

## Rio Salado Continues to Lead in Technology for Education, with Advanced Feedback Systems from Blue

by Anne Coyle, eXplorance

**R**io Salado College is way ahead of the technology curve for education.

Known as the “college within everyone’s reach”, the Arizona-based community college makes all its courses available online, so you don’t have to go to campus to get an education—they bring the college to you.

Rio Salado also provides flexible scheduling, with over 500 courses that students can start almost every Monday of the school year.

**Client:** Rio Salado Community College based in Tempe, AZ with 61,000+ students

**Challenge:** New students starting every Monday meant the course evaluations system needed to be flexible

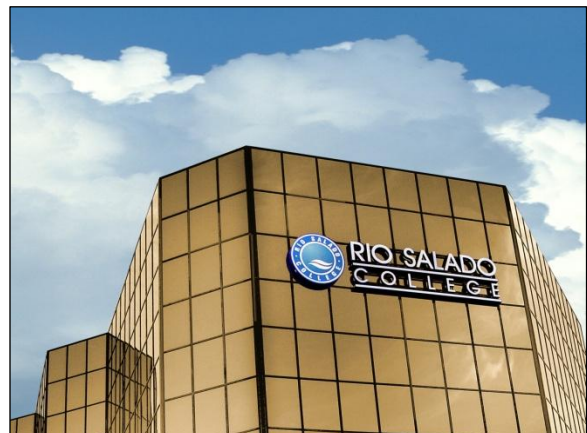
**Solution:** Blue/Evaluation and Blue/Surveys software

**Benefits:**

- Increased course evaluation response rates dramatically
- Saved 15–20 hours of labor a week processing evaluations during busy periods
- Reduced time to publish surveys by more than 66%
- Generated ongoing excitement with near real-time survey results

**Quote:** “eXplorance is extremely responsive to our requests. We appreciate how they follow up with us from time to time, just to make sure everything is working the way we want. And it is.”

— **David Sweeley, Coordinator of Institutional Effectiveness, Rio Salado Community College**



## Putting information technology to the test

With courses taking place on such a dynamic schedule, course evaluations have proven a tough riddle for the Office of Institutional Research.

“There’s no real start and end date to open and close a course evaluation project like is typically done at most colleges,” says David Sweeley, Coordinator of Institutional Effectiveness at Rio Salado Community College.



**David Sweeley, Coordinator of Institutional Effectiveness at Rio Salado**

To manage course evaluations, Rio Salado used to rely on a homegrown system, which provided online forms that students could link to from a URL included in their final course lesson.

“Our response rates were low, says David.

“We couldn’t reach out to students directly for follow up, and there were limitations on the types of questions we could ask.”

What’s more, because students had to include lots of information on the evaluation form, such as course and instructor, the sheer amount of data was bogging the Office of Institutional Research down.

## Blue’s flexibility makes the grade

Rio Salado conducted a lengthy and detailed evaluation to find a new system for gathering feedback from the academic body.

In particular, they wanted a flexible course evaluation system that could accommodate their unusual course scheduling.

They also wanted a survey system that provided a similar experience to their course evaluations, to make it easier for end users and administrators alike and help bring costs down.

Blue passed the test with flying colors.

“We had a detailed Request for Proposal, which Blue successfully met. We were impressed by the question types as well as all the features it came with,” says David.

“It was especially important to us that Blue could easily integrate with our other systems,” adds Adam Lange, Institutional Research Programmer for Rio Salado. “Blue was easy to connect with our Microsoft SQL Server.”

## Blue/Evaluation saves huge amounts of time

The school now has an automated process for course evaluations from start to finish using Blue/Evaluation.

This course evaluation software is designed specifically for the academic environment using secure, Web-based forms.



“Implementation was a very straightforward process and the documentation and support from eXplorance were outstanding,” says David.

Because Blue is integrated with the college’s in-house systems, forms are shorter and produce less data to gather and tabulate.

“Evaluation forms already contain all the right information about courses and instructors,” says David. “Students don’t have to fill that out again.”



“Now that we have cleaner data, we don’t have to spend time filtering and tabulating.

**We’re saving at least 15 to 20 labor hours a week in labor during the busy periods,”** says Adam. “That let us focus more on data analysis.”

## **Blue/Evaluation helps raise response rates**

Rio Salado has seen a **big bump in response rates for evaluations—over 10 times what they used to get**—since they started using Blue/Evaluation.

“Students now receive an automatically generated e-mail to complete an evaluation form two weeks prior to the course end date,” says Adam.

“Automatic reminders are sent seven and 14 days later if they don’t respond. The automated reminders make a big difference in increasing response rates,” says David.



**Rio Salado is now doing more surveys than ever before, and seeing the results faster.**

“Now that we’re able to communicate with students about the evaluation forms, we’ve been fine tuning how we do it to get responses up even further.”

## **Blue/Surveys gets results much faster**

In addition to Blue/Evaluation for course evaluations, Rio Salado also implemented Blue/Surveys to streamline their survey processes.

Blue/Surveys provides Web-based survey creation, management, and analysis that reaches into an organization’s housed data for greater automation, stronger analysis, and intelligent survey management.

The ability to make questions target a specific audience is a big bonus.”

“Blue/Surveys is great,” says David. “Using the skip logic and the various question types, we can provide our customers with customized surveys.

**The survey application is much faster than the old one, and is winning over internal clients.**

“Blue is extremely fast at getting surveys created and published,” says David. “We’re getting surveys done in two hours when it used to take us about six.

“It’s gotten popular with our internal clients—we’re getting more and more requests for surveys!” says David.

“We’re now able to get the survey out and send results to our clients quickly. I think that’s part of the reason we’re doing more surveys now than we ever have in the past.

“The near real-time data generates the most excitement. One dean in particular got very enthusiastic about a survey and monitored the results constantly.”

Fast results, more analysis, and flexibility. Looks like it’s straight A’s for Blue on this group project.