University of Maine

Online Student Evaluation of Teaching Policies and Procedures

Acknowledging that student input is essential in improvement of instruction, the AFUM contract states that faculty conduct student evaluations in each course taught. Specifically, the contract states (Article 10B2):

*The parties agree that student input is essential in the improvement of instruction and shall be considered during evaluation. Further, student input is a meaningful part of evaluation. Consequently, Unit members shall conduct evaluations in each course taught.*

I. Online Student Evaluation of Teaching System

UMaine implemented the Explorance Blue Course Evaluation System in December 2016. This system includes support for multiple instructors, dynamic timing, and customized survey questions (configurable by instructor, course, department, and/or college), and will permit distributed reports based on complex permission settings. UMaine deployed Blue for all online courses at UMaine & UMM starting in spring 2017. Since spring 2017, an increasing number of academic units have also moved to Blue for evaluating in-person courses: As of fall 2019, 30 academic units or programs, plus 42 individual faculty members, were using Blue for all course evaluations. UMM is now using Blue for evaluating all courses – online and in-person.

Currently, UMaine, USM, UMFK, and UMM use Explorance Blue for online Student Evaluations of Teaching. Access to Blue through the portal is implemented through UMaine’s authentication service and the Blue hosted data center is SOC 2 Type 2 certified.

II. Evaluation Form Items

The AFUM contract indicates that forms must contain a series of questions, each confined to a limited aspect of the unit member’s teaching performance. Academic units may develop or revise their own evaluation form or procedure (Article 10, Section B2). Consequently, faculty must use the form identified by their unit, which could be the default form (the 19-item short form) or a custom form. Faculty are given the option of adding customized questions during a question personalization period.

III. Signed Comments

Per the AFUM contract, items that consist of broad solicitation, without limit or direction, to evaluate the instructor’s performance shall only be placed in the personnel file when signed by the student who has conducted the evaluation. Consequently, students are given the opportunity to sign their evaluations. In Blue, students are provided a check box item to indicate that they have signed the form and therefore would like their rater-scale results and open-ended comments to be included in the instructor’s personnel file.
IV. Multiple-instructor courses

In cases where courses have multiple instructors, students are asked to evaluate each instructor. There are two sets of questions: a common set of questions relevant to the course and individual sets of questions for faculty.

V. Online Student Evaluation of Teaching process

The online SET process requires multiple steps as shown in the following figure and described below.

Identification of courses to be evaluated: Each term, OIRA provides units a list of their active courses. Units indicate which courses are to be evaluated in Blue. OIRA uses evaluation history to set default indicators. For example, if an independent study has not been included in the past, the default will be to not include it unless otherwise indicated.

Timing. Course lists are sent mid-semester.

Question personalization: Faculty have an opportunity to design personalized questions prior to the evaluation period.

Timing: For standard semester-length courses, question personalization will open two weeks week prior to the evaluation period – four weeks prior to the end of the course. Faculty receive an initial email invitation and one reminder prompt. Question personalization closes one day before the evaluation period.

Evaluation: Students are sent emails directing them to Blue for evaluating their courses. The emails include a directions for completing the form.

Timing: Per the AFUM contract (Article 10, Section B2b). For courses scheduled for a full term, the evaluation window is the last two weeks of classes. Students receive an invitation email to complete their evaluations the Monday of the second to last week of classes. They receive two additional reminders. Evaluations close at midnight on the last day of classes. Evaluations are not open during finals week. (Alternative schedules are arranged for courses with alternative lengths/schedules.)
To ensure adequate response rates, instructors are encouraged to provide students class time to complete the online SETs, as they would for the paper form.

**Response rate monitoring:** Faculty have the opportunity to monitor their response rates throughout the evaluation period. They receive an initial email invitation directing them to the response rate monitor in Blue. The email is followed up with two reminders during the evaluation period.

**Distribution of Reports.** Reports are generated in Blue two weeks after grades are due to be submitted to the Office of Student Records.

Reports: *Two sets of reports are generated: One report includes the quantitative items from the academic unit form, as well as signed comments. This report is shared with the faculty member, academic unit chair/director, and administrative support staff for the unit. The second report includes the personalized questions and unsigned comments. This report is only shared with the instructor. Reports will not be generated for courses with fewer than two responses.*

Distribution: Faculty members receive an email indicating that their reports are ready and are directed to Blue for access. Academic unit chairs/directors and administrative support staff are provided summary reports for each course section and faculty member.

**Data Storage and Access**

**Confidentiality:** Student identity is confidential and not included with responses in instructor reports, except signed comments, which include student names if signed. Student information is deleted from data downloaded from Blue for the purpose of calculating departmental and college norms.

**Access to Data:**

Reports: Instructor, departmental and dean-level reports are securely stored within Blue. Access is controlled by user-defined roles such that only current faculty members, chairs, deans and administrative staff have access to each level of reporting. OIRA staff with administrative accounts in Blue also have access to all reports. Access is available via the Blue icon on the UMaine Portal or directly via https://maine.bluera.com/maine. Reports can be downloaded as PDF for local storage. In addition, reports for departmental use, are downloaded from Blue and stored in UMaine’s secure cloud storage solution (currently Box). Currently, a Box folder has been created for each academic unit, and access is provided to the academic unit chair/director as well as the unit’s administrative support staff member. OIRA staff also have access to this Box folder.

Raw data: Data downloaded from Blue for the purpose of calculating unit and college norms is stored in Box and managed by staff members of the OIRA. Evaluation data collected through the paper forms are combined with the data collected through Blue. Only OIRA staff members have access to these data.

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