



# HOW TO ENSURE THAT ALL STUDENTS SUCCEED

By Taking the Ongoing Pulse of the Classroom

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## Executive Summary

The mission of any educational institution is to help all students flourish.

This means providing students with a superior learning experience, promoting excellence in teaching, and ensuring that all students are equipped with the necessary skills and competencies to help them succeed outside the classroom.

Listening to student feedback is crucial to help educators achieve this mission.

Today, students typically give feedback through a mix of four channels:

1. Mid-term course evaluations
2. Discussion forums
3. Social media
4. Rating websites

Each channel has assorted strengths and weaknesses. An ideal system would combine the strengths of every channel, while avoiding their drawbacks.

Bluepulse® by eXplorance was designed with this goal in mind.

Bluepulse is a social feedback platform designed to help institutions achieve excellence in teaching and learning.

By providing a more effective way to take the pulse of the classroom, Bluepulse supports a culture of continuous improvement which helps educators deliver better learning experiences, promote teaching excellence, and engage and retain at-risk students.

All this helps an educational institution to achieve its mission: ensuring that all its students succeed.

## The Vital Mission of Educators

At all levels from kindergarten to university, educators share a vital mission: to help students flourish.

To do this, every educational institution must:

- Deliver a **superior learning experience**, even though students can get instant answers from the web and instant support from online communities
- Promote **excellence in teaching**, even though many sessional instructors—the vast majority of all postsecondary instructors—face an uncertain future without tenure<sup>1</sup>
- Engage and motivate all students, help them with any challenges, and make sure **none are left behind**

Institutions have many ways to help fulfil this mission. One way is to listen more closely to students, and take what they say more seriously.

There is room for improvement here. For example, in one recent study, 4 out of 10 university students said they don't believe anyone will take any action on their feedback.<sup>2</sup>

Today's Millennial students are used to 24/7 access and instant results.<sup>3</sup> They may view end-of-term course evaluations, especially on paper, as relics from the past.

To fulfil their mission, educators must find a faster and more effective channel to gather feedback from students on their learning experiences.

## Channels for Student Feedback

Today, students typically give feedback through a mix of four channels:

1. Mid-term course evaluations
2. Discussion forums, portals, or student groups
3. Social media like Facebook, LinkedIn, or Twitter
4. Rating websites like RateMyProfessor.com

Each channel has some value. But each channel has certain drawbacks, as shown in Table 1 and discussed in the following sections.

An effective feedback channel must provide **privacy** for instructors and **anonymity** for students; otherwise, many people are not comfortable giving or accepting feedback.

Ideally, the channel works in both directions, so that feedback can be both sent and received; this **two-way interaction** is more engaging for all.

For best results, a channel must support **frequent** feedback. And the channel must handle both **structured** and **unstructured feedback**; both quantitative ratings on Likert scales, and qualitative or open-ended, freeform comments.

And finally, a channel ideally supports **continuous improvement** for both instructors and students.

**Table 1: Typical Student Feedback Channels**

	Mid-term evaluations	Discussion forums	Social media	Rating websites
<b>Privacy</b> (for instructors)	✓			
<b>Anonymity</b> (for students)	✓			✓
<b>Two-way interaction</b>		✓	✓	
<b>Frequent feedback</b>		✓	✓	
<b>Structured feedback</b>	✓			
<b>Unstructured feedback</b>		✓	✓	✓
<b>Geared to improvement</b>	✓			

## Mid-term course evaluations

Many colleges and universities encourage the use of mid-term course evaluations, which can be an excellent way for instructors to gather the feedback they need.

### Value

Mid-term evaluations enable instructors to ask questions, seek detailed feedback, and make course corrections before the end-of-term evaluations.

In most cases, the feedback gathered remains the property of the institution, but it can be difficult to aggregate since there is no uniformity in the forms used among different instructors and different courses.

### Drawbacks

- **Infrequent:** Since mid-term evaluations are gathered at most twice per term, they provide only a snapshot, not an ongoing stream of feedback.
- **Not widely used:** Despite their value, most college and university instructors do not use mid-term evaluations.
- **Labor-intensive:** Evaluations take time for students to fill out and more time for instructors to manage and analyze.
- **One-way:** Instructors set the agenda by creating questions to gather the answers they seek. The issues addressed do not include student views or suggestions, so these evaluations are not a two-way conversation.

### Bottom line

Mid-term evaluations can certainly help improve teaching excellence, and they should be more widely used. But without the student perspective, these are limited at improving learning experiences and retaining at-risk students.

## Discussion forums, portals, or student groups

Some institutions and LMS systems provide online forums or portals where students can gather to discuss a specific course. Some ad-hoc student groups spring up around a particular course for group studying or mutual support.

### Value

A discussion forum or portal can enable students to gather for class-related discussions. Through this channel, students can share their concerns, and support one another's learning experience.

### Drawbacks

- **Loudest voices dominate:** As in any group discussion, a few can steamroll over the comments of less assertive students. What appears to be a consensus can come from a small number of students, while the “silent majority” may not be heard.
- **No privacy for instructors:** Exchanges are typically public and visible to all. Instructors can feel defensive when criticisms regarding their effectiveness and suggestions for improvement are aired in public for all to see.
- **No anonymity for students:** Public discussions also leave students exposed. Students may censor themselves rather than provide honest feedback.

### Bottom line

Without privacy for instructors and anonymity for students, discussion forums do not provide the right environment to encourage open and honest feedback that will lead to real improvements in teaching and learning.

## Social media like Facebook, LinkedIn, or Twitter

Many instructors are available on social media, publish their courses on social media, or invite students to comment on courses through social media.

### Value

Social media is available 24/7 with any Internet or smartphone connection. The most popular services are well-designed and enjoyable to use. Major services like Facebook and LinkedIn have become mainstream, so everyone understands how to use them.

### Drawbacks

- **No privacy for instructors:** Since all comments and interchanges are visible to all friends or followers, there is no privacy for instructors.
- **No anonymity for students:** Since everyone who posts is identified, there is no anonymity for students. This may limit the directness and honesty of the feedback received.
- **Distracting:** In a survey of 44 colleges and universities, about 40% of first-year students and a third of seniors (fourth-year students) said they were “substantially distracted from completing their coursework by social media.” Even worse, 1 in 5 first-year students and 1 in 10 seniors said social media made them feel harassed, hazed, or bullied by other students.
- **Merges academic and personal lives:** Using social media to discuss academic courses tends to merge a person’s academic and personal lives. This is not something all students and instructors want.
- **Third party owns feedback:** All comments are owned by the social media corporation, and governed by its terms of service. Even after a fruitful discussion on how to improve a course, the school does not own that data and may not be able to access it.

## Ratings websites like RateMyProfessor.com or Yik Yak

### Bottom line

Social media can be fun and engaging to use; but these services are not designed for gathering student feedback.

These are public websites where students can vent about their professors, schools, classmates, or anything else on their minds.

For example, RateMyProfessor.com was explicitly created to enable students to comment on instructors.

Yik Yak is an anonymous messaging app popular with college students for passing brief comments on campus life, including instructors and courses. Yik Yak is a free service with an effective radius of 10 miles, more than enough to blanket most campuses.<sup>5</sup>

### Value

These services are popular with students for three main reasons:

- 1. Anonymity:** All posters remain anonymous, so their identities are not revealed without a serious legal issue and a court order.
- 2. Accessibility:** These sites are accessible 24/7 online.
- 3. No cost:** It's free to post comments or view postings on these sites.

### Drawbacks

- **Attract unhappy students:** Rating sites tend to attract disengaged students seeking to vent about negative personal experiences.
- **No privacy for instructors:** All postings are accessible to all visitors. Comments can range far beyond the confines of any course or classroom.

- **Not constructive:** Despite the “ratings” scheme on RateMyProfessor.com, comments tend to be highly subjective. Most students don’t provide any constructive feedback an instructor can use to improve their courses. Instead, they cheerlead for their favourite instructors and denigrate any they don’t like.
- **Many inappropriate comments:** Protected by their anonymity, posters on these sites frequently engage in name-calling, off-topic comments, and sexual innuendo. For example, ratings like “hotness” have nothing to do with the learning experience.
- **Cyber-bullying:** At its onset, Yik Yak suffered from a vast amount of cyber-bullying from high school users. After many officials complained, the app’s creators set up geo-fencing around 128,700+ middle and high schools in the United States. Within those locations, the app is blocked to prevent cyber-bullying from younger users.<sup>6</sup>

### **Bottom line**

Rating websites can provide a release valve for students who need to vent, but they are not useful for gathering constructive student feedback.

## Introducing Bluepulse by eXplorance

An ideal system for collecting student feedback would combine the strengths of every channel, while avoiding their drawbacks. Bluepulse from eXplorance was designed with this goal in mind.

Bluepulse is a unique **social feedback platform** designed to help educators achieve excellence in teaching and learning.

With Bluepulse, students and instructors engage in an improvement-centric classroom conversation through an online social hub.

Instructors continuously monitor the pulse of the classroom, receive suggestions, and take action to improve their courses.

By fostering a culture of continuous improvement, Bluepulse supports institutions in their mission to help all students flourish.

**Provides every must-have capability**

As shown in Table 2, Bluepulse provides every must-have capability needed to engage students and instructors in a constructive and efficient feedback loop.

Bluepulse provides **privacy** for instructors, so that none of their identifiable interactions with students are shared.

Bluepulse provides **anonymity** for students, so that their comments cannot be traced back to them. This creates a safe environment where students are comfortable providing honest feedback during the continuous improvement process.

**Table 2:  
Bluepulse Social  
Feedback Channel**

	Bluepulse
<b>Privacy</b> (for instructors)	✓
<b>Anonymity</b> (for students)	✓
<b>Two-way interaction</b>	✓
<b>Frequent feedback</b>	✓
<b>Structured feedback</b>	✓
<b>Unstructured feedback</b>	✓
<b>Geared to improvement</b>	✓
<b>Anonymous coaching</b>	✓
<b>Runs on any device</b>	✓
<b>Integrates with popular LMS</b>	✓
<b>Complies with WCAG 2.0 (Level AA) for accessibility</b>	✓
<b>Aggregate analytics</b>	✓

Source: eXplorance

Bluepulse supports a instructor-led **two-way interaction** with students through an easy-to-use dashboard with built-in anonymous communication.

Bluepulse supports **frequent feedback** available instantly, whenever an instructor or student logs in.

**Plus many  
unique  
features**

Bluepulse supports **structured (quantitative) feedback**. Instructors post learning polls or teaching initiatives for students to rate on a 5-point scale, from “Not at all” to “A great deal.” The default labels on this scale can be configured by each institution.

Bluepulse also encourages **unstructured (qualitative) feedback**. At any time, students can make open-ended or freeform comments.

In all these ways, Bluepulse is designed to support **continuous improvement** in teaching and learning: creating better learning experiences, further developing teaching excellence, and engaging and motivating all students so that none are left behind.

Bluepulse also provides advanced features that other solutions do not offer.

For example, Bluepulse supports **anonymous coaching**. This enables instructors to detect students at risk and coach them one-on-one with additional materials and support, without ever knowing who they are.

Bluepulse runs **on any desktop, laptop, tablet, or smartphone** running Android, Blackberry, iOS, Linux, or Windows with any popular web browser including Chrome, Firefox, Internet Explorer, or Safari.

The system integrates with any major **Learning Management System** including Blackboard Learn<sup>®</sup>, Brightspace<sup>®</sup> by D2L, Canvas by Instructure, and Moodle.

Bluepulse is **accessible to all**. Since the system meets the WCAG 2.0 (Level AA) standards for accessibility, it provides an equivalent experience for all students.

As well, the system delivers **aggregate analytics** that show overall statistics for the institution. These metrics are created by totaling and breaking down all statistics from Bluepulse for the whole institution, without identifying individual instructors or students.

For example, Bluepulse analytics can show:

- Total daily logins by users in the past 30 days
- Total number of students and instructors in the system
- Total number of messages exchanged
- Total number of responses received in the past 30 days, and the ratings breakdown over the same period
- Ratio of raters to users, expressed as a percentage

### Three real-world scenarios

Based on the real-world experience of several institutions, we developed three scenarios that show how Bluepulse can help deliver a superior learning experience, promote teaching excellence, and engage and retain at-risk students.

To highlight the versatility of Bluepulse, one scenario is set in a university, one in a college, and one in a high school. To see these scenarios, please refer to the accompanying white paper, [3 Real-World Scenarios Using Bluepulse](#).

## Conclusions

Educators can help fulfil their ultimate mission by giving students a more effective channel to provide feedback on their learning experience.

Today students typically give feedback through a mix of four channels:

1. Mid-term course evaluations
2. Discussion forums
3. Social media
4. Rating websites

Each channel has assorted strengths and weaknesses. One system that combines these strengths while avoiding drawbacks is Bluepulse from eXplorance.

Bluepulse is a social feedback platform designed to help institutions achieve excellence in teaching and learning.

By supporting a culture of continuous improvement, Bluepulse helps educators to achieve their mission of helping all students to flourish: delivering better learning experiences for students, promoting teaching excellence, and engaging and motivating all students.

To find out how more about how Bluepulse can benefit your institution, visit our website at [www.bluepulsehub.com](http://www.bluepulsehub.com).

## About Bluepulse

Bluepulse® is a unique social feedback platform designed to help institutions achieve teaching and learning excellence. It helps instructors discover what to start doing, what to stop doing, and what to continue doing to improve the teaching and learning experience for students.

Putting an emphasis on **how** students learn as much as **what** they are learning, instructors can make real-time adjustments using real data exclusive to them.

By receiving continuous daily feedback, instructors can take the pulse of the classroom to address issues prior to mid- and end-of-term evaluations. This gives instructors a chance to get back on track and refine their teaching methodologies before end-of-term evaluations.

For sales, support, or general inquiries, please contact a Bluepulse representative at [info@bluepulsehub.com](mailto:info@bluepulsehub.com) or visit our website and chat live with an expert, [www.bluepulsehub.com](http://www.bluepulsehub.com).



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## About eXplorance

At eXplorance, we believe that continuous improvement is at the heart of progress.

By providing tools that assess knowledge, competencies, and skills, we assist organizations in developing a culture of improvement. Blue® helps build that culture by powering a cycle of improvement resulting in strategic insights for future innovation.

Blue is a Learning Experience Management (LEM) system that includes applications for course and instructor evaluations, broad-based stakeholder surveys, psychometric and knowledge tests, 360 degree feedback, and more. Putting being better at the forefront, Blue provides benchmarks, stakeholder assessments, sophisticated reporting, adapted insights, and continuous monitoring.

Founded in 2003, eXplorance is a privately held corporation based in Montreal, Canada. Some of eXplorance's clients include RMIT University, UAE University, University of Groningen, University of Louisville, University of Toronto, UMPQUA Community College, and organizations such as The American Petroleum Institute, Fidelity Marketing, loanDepot, and NASA.

## Notes

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- 5: Legal page, Yikyak.com, retrieved 3 April 2015 from <http://www.yikyakapp.com/legal/>
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