



# Blue Helps University to Optimize Online Evaluations

by Anne Sueko Coyle, eXplore

**Client:** Haigazian University in Beirut

**Challenge:** The manual processes for course evaluations were error-prone and eating up precious resources.

**Solution:** Blue/Evaluation, a powerful online course evaluation system, plus a customized interface to the university's portal to help boost response rates.

**Benefits:**

- Higher quality responses
- More efficient evaluation process
- More analysis with less manual labor
- Quick, easy implementation

Students at Haigazian University like to think of it as a very special place.

Located in Beirut, Lebanon, the school is a non-secular, liberal arts institution that has educated men and women from every walk of life in Lebanese society.

Building a strong community is at the heart of the school's mission. So it puts great emphasis on providing quality services to its students and community.

"Because of our focus on close relationships here at Haigazian, we take a lot of time working on the services we provide to our students and our other communities," says Nazareth Nicolian, the school's Director of IT & Services, and Coordinator for MIS.

Course evaluations are of course critical in the development of any institution, and Haigazian is expert in the subject. Prior to this year, however, its purely manual processes were eating up precious resources and limiting what the university could provide.



The architectural flourish over the main entrance to the university's Magun Building.



The garden entrance to the Mugar Building, which houses the university's administrative offices and two libraries.

“A week or two before the end of the semester, the registrar’s office would bring evaluation forms to each classroom and ask the students to fill them out,” Nicolian explains

“These were then manually re-entered into a spreadsheet application to tabulate the results. It was a lot of work, and it was error-prone, obviously.”

### ***Doing the homework to find best evaluation software***

The school decided to find a more efficient, automated way to communicate with its students regarding course and instructor feedback.

But they also wanted to do more.

“Our main objective was to create efficiencies and reduce labour and time on these processes,” says Nicolian.

“But we also had an overall goal to help our students and community become more technology literate.”

He assessed many systems looking for the right tool.

“We looked at several systems, including Web-based survey tools, some freeware, and the integrated evaluation system available in Blackboard, which provides our current portal,” he says.

To assess the products, Nicolian used a detailed set of criteria: functionality, user-friendliness, cost, extensibility, and ease of replicating existing forms. Blue got top marks on every test.

“I was so impressed by the product, the company, and

especially the personal service, that I decided finally on Blue/ Evaluation,” says Nicolian.

### ***Online evaluations make the grade on efficiency***

Haigazian ran a pilot project last semester with all but a few courses being evaluated online.

“We conducted evaluations online in real-time for 225+ courses,” says Nicolian.

Almost all the manual processing of forms is now gone, as well as the duplicate entry of results into spreadsheets.

This has eliminated hours of tedious labor for several employees, who have now been put to work doing real analysis.

“We’ve now got all those people who used to have to enter forms manually doing analytical activities. They use the software to look at cross-departmental statistics or cross-course instructor results,” he says.

“It gives us real insights: We’re now looking at organization-wide results as opposed to individual results.”

## ***A partnership to achieve better response rates***

The automated surveys did not reach the same response rates as surveys filled out under the watchful eyes of the registrar. So eXplorance, the provider of Blue, worked with Haigazian to devise a solution.

“I talked with eXplorance about building some back-ends to our Blackboard application that would prohibit students from viewing their grades until they complete the evaluations,” says Nicolian.

The new component will be available this summer, and it’s expected to dramatically raise response rates.

“Usually we provide Web services for our customers to build their own portal solutions,” says Samer Saab, Director of Product Management at eXplorance.

“In this case, we decided to create a component that would integrate with the Blackboard portal to help the school really boost response rates from its students.”

It was a welcome idea.

“We’re really pleased to work in partnership with a company such as eXplorance to build the best online course evaluation solution possible,” adds Nicolian.

## ***Very fast learning curve***

As evaluations are now conducted on the students’ own time, responses are also improving in quality.

“We obtained a higher quality of responses,” says Nicolian.

“As students get to do the evaluations on their own time, at their own pace, in the privacy of their own homes, they tend to give you a better-quality evaluation.”

Blue was designed to be both easy-to-use and easy to integrate, which made implementing the system as easy as ABC.



**Nazareth Nicolian, the Director of Information Technology & Services, and Coordinator for MIS**

“We’re currently introducing a lot of technology at Haigazian,” says Nicolian. “This implementation went very smoothly, even beyond expectation.

“I was pleasantly surprised to see how quickly my staff were able to learn, install, and implement the system successfully,” he continues.

“Blue provides a number of utilities to facilitate the interface with other systems, which made some of our trickier tasks straightforward.”

Blue’s intuitive user interface means administrators need little training on the application, which introduces cost-savings all down the line for the university.

“We had a two-hour telephone training,” he explains. “The product is so straightforward, easy-to-use, well-documented, and is pretty much real-time, that we didn’t need much more than that.”

When it comes to making the most of technology for evaluations, it looks like Haigazian is now in the top percentile.