

# Academics' engagement with Blue Explorance Question Personalisation: an imperative for response-able evaluations

## The Wits University experience

Dr Rejoice Nsibande; Ms Nompumelelo  
Mazibuko & Ms Nthabiseng Mokoena



# This presentation aims to:

1. Demonstrate the affordance of Blue Explorance system in supporting change in student evaluation practices (designing response-able evaluations & data analysis)
2. Explore lecturers' participation in designing response-able student evaluations via Question Personalisation
3. Reflect on how we can engage differently for a better experience?



# About Wits: Facts & Figures 2019/2020

---

- 5 Faculties comprising of 36 schools
- 3 416 courses offered
- 40881 student enrolment
- 1152 staff head count

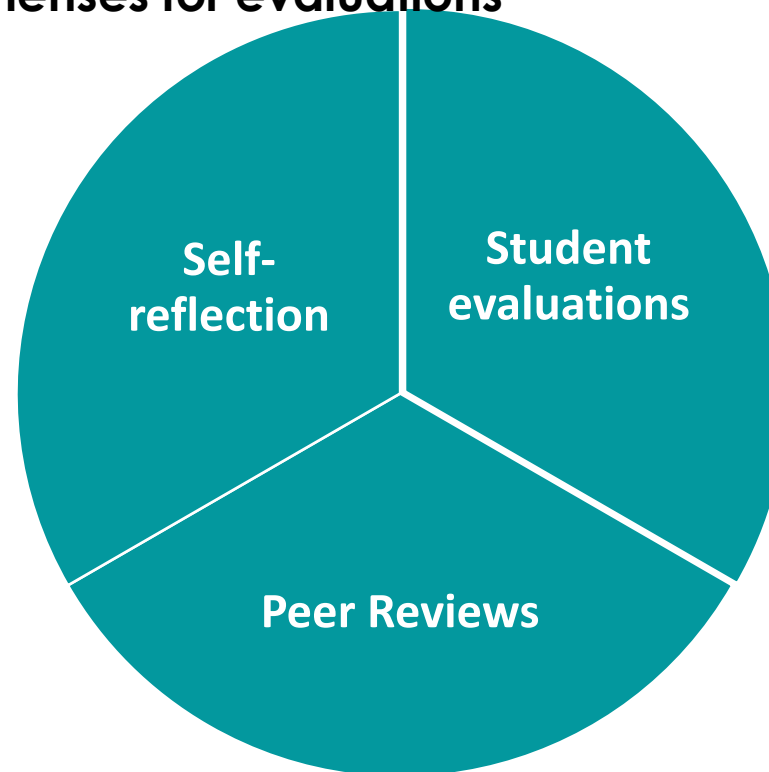
Evaluations Services is located in the Centre for Learning Teaching & Development (CLTD) responsible for staff development  
Responsible for coordinating student evaluations using Blue Explorance system.



# Architecture of Evaluations of Teaching and Courses at Wits

- Evaluations for accountability and development
- Student evaluations feature in staffing & promotions process
- Fault finding and blame the lecturer approach
- Element of control (lecturer is the subject of analysis)

**Evaluations policy encourages the three lenses for evaluations**



**Participation in student evaluations follows an Opt In model – lecturers according to ‘need’ decide whether to conduct evaluations or not**

# University core questions: focus on lecturer performance

1. Lectures are presented in a logical way and easy to follow.
2. The lecturer uses examples that support my understanding of the concepts covered in the lectures.
3. The facilitation methods of the lecturer challenge me to understand concepts taught rather than to memorise content.
4. The lecturer provides opportunities for collaboration and interaction among students either in lectures or online.
5. The lecturer listens and responds appropriately when the class requests for help during lectures.
6. The lecturer makes herself/himself available to students for consultation in line with agreed-upon consultation platforms (face to face or online).
7. I feel my participation in class is valued and treated with respect.
8. The lecturer makes assessment guidelines clear and easily available.
9. The lecturer provides constructive feedback for my assessment tasks to help me improve my work.
10. The lecturer's facilitation methods developed my ability to work independently.

# Blue Explorance Question Personalisation

Question Personalisation selectable

- Data bank provided with questions to select
- Focus on teaching goals, unique teaching context & student learning

What are some concerns staff have about the questions used in SET?

Question Personalisation selectable

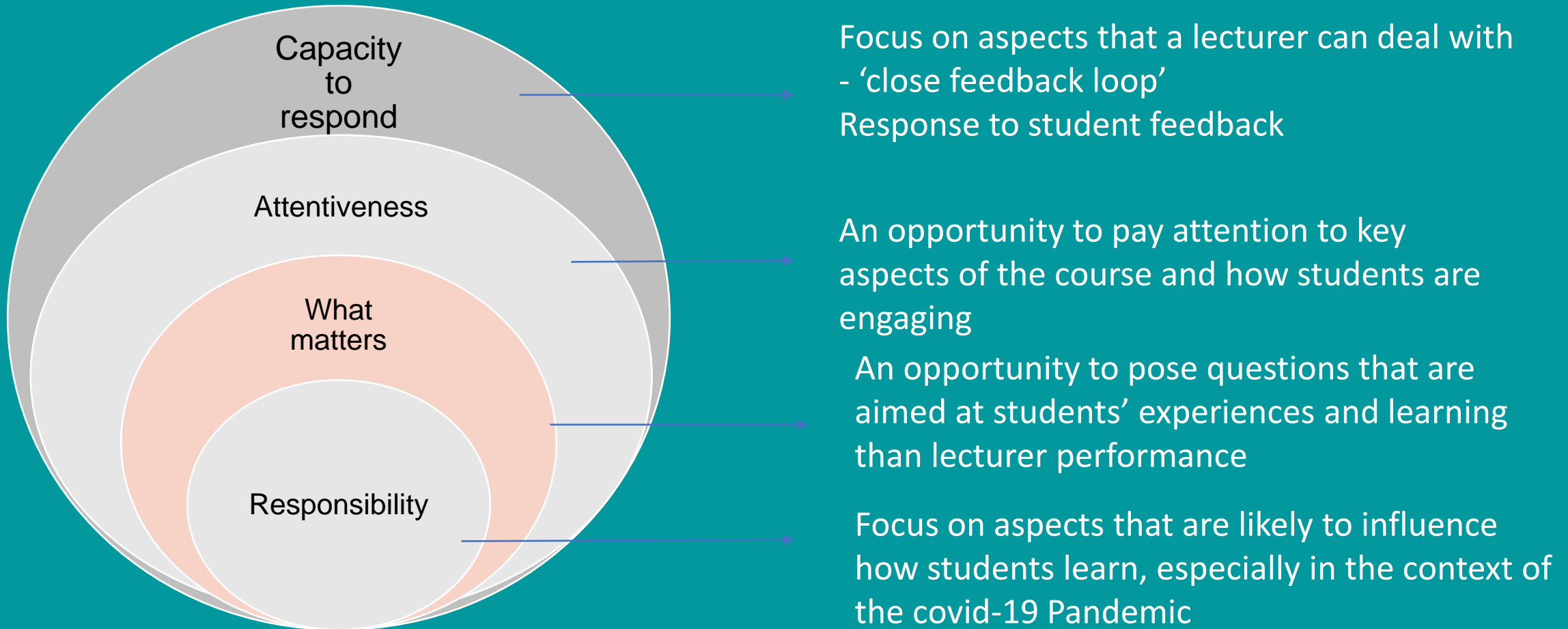
- Lecturers design / create their own questions
- Focus on teaching goals, unique teaching context & Student learning

relevance

too broad  
team taught modules  
not relevant for online  
this has been mediated by  
validity and reliability  
not relevant for students  
biased in favour of stude  
not current  
irrelevant to needs  
confidentiality

**Using QP to create response-able evaluations**

# Response-able Evaluations using Question Personalisation: what do we mean?



NB: Putting students and student learning at the centre of evaluations

# An example of support for staff: self-help docs



## CENTRE FOR LEARNING, TEACHING AND DEVELOPMENT EVALUATION OF TEACHING AND COURSES – QUESTION PERSONALISATION GUIDE

### How to Add and Select Questions in the Blue Evaluation System

This document outlines the steps for selecting, creating and submitting your questions for the student evaluation form.

#### Overview

As a lecturer, you may add up to eight (8) questions for each of your evaluation/s by selecting them from the Item Bank. You may also select three (3) qualitative questions. There is also an opportunity for you to design your own questions in line with your teaching goals. If you are teaching more than one course, you may copy questions selected for one course for use in another course.

#### Step 2. Create your question(s).

Click the “Edit” button beside the first question:

Once clicked, the question field will expand as shown:

Click on the phrase “Please enter your 1<sup>st</sup> question” to activate the yellow edit box. Then begin typing your question. *It is recommended to include your name in brackets to indicate to students that this was your question*



The course contributed in a meaningful and relevant way to my program of study.

**NB: To facilitate engagement with Question Personalisation we also organised webinars and provided consultations to ensure dialogue.**



# Blue Explorance Question Personalisation Email

Dear **NAME OF LECTURER**

**Wits University is committed to continuous improvement of all its courses through using different mechanisms to solicit feedback on teaching and courses. All teaching staff are encouraged to elicit feedback from students of their experience of teaching and/ or courses. This feedback should support your reflection to improve teaching practice and enhance student learning.**

**Use the provided link to create an evaluation form for your students. Please note that in the case of a teaching evaluation you will have 10 core questions, you should select additional questions of your choice (between 4-8 questions) and up to 3 open ended questions.**

**[Please click here to create your evaluation form.](#)**

**For more information on Evaluations of Teaching and Courses, please refer to the university policy via the link provided below:**

**<http://intranet.wits.ac.za/exec/registrar/Policies/Revised%20Policy%20on%20Evaluations%20and%20Teaching%20of%20courses.pdf>**

Thank you  
Evaluation Services Team

**Email is detailed because it also serve as an information point for lecturers**

# Extracting and analysing evaluations data: QP data

Extracting data from Blue Explorance was a challenge:

1. Not possible to just extract CSV file on QP questions only without downloading project data.
2. Not possible to get QP create your own questions. Missed on getting questions that lecturers designed – key data.

Extracted data not easy to analyse without support of an expert in data analysis



Q101\_The pace of presentation was suitable i.e. not too fast or too slow.\_

| EI    | EJ       | EK       | EL      | EM        | EN       | EO       | EP    |
|-------|----------|----------|---------|-----------|----------|----------|-------|
| _Meth | Q100_The | Q101_The | Q102_Wo | Q103_Inst | Q104_Lab | Q105_Lab | Q106_ |
|       | D/A      | D/A      | D/A     | D/A       | D/A      | D/A      | D/A   |
|       | D/A      | D/A      | D/A     | D/A       | D/A      | D/A      | D/A   |
|       | D/A      | D/A      | D/A     | D/A       | D/A      | D/A      | D/A   |
|       | D/A      | D/A      | D/A     | D/A       | D/A      | D/A      | D/A   |
|       | D/A      | D/A      | D/A     | D/A       | D/A      | D/A      | D/A   |
|       | D/A      | D/A      | D/A     | D/A       | D/A      | D/A      | D/A   |

**NB: Reliance on other individuals with relevant skills set impacts on the rate at which we can use evaluations data to inform ACTION**

# Data Analysis

Data extracted from Blue Explorance systems – **challenges**  
Focus is on Semester 1 of 2021 (Term 1 & Term 2) – all lecturers using Blue Explorance system

## Data Analysis

Data analyst used SPSS & R software to handle and organise data for analysis and reflection

## Data analysis focused on:

Lecturers' participation in Question Personalisation; the questions selected from the data bank (and the focus of these questions)

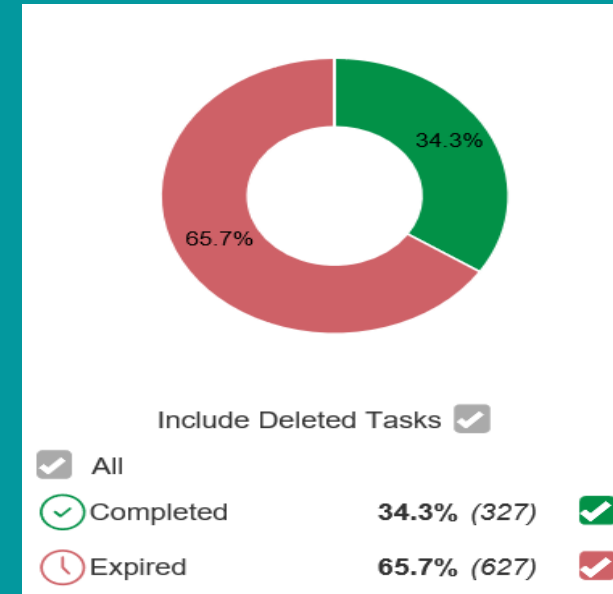
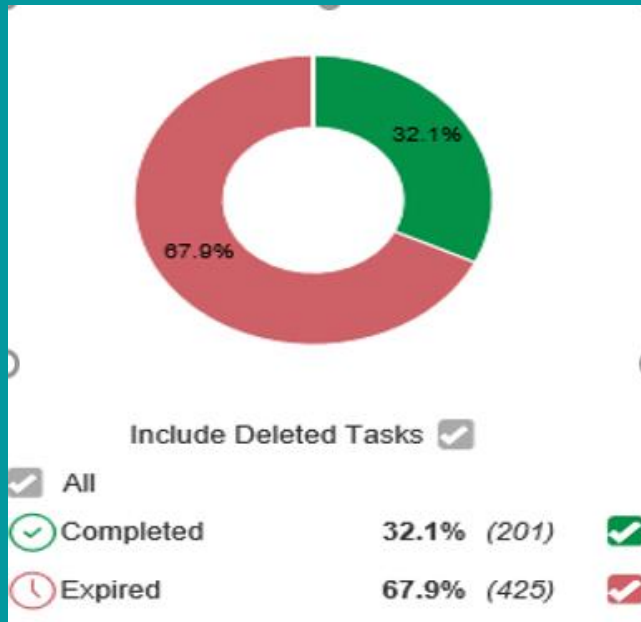
**We could not retrieve questions created by lecturers from system**



# Participation trends across 2 Terms in Semester 1: Blue Explorance dashboard

Term 1 – 32 of the 36 schools (626 lecturers)  
participated in evaluations

Term 2 – 30 of the 36 schools (954 lecturers)  
participated in evaluations



32.1% lecturers engaged in QP for Term 1 evaluations project and 34,3 % in Term 2, only 2.2% increase.

Most lecturers did not engage in QP (Evaluation forms were sent to students with Core questions only)

# Example of frequently selected questions: Can we hear the lecturers?

1. The course outline gave a clear idea of the purpose and demands of the course.
2. Lectures made a valuable contribution to my understanding of the subject.
3. Returned work is accompanied by helpful written comments and suggestions.
4. Resources required for completion of assessed work were easily available.
5. The lecturer is clear and understandable in his her explanations.
6. The lecturer makes good use of examples and illustrations to support learning.
7. The lecturer summarizes the main points of the lecture effectively.
8. The lecturer welcomes different viewpoints and independent thinking.
9. The lecturer shows a thorough knowledge of his her subject.
10. The course materials is well presented.
11. The Lecturer presents the online component of the course in a structured way.
12. The lecturer used different educational technologies .e.g. YouTube videos, PowerPoints Slides, LMS, and social media platforms to support my learning experience.

**Questions are not drastically different from the core questions – focus is on lecturer performance.**

**Only question 11 & 12 could be seen as slightly appreciative of the current context.**

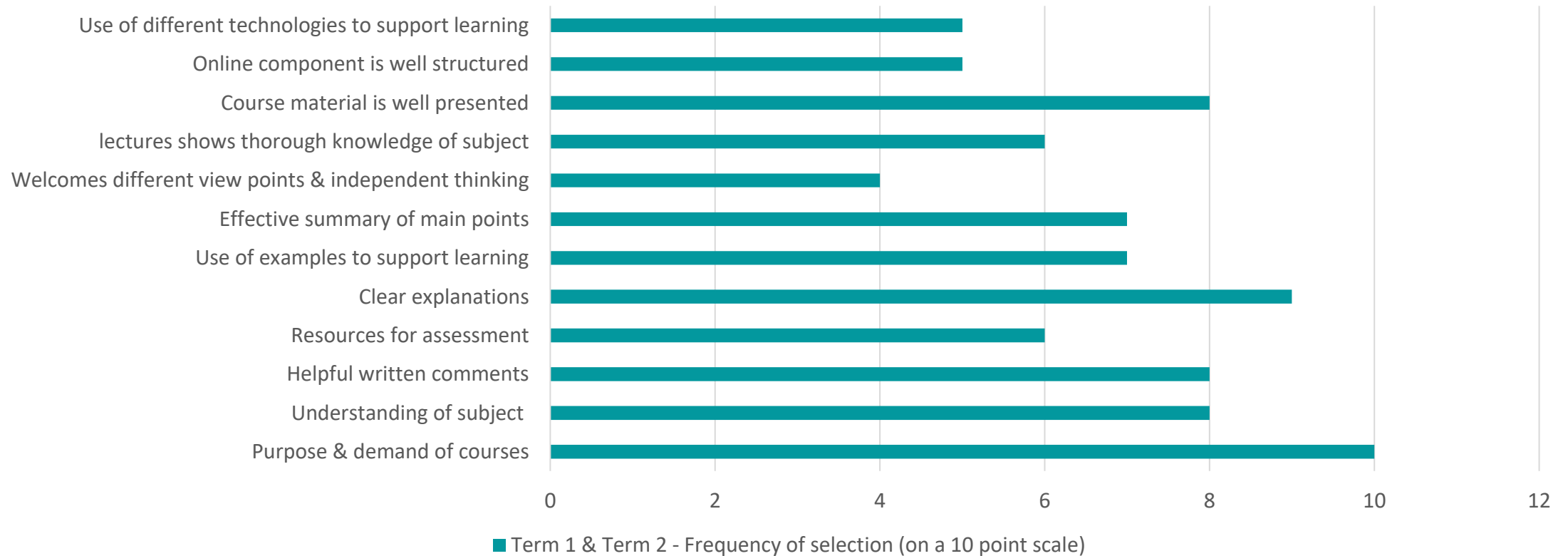
# Areas of focus for the selected questions

| Areas of focus           | Details   |
|--------------------------|---|
| Course organisation      | Structure of the course and clarity on what the course is about   |
| Lecturer engagement      | Lecturer subject knowledge, clarity of explanations and summaries & use of examples to support student learning |
| Assessment practice      | Usefulness of the feedback comments given on assessment tasks   |
| Use of technology        | Structure of the online course and usefulness of technology tools used in the course                            |
| Sensitivity to inclusion | Allowing space for students' ideas  |

**Areas of focus are not different from the core questions YET these are often seen as not particularly useful as they favour students than lecturers.**

# Frequency of selection for the top 12 questions

Frequency of selection (on a 10 point scale)



**‘safe questions’ rather than addressing learning processes e.g. students’ engagement with knowledge in the disciplines**

# Reflection and lessons learnt

## What do we know?

- Lecturers made the decision to conduct evaluations YET they were less likely to engage in QP.
- Lecturers that made the attempt to do QP still mimicked what is covered in the university core questions (not much focus on other aspects).
- Its not the accessibility of the platform nor resources that impact engagement with QP.

## What do we think?

- ‘Space is not safe’ (how reports are used) hence lecturers feel they are under surveillance YET they are learning how to work in the new modality.
- It would seem lecturers chose either ‘safe’ questions or not engage at all - to protect themselves.
- Evaluations seem to be in competition with other areas of lecturers’ academic role.
- Often lecturers do evaluations for either probation confirmation or promotions processes



# Conclusion

Perceptions of evaluations (institutional culture), increased workload & a sense of 'disruption in the current context' influenced lecturers' approach and engagement.

There is a need to go beyond focus on the affordances of the Blue Explorance system and lecturers' capacity development.

## Challenge

*How do we influence the institutional culture in order to benefit from affordances of the Blue Explorance system to ensure better evaluations processes?*

## Suggestion

**We need a systems thinking approach to begin shifting thinking about evaluations from multiple points**



# Selected Readings

Bozalek, V & Zembylas, M. 2017. Towards a response-able pedagogy across higher education institutions in post-apartheid South Africa: An ethico-political analysis. *Education as Change*, 21 (2):62-85.

Brewington, Q. L. & Hall, N. H. 2018. Givin' Stakeholders the Mic: Using Hip-Hop's Evaluation voice as a contemporary evaluation approach. *American Journal of Evaluation*, Vol 39 (3), 336 – 349.

Chalmers, D. & Hunt, L. 2016. Evaluation of Teaching. *HERDSA Review of Higher Education*, 3: 25-55.

Chen, Y. & Hoshower, L. B. 2003. Student evaluation of teaching effectiveness: An assessment of student perception and motivation. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 28 (1): 77-88.

Edstrom, K. 2008. Doing course evaluation as if learning matters most. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 27 (2): 95-106.





# Acknowledgement

Grateful to Senyo Cudjoe (PhD student at Wits,  
Research Assistant)

*Thank you for taking time to listen to our presentation!*