Strengthening student engagement in course evaluations at Reykjavík University

Institution:
Reykjavík University

Location:
Reykjavík, Iceland

Details:
~3,500 students

Solution:
Blue Course Evaluation Software

Challenge:
Transforming the student and teacher experience by replacing a 'does-it-all' legacy system with Blue and other 'best-of-breed' integrated solutions. Course evaluations needed to be integrated and rolled out through Canvas portal.

blue

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Key Benefits

→ Ability to be run on-campus.

→ Increase in response rates due to integrated approach.

→ Fully embedded in Canvas learning management system.

→ Quality of customer support.

Moving from legacy to bespoke systems

Reykjavík University is the largest private university in Iceland with more than 3,500 students and specialises in science and engineering, computer science, business and law. The University has a modern, interdisciplinary approach and offers programmes that, for example, cross business with computer science and computer science with engineering. It has seven departments and 250 permanent faculty and staff.

In 2015 Project Manager Rebekka Helga Aðalsteinsdóttir was appointed to oversee the move from a legacy student management system (MySchool), which had been in place since 2002 and incorporated everything from learning management and curriculum management to scheduling, user management and evaluations, to a brand new system. The decision was taken to install Canvas as the University's learning management system, replacing MySchool; however, this did not immediately include student evaluations and there was "subsequent urgency" to move these away from the legacy site.

"In October 2017 we looked at the key players in the market: we chose Blue as it can be run on-site and, given the uncertainty over GDPR, the guarantee that our data would not be published in the American cloud was a major influencing decision," Rebekka said. "With

an agreement in place in November, Blue was up and running in January 2018 with a mid-term evaluation going out in February. The response rate was 34% for the mid-term evaluation, ahead of a final evaluation going live at the start of March. We would usually implement a new system more slowly and provide training, but we fast-tracked the process with Blue to support internal drivers to get evaluations up and running."

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Canvas integration means higher response rates

Now in the third year of partnership with Blue, Rebekka has pinpointed a number of practical benefits for the University to date. "The major reason we went with Blue was its integration into Canvas and this has worked well – the increase in response rates we have experienced throughout this period is due to surveys being rolled out in our learning management system, rather than visiting another site," she said. "The quality of reports received by our Rector/President and Department Heads, as well as the advantages for administrators in having less manual data involved, are also adding value in what is a very small university with no dedicated office for evaluation. In retrospect, we made a mistake in first seeing this as an IT implementation project, and I have publicly shared those lessons, but we have come a long way since and now all university staff are using Blue."

With two evaluations each semester – mid-term and end of module – the University has a continuous evaluation cycle. With Rebekka aware that this can contribute to "survey fatigue", she has been innovative in her approach to partnership building. "Whilst we do have a centralised approach to survey administration we work with the Students' Union to publish survey response rates for each academic school to create a sense of internal competition, and these are also communicated through social media," she said. "We know law and computer science students are less likely to complete our surveys, as are part-time students, so we are coming up with ways to target them more effectively."

Rebekka highlighted the opportunity to maximise Blue's potential. "What we purchased was a 'best-of-breed' solution, one that is fully integrated, modern, automated, intelligent and customisable, and there is so much more we can do with it," she said. "For example, we would like to improve the questionaire to support better answers to the burning questions and allow for more granular insights. There is also the opportunity to utilise the data we have to support strategic decision-making at an institutional level."

Excellent customer service

Finally, Rebekka reserved special praise for Explorance's customer support ethos: "The level of support we have had from the European side has been really good. My contact really helped a lot during the initial period of implementation and was a pleasure to work with. Beyond that, the team have really listened to our input in development, and I cannot fault the quality of customer service because they try to help any way they can. The people are lovely to work with and great professionals, and I welcome the recent appointment of a Customer Success Manager, who will help us in our next phase."

In March 2020, Reykjavík University was also the recipient of an Explorance Faculty Research Grant for a project entitled 'Learning Outside the Box: a Data-Driven, Cross-Sectional Learner Behaviour Analysis'.

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