Input on Teaching from Students

Introduction

Blue Evaluations ("Blue", for short), a software provided by eXplorance, is the solution selected and deployed at American University to capture students’ course feedback and provide information that will help to shape the student learning experience.

Previously, the Student Evaluations of Teaching, known as “SETs”, was conducted by packaging and distributing paper scantrons in individual classrooms. In an effort to optimize this process, American University has partnered with eXplorance, a Montreal based company focused on providing Learning Experience Management solutions to higher education and corporate environments. Through various products, eXplorance seeks to provide a medium through which organizational benchmarks can continually be assessed, monitored, and analyzed.

Blue is one of eXplorance’s product offerings which facilitates the distribution of course surveys in an online format. To distinguish it from the former, paper-based process, it has been titled Input on Teaching from Students, or ITS, and provides the Office of the University Registrar with the ability to administer these surveys, collect responses, and generate reports with minimal overhead.

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Blue

Blue delegates activities to students and instructors in the form of tasks. Each task is intended to facilitate the progression of ITS for an individual section, which means involvement in multiple sections will often incur ownership of multiple tasks. For an instructor, a single task could be reviewing when one section survey is being distributed. For a student enrolled in 5 sections, 5 tasks could be assigned, each associated with completing an ITS. The timing of when a task is assigned is dependent on the calendar scheduling of the section. So, non-standard sections may generate tasks that don’t overlap, while standard sections generate tasks that are assigned simultaneously.

Instructor Tasks

Blue creates two task types for instructors – Subject View Management (SVM) tasks and Question Personalization (QP) tasks. SVM tasks are for setting the evaluation distribution time and reviewing the ITS response rate. QP tasks are for adding questions to the ITS before it is distributed. For a single section, they become active at the same time, which is communicated by email to the assigned instructor. In the event that a section is instructed by more than one instructor, they share the responsibility of completing the task. A task completed by one instructor shows as completed for all instructors it is shared with. All instructor tasks

NOTE: The Office of the University Registrar strongly encourages instructors to designate class time to have students complete the surveys.

How to View the ITS Dashboard

All of an individual’s active tasks can be accessed through their Blue dashboard, which provides the most comprehensive view of their task status and history.

1. Navigate to the Blue dashboard

   Blue automatically sends emails to notify instructors when a task is available. These emails contain a direct link to the tasks that can be used, or instructors can also go directly to the self-service dashboard at https://american.bluera.com/american/

2. Login with AU credentials

   Blue uses “single sign-on” technology, which means instructors only ever need their myAU portal credentials to sign in. In the event of a sign-in issue, it will be necessary to follow the normal means of troubleshooting with the OIT Helpdesk.
3. View available tasks to manage

The dashboard displays available tasks and uses the first column to specifically indicate the task type. Tasks that haven’t started yet do not appear and are not available to be managed. The management interface for each task is accessible by clicking the “select” link to the right of the section line item.

a. SVM tasks

The interface for a single SVM task provides the ability to view or change survey start and end dates, review the current response rate, or access the affiliated QP task.
b. QP tasks

The QP task interface allows for the questionnaire to be previewed, adding custom questions, and pushing or pulling questions to or from another section survey that the instructor also maintains ownership of.
How to Access SVM Tasks from Email

When a task becomes available, a notification is sent to the task owner. Tasks that remain incomplete will also have reminder emails associated with them that go out periodically to the task owner as well.

1. Locate invitation (or reminder) email

Blue sends email invitations for tasks the day they start. For instructors, this generally occurs early in the working day so that they can be prioritized. These tasks come from the Office of the University Registrar with a subject pertaining to the need to “Manage Your ITS Survey”.

2. Select the section to be managed

The email link directs instructors to a list of their available tasks, and their due date. The status indicates whether the task is open, complete, or expired.
3. View survey start and end dates

The dates for the survey start and end are listed here. Students will receive an email invitation on the start date, and their ability to access the survey will stop on the end date.

How to Review, Adjust or Change Survey Timing

The SVM task primarily functions as the interface for reviewing the default settings for ITS availability. Instructors, however, can also view response rates, and continue to do so through the life of the survey.

1. Locate and select the SVM task

Instructors can login to their dashboard at https://american.bluera.com/american/ or with an invitation or reminder email. From the list of sections on the dashboard, select the section that needs to be adjusted.

2. Enter a new Start Date or End Date

The calendar icon is used to select a new date and time for the survey. **NOTE: In accordance with AU policy, the end date must be before final grades are submitted for that section.**
3. Apply changes

Click Apply Changes to submit the update. Confirmation text appears just below in green.

4. Finalize the SVM task

Click Finalize once the preferred dates have been applied, or if the initial review was satisfactory. Finalizing the task marks it as complete, and indicates no additional reminders regarding the task are necessary. Regardless of the SVM task status, an SVM task can always continue to be modified to suit changing needs. **NOTE: The SVM task will maintain the same expiration date regardless of any changes made to the task.**

How to View Response Rates

Response rates provide an indication of how many students have completed a particular section’s ITS. It is useful for measuring how many students still need time to respond and can also be an indicator that the availability of the ITS needs to be extended.

1. Locate the SVM task

Instructors can login to their dashboard at [https://american.bluer.ca/american/](https://american.bluer.ca/american/) or with an
invitation or reminder email. From the list of sections on the dashboard, select the section that needs to be adjusted.

2. Click the Response Rate tab

The tab at the bottom labeled “Response Rate” details the current response rate. The number responded will show zero until the survey has opened to students and the first response has been received. The number invited should reflect the section enrollment, inclusive of any crosslisting.

How to Add Questions to the Section Questionnaire

The QP task provides an opportunity to add up to 5 questions to the ITS. These questions should be expressed in such a way that they can be responded to on a 7 point scale – the format consistent with the remainder of the ITS.

1. Locate the QP task

This can be done by either logging into the dashboard at https://american.bluera.com/american/ or by locating an invitation or reminder email.

2. Select the section to have questions added

The email link directs instructors to a list of their available tasks, and their due date. The status indicates whether the task is open, complete, or expired. Select the section for which questions will be added.
3. Click the edit button to input new question content

Each Edit button activates a space for the entry of question content. To create content consistent with the remainder of the questionnaire, the question should be created in the form of a statement that a student can either agree or disagree with.

4. Mark the questions as Selected

Beyond creating question content, each question must also be selected to be displayed. On the right side of the QP form, items marked as selected will appear on the ITS. Deselected items will not.
5. Click Submit to finalize selected questions

The Submit button will complete the QP task and add the questions to the ITS. Alternately, the save button can be used if the intention is to return to the QP task to make additional edits later.

How to Copy Custom Questions to Another Section’s Questionnaire

The questions that are created in one section can be copied to another section in order to streamline task completion.

1. Locate the completed QP task

   This can be done by either logging into the dashboard at https://american.bluera.com/american/ or by locating an invitation or reminder email.

2. Use the dropdowns to indicate the section to which the questions are being sent

   Use the “To” parameter in conjunction with the section dropdown to tell Blue where to send the questions. Other sections managed by the instructor will be available in the section dropdown, so if the drafted questions are appropriate for all available section surveys, select “All”.
3. **Click Copy to propagate the questions**

The Copy button will send the drafted questions to the selected section. The Copy & Submit button will send the questions to the selected section and mark the QP task as complete for that section as well.
Student Tasks

Blue creates one task type for students – Form Fill Out (FO) tasks. For a single section, FO becomes active during the last several days the section is offered. FO tasks are created with default start and end dates, however all instructors are granted the opportunity to modify the start and end date to better fit their needs, given their knowledge of their class section. Whether the selected dates are default or instructor-modified, they should remain in accordance with AU policy, which restricts ITS from being conducted after the section’s final grades have been submitted.

The invitation to complete a survey is sent to students when the FO task becomes available (the FO start date) and is followed up by subsequent reminders when surveys remain incomplete, up until the end date. When an FO task ends, the ITS expires and the survey is no longer available to be completed. It would then need to be extended by the instructor, as permitted by their observation of AU policy.

How to Access Fill Out tasks

There are several methods for accessing FO tasks. All of which require authentication through Blue or another familiar system. A common technology among all of these systems is the “single sign-on” technology, which means only the myAU portal credentials are required to sign in. In the event of a sign-in issue, it will be necessary to follow the normal means of troubleshooting with the OIT Helpdesk. They can be reached by email at helpdesk@american.edu or more expeditiously by phone at 202-885-2550.
Method One – Blue Dashboard

All active FO tasks can be accessed through the Blue dashboard, which provides the most comprehensive view of the tasks available to an instructor or student. The dashboard can be accessed by going to https://american.bluera.com/american/. After signing in with myAU portal credentials, each ITS can be accessed by clicking the select button to the right of each section line item.

Method Two – Email

When a new ITS become available, Blue sends a notification to the student to notify them of the corresponding FO task.

Dear Austin,

As part of our focus on improving the student experience at American University, we are seeking your feedback for each of the sections you are undertaking this term.

The link below will provide access to all available section surveys. We ask that you provide a fair and honest assessment of your learning experience in these courses. We strongly encourage you to add additional comments where possible.

Your responses will remain anonymous.

Please click here NOW to complete your course surveys.

If you have any questions please contact its_services@american.edu.

Kind regards,

Office of the University Registrar
Clicking the link will prompt the student with a sign in screen that accepts their myAU portal credentials. It subsequently provides access to the list of sections with ITS available to be completed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fillout Task List</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Task Owner: Austin Grasty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Title: Test Cycle American University Input on Teaching from Students (ITS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category: Fall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subcategory: 2016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Due date</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACCT-249-003 Principles of Financial Acct</td>
<td>Tuesday, December 20, 2016</td>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACCT-241-003 Principles of Managerial Acct</td>
<td>Tuesday, December 20, 2016</td>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIN-365-002 Business Finance</td>
<td>Tuesday, December 20, 2016</td>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IBUS-359-007 Fundamentals of Intl Business</td>
<td>Tuesday, December 20, 2016</td>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITEC-269-004 Edge of Information Technology</td>
<td>Tuesday, December 20, 2016</td>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITEC-355-004 Production/Operation Mgmt</td>
<td>Tuesday, December 20, 2016</td>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KSR-100-002 Business 1.0</td>
<td>Tuesday, December 20, 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>MGMT-201-006 Global Corporate Citizenship</td>
<td>Tuesday, December 20, 2016</td>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MGMT-202-001 Legal Environment of Business</td>
<td>Tuesday, December 20, 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>MGMT-355-001 Mgmt &amp; Organizational Behavior</td>
<td>Tuesday, December 20, 2016</td>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MGMT-458-002 Business Policy and Strategy</td>
<td>Tuesday, December 20, 2016</td>
<td>Open</td>
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<tr>
<td>MKTG-300-002 Principles of Marketing</td>
<td>Tuesday, December 20, 2016</td>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Method Three – Blackboard.com
A content block has been added to students’ Blackboard.com home pages that allows them to access a list of their available section surveys. The list is not as robust as the lists in Method One or Two, rather it provides immediate access to the FO tasks with an open status, and excludes details regarding the ITS completed previously. In this method, the link does not redirect to a sign-in, rather logging into Blackboard.com is the requisite form of authentication.

How to Complete the ITS
Within any of the three methods, clicking on a section link will lead to the survey. The survey opens with some introductory text. Clicking “Next” will lead to the first page of the survey.
Select answers and provide feedback until the ITS form is complete. The “Submit” button becomes active only when the last page has been reached, and only by clicking Submit will the FO task also be marked complete.

End of questionnaire. Please SUBMIT your answers.
Timeline

The lifecycle of a single section survey is tied to its listed section start and end dates in our student information system, Colleague. Ideally, the ITS is distributed during the last several days of a section, so Blue uses the section end date as reference for when the ITS should be opening and closing. However, because the section end date is generally inclusive of final exam dates, an imposed buffer of time is built into the Blue logic to ensure the ITS still ends prior to any final exams. Once Blue has identified a viable ITS end date, it then counts a predefined amount of time backwards to create start dates for the remaining tasks. These dates mark the period of time an ITS is considered active.

An ITS is pending as long as it has no actively running tasks, and has yet to be distributed. The SVM is the longest task because it gives the instructor the ability to modify the ITS prior to it being distributed, as well as monitor the response rate through completion. The QP task starts at the same time but ends before the ITS becomes available to students to fill out. This makes sense because questions shouldn’t be adjusted after the ITS has been distributed to students. The FO makes up the remainder of the time, and once it ends, the ITS is closed off to the students. In all, this lasts for about 3 weeks.

This distribution logic is applied to each section, so while most standard sections by definition will start and end their ITS at the same time, it still allows for the ITS of non-standard sections to be in various stages of completion throughout the term.

The following diagram shows the composition of tasks for an example ITS. It outlines how the three tasks generally relate to one another respective to passing time. Within the illustration, SVM overlaps both QP and FO. QP and FO however start and end in succession with no overlap.
FAQ

- **What login do I use, or, why isn’t my login working?**
  Blue uses a Single Sign-On technology, which allows users to authenticate with their myAU portal credentials. Blue is currently only accessible to instructors who manage section surveys, or students who complete ITS. If the attempted set of login credentials do not work, please contact the OIT Help Desk for assistance at 202-885-2550 or helpdesk@american.edu.

- **As an instructor, will I be able to keep ITS closed until the specific class time in which I want to have them completed?**
  Yes. Your section’s SVM task not only allows you to view the default survey timing, but also modify the timing as well. Start and end dates can be separated by entire days, or just minutes.

- **What is the “Due Date”, and why does it not change to reflect my survey end/due date for?**
  The task “due date” is the date by which any modifications of that task must be submitted, and does not change. For a QP task, the Due Date will be the day before the default survey start date. For an SVM task, the Due Date will be on or close to the section end date. The Due Date does not dynamically adjust based on any changes you make to your tasks.

- **I am fine with the default survey timing, and I do not want to add personalized questions. Do I need to do anything?**
  It is always recommended that the section SVM and QP tasks are at the very least reviewed to ensure that they meet your expectations. Not submitting either of these tasks does not prevent the survey from being distributed, but finalizing the tasks does prevent you from receiving further reminders to complete them.

- **I am concerned I may have inadvertently entered dates that pre-dated, or ended my survey via SVM. How do I double-check or undo?**
  Blue does allow for this to happen. As long as your dates fall in the valid global range, Blue will accept your entry when you click Apply Changes. To correct this, just enter new, valid, future dates and click Apply Changes again.

- **What does the Finalize button do? Will it end my survey?**
  The Finalize button in an SVM task notifies Blue that you have completed the review of your SVM task. It prevents Blue from sending you additional notifications regarding completing the task. It has no impact on the survey status, other than confirming the selected dates that are defined in the task itself.

- **I am unable to submit my survey despite the survey period still being open. What do I need to do?**
  The survey can only be saved *but not submitted* prior to reaching the last page. If the submit button is grayed out, most commonly, there are still remaining pages to complete. The last page will read “End of Questionnaire” and will have an active “Submit” button.
• The instructor assignment for a section changed over the course of the term. How will this impact the ITS?
Blue is designed to incorporate updates in courses, student enrollments, and faculty assignments. If this faculty change is completed prior to the ITS distribution, the update process in Blue is seamless and there are no observable ramifications.

If the instructor change occurs after the ITS has been distributed, the affected students will observe (or may recognize after the fact) a sudden swap of the old ITS for a new ITS. Within this process, the old ITS is automatically rescinded, students will lose access to that ITS and the contained responses, and the new ITS will be distributed with the corrected instructor name. As two entirely separate ITS, the new ITS will not carry any answers from the previous, so any students who submitted the old ITS will need to do so again with the new ITS.

• My ITS expired before I was able to complete it. Can it be re-opened?
For the new Blue facilitated ITS distribution, the Office of the Registrar has yielded control of the survey timing to the instructors. Instructors can, during the lifetime of their section ITS, modify the ITS start and end dates as they see fit. If there is an instance where a survey is unable to be completed due to it expiring, it will be necessary to contact the instructor directly to see if they are able to re-open it. There are certain administrative restrictions and deadlines related to section close-out, so it is not always possible for an instructor to reopen an ITS.

• When will my section’s ITS report be made available?
The timeline for generating individual teacher reports still follows a traditional release cycle wherein reports are generated within the first two weeks of the standard term ending. Certain academic programs follow a non-standard calendar which dictates their reports be made available at a separately specified date.