build that culture by powering a cycle of continuous improvement resulting in strategic insights for future innovation.

Blue is a complete Learning Experience Management (LEM) system that includes applications for course and instructor evaluations, broad-based stakeholder surveys, psychometric and knowledge tests, 360 degree feedback, and more. Putting 'being better' at the forefront, Blue provides benchmarks, stakeholder assessments, sophisticated reporting, adapted insights and continuous monitoring.

Founded in 2003, eXplorance is a privately held corporation based in Montreal, Canada. Some of eXplorance's clients include RMIT University, University of Louisville, PPS International Limited, University of Toronto, Babson College, Fidelity Marketing, UAE University, loanDepot, University of Groningen and NASA.

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