Blue Plays a Central Role in Education Transformation at Monash University

Institution:
Monash University

Location:
Melbourne, Australia

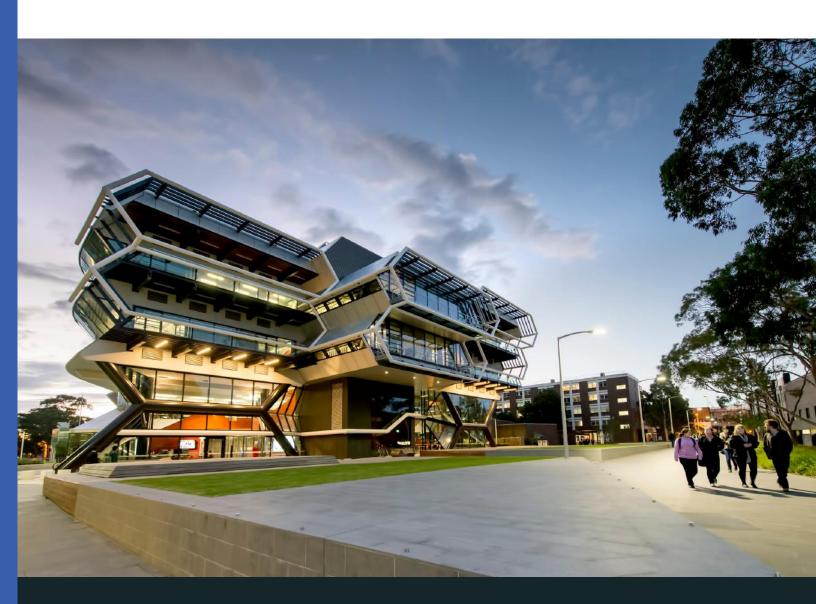**Details:**
~75,000 students

Solution:
Blue Course Survey Software

Challenge:
The university outgrew their in-house solution and needed to find an enterprise level survey platform that would keep up with their growth and evolving needs.

Benefits

→ Optimise data governance to maximise value from student surveys

→ Provide a streamlined and consolidated platform for the sharing and distribution of student insights

→ Reduce manual cleansing of data

→ Improve response rates on Student Evaluation of Teaching Units (SETU)

→ Increase flexibility for customised questions

Monash University is Australia's largest and most international university. The prestigious Group of Eight member hosts four Australian campuses, as well as two locations in Malaysia, and a campus in South Africa. As a research-intensive institution, Monash must ensure the curricula are highly relevant and well designed, placing the student at the centre of the learning process.
With approximately 75,000 students, more than 6,000 educators, and multiple campus locations, student feedback data governance is no small task at Monash.

Outdated data resource

While Monash has ongoing data gathering efforts, the information that they were collecting was not being leveraged to the fullest. As with any large institution, how the data was being used differed across faculties. Although the university has an expert group that runs their Student Evaluation of Teaching Units (SETU), at the time there were significant data governance issues.

"Monash had a lot of very valuable information from the student insights into their units but we were not fully utilising that data to inform the transformation of our pedagogy and curricula," commented Professor Zlatko Skrbis, Senior Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic) at Monash University.

It became clear that a new system and new processes were needed for student feedback. So the Information Systems and Surveys team, led by Kristina Kaulenas, and the Teaching and Learning Quality team within the Office of the Senior Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic), led by Professor Zlatko Skrbis, worked closely together to investigate requirements as well as the institutional survey systems available on the market.

"This was a major initiative across the University and we had a very important high-profile mandate to ensure teaching across all faculties and all courses was meeting the strategic goal of education excellence," said Professor Skrbis.

A partner from the start

The joint project team went through a long review process and early on decided on a series of criteria for the new system. Their main goals were to reduce manual cleansing of data, improve response rates (which were already good for Australia), and give faculty and schools the ability to customise questions that they can choose themselves.

In addition, the team brought in a data architect who worked with the project manager to understand the business and complexity of the Monash enterprise. Using an analytical approach, they were able to look at the interrelationships, impacts, and dependencies within the institution and the role that SETU played in the overall picture.

A detailed proof of concept revealed a full breakdown of what was required in a platform that met the business needs, the technical specifications, and IT standards of Monash. From that the Blue platform – along with several other providers – was reviewed.

"It was rigorous, it was long and I can do nothing but praise the professionalism of eXplorance in terms of working with us," said Ms Kaulenis. "They were running 2-3 hour sessions for each stage of the proof of concept where we were asking very detailed questions and we always got a clear, honest answer. I appreciated the way they explained everything, to both myself from a research and pedagogical perspective and our technical teams, who wanted to know the nuts and bolts."

In addition to the usual product demonstrations, eXplorance provided a test sandbox environment for the Monash technical team. There they were able to build their full implementation as well as perform white board exercises which mapped out how various potential scenarios would be handled in the new system.

"I'm the type of person who wants to understand a product in-depth before I commit to it. I undertook, independently, a significant investigation of the available offerings, and by the end, I was thoroughly convinced that Blue was the best product for us," said Kristina

explorance.

Response rates go up

Before Blue, several academic units at Indiana University Bloomington were already administering evaluations online, or had done so in the past, with mixed response rates. Furthermore, faculty members that administered paper evaluations had no control over students turning in blank forms, partially filled forms, or those who just didn't bother to turn them in at all.

"Although there were departments that tracked response data those numbers weren't maintained institution-wide," Krisy adds. "We fully launched Blue online course evaluations in fall of 2015 and we had the highest response rate to date that term."

"Spring 2017 was also a good term and in fact our best spring semester results by a 15% year over year growth."

IU Bloomington plans to launch more initiatives in an effort to keep increasing their response rates.

"We really want to get our response rates up and continue providing this useful tool for IU Bloomington faculty and students. We are making efforts to create a culture of assessment that will allow this process to capture and uncover meaningful and useful feedback."

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Krisy Mahome (Assistant Director for IU Bloomington Evaluation Services and Testing)

Finding new uses for course evaluation data

"One thing that is easier to do with the Blue system that wasn't as easy before is that we now have a way to centrally report data for students to use when they are registering," Krisy offers.

By centralizing course evaluations in Blue, students at IU Bloomington have access to past feedback data from their peers that they can use to inform their choice about instructors and courses.

"This is a new incentive that we are able to offer students in addition to the benefits of uniform online evaluations and the other features that comes with Blue."

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Convenience, efficiency, and cost-savings

Ranked among the top five schools in the country in Campus Conservation Nationals 2013, it's no surprise that saving resources and adopting efficient policies would be an important item for IU Bloomington.

"Especially when you look at how much we were spending on paper and maintenance fees during course evaluations," says Krisy.

A fully online and automated system, Blue greatly reduced the need for paper products while significantly saving the university time by optimizing processes.

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Being part of the Blue community

An active member of Bluenotes Group – a global community of Blue users, Krisy will attend the Bluenotes Americas 2017 user conference.

"I look forward to connecting with professionals from other institutions that are currently using Blue with high response rates. I presented in the previous conference and I'm currently working on a presentation for this year."

Commenting on IU Bloomington's ongoing relationship with Explorance, Krisy expresses that "My vision is for us to cultivate a partnership that allows for meaningful and useful two way feedback about the tools that we use, how we use them, and future development."

"Specifically with regards to Bluepulse my goal is to work to show the value of formative feedback in the learning environment and programmatically. I hope to achieve this by showing the value of formative feedback in IU Bloomington's culture of meaningful assessment and improvement."

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