Introduction

With the introduction of new technology, the challenge is always finding the right strategic fit. For institutions, faculty, and students accustomed to structured end-of-term evaluation mechanisms, Bluepulse represents a major departure from the traditional collection of student feedback.

Structured course evaluations are often used by the institution to make policy decisions regarding curriculum, accreditation, tenure, salary increases and/or promotions. Often at the behest of policy, students often feel pressured to fill out these forms. A disconnect exists between the desire to make necessary improvements for the people that provided the input to necessitate change and the students themselves. Any changes that institutions implement always come in the wake of the exodus of students who provided the feedback to begin with. This often leads to diminished student engagement.

Most importantly, end-of-term course evaluations make it difficult to discover what students truly need in order to improve their day to day learning experience. Open-ended comment sections provide an opportunity to let students speak their mind, however very few instructors have the time or energy to read through hundreds of these comments and synthesize over-arching themes that may be contained within.

What this means is that there are very few tools on the market designed to address the needs of instructors who wish to make incremental changes to their teaching methods during the semester, in turn anticipating the results of structured course evaluations forms.

Bluepulse drives student engagement in a way that is fun, unstructured and safe. This leads to better learning outcomes for students and an improved teaching and learning experience for the institution.
Strategic Impact of Bluepulse

Who should use it?

Bluepulse is an adaptive social feedback platform that works in concert with instructors who are open to making incremental improvements in their teaching practices and the understanding that going from being a great teacher to a hero in the classroom requires objective input from stakeholders. This is akin to losing weight; often the last ten pounds are the hardest. The same can be said about improvement. The last push to fine-tune teaching strategies to maximize learning outcomes is aided by being able to discover ‘blind spots’ from outside feedback.

Initial Adoption Strategies

There are some immediate adoption strategies that clients have shared with us in the past few months:

1. **First-year Core Courses with Multiple Sections**: These would be courses that have the biggest enrollment. Introductory science, literature, or business classes have a higher potential for first year students to get “lost in the shuffle”. Providing students an equal voice in a sea of eager students is a good fit for Bluepulse.

2. **Science and Technology Courses**: Software engineering and computer science courses would be more willing to adopt new technology and software because it fits right in their milieu. Courses taught in computer labs will put users directly in front of a direct access point to Bluepulse.

3. **eLearning, Blended Learning, MOOCs**: Any online course where there is a physical disconnect between student and instructor would benefit of having an anonymous and direct link to providing feedback. This sort of model is in line with the mobile accessibility of Bluepulse along with an existing online feel.
4. **Professional Certifications:** Departments of Medicine, Nursing, Dentistry, Law, and Masters or MBAs where student feedback may be mandatory. Where students have a lot more invested in participating in improvement opportunities would imply a greater likelihood of adoption of a tool like Bluepulse. The feedback will also be more visible as professional students are more vocal about improvements come evaluation time.

5. **English Language Studies (ESL) or Language Courses:** For students who may not speak English natively but are taking courses taught in English might not be so forthcoming during in-class discussions. Providing an anonymous channel for feedback will alleviate some of the concerns about being too embarrassed to speak up in class.

6. **First-year Instructors:** Generally, these individuals are a little younger and much more familiar with existing technology trends like social networks and using technology to their full advantage. These instructors have yet to develop trusted teaching approaches and Bluepulse would help highlight ‘blind spots’ in their classroom teaching to help cater to different learning styles of their students.
Why should it be used?

Education is entering an era where there is no technology substitute for good teaching. As the pervasiveness of technology in the classroom increases, educators are faced with a daunting task of wielding technology as tool that will improve the teaching and learning experience for students and instructors. Bluepulse is at the forefront of adaptive learning tools that seek to leverage socially collaborative online platforms to emphasize the importance of improvement rather than performance, and deliver a Return on Expectations (ROE) rather than Return on Investment (ROI).

Market Shift: A New Paradigm

In a recent study from the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges in June 2013, researchers discovered that the availability of tenure-track position in post-secondary education in North America has drastically reduced. In 1969, of the available teaching positions in universities and colleges in North America, 78.3% were tenure-track positions. In 2009, that number had plummeted to 33.5%.

As institutions rely more heavily on non-tenure track faculty, instructors are thirsty for new feedback tools that will help them improve their teaching and learning experience in the classroom. Furthermore, as higher education institutions become more competitive, as does this become increasingly the norm.

The use of Contract Academic Staff (CAS) is on the rise. Currently, half of all undergraduates in Canada are being taught by contract faculty. Also referred to as seasonal lecturers or adjunct faculty, they operate with no job security. Each semester they must re-apply to teach courses without the perks and

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benefits of full time professors: generous benefits and pension, sabbaticals, money for travel and research, and tenure. As the landscape becomes increasingly competitive, the need to differentiate skills and competencies is more important than ever.

With the teaching profession having a turnover rate that is nearly four percent higher than other fields, engaging and empowering instructors is a key tenant in staving off high turnover costs and giving instructors an opportunity to have a say in what goes on in the classroom.

**Learning Experience Management (LEM)**

The high cost of tuition for post-secondary education often comes with high student expectations. The skills and competencies they need to succeed in the workplace are constantly changing, and having the correct skill set is just one aspect of landing a career. Another facet to teaching and learning is how instructors manage these expectations for students in a way that motivates them to develop to their full potential.

Providing an open channel of communication where even the shyest of students can feel safe in sharing candid feedback on classroom topics that are important to them is a small but important piece of LEM. Gathering and analyzing instant daily feedback through Bluepulse complements existing face-to-face feedback channels, giving greater opportunity to instructors to get a ‘pulse’ of the classroom.

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The other important aspect of the data collected using Bluepulse is that it is on-topic, timely, and validated. The popularity of websites such as www.ratemyprofessors.com is proof enough that a large community of students is looking to share feedback amongst themselves because they want to make more informed decisions about their education. The problem with those types of websites is that they are a breeding ground for maligned and disgruntled students who take opportunities to slander professors for ill-gotten gain. This type of anonymous community is nonetheless growing. By bringing the conversation into the classroom, normative behaviours can be formed so that anonymous feedback is constructive and consistent.

**Continuous Improvement**

The dynamic and interactive dashboard allows instructors a visceral snapshot of how improvement is changing in the classroom. Different from other instant social feedback platforms, Bluepulse uses a rating scale to assess the daily student perception of specific improvement opportunities. This way Bluepulse becomes an improvement tool for faculty to engage students in the learning process by prioritizing classroom topics that are particularly important to them.

As more data is collected, an aggregate view of improvement is formed as users can see the changes in the ratings over time. Improvement opportunities can be used to track daily, weekly or periodic topics. Things like having enough review time before quizzes or exams can be revisited as the need arises, whereas improvement opportunities surrounding more daily topics can remain published to track them over the course of an entire semester.

This is a great opportunity for instructors to discover what to start doing, what to stop doing, and what to continue doing in terms of implementing effective teaching strategies.
General versus Specific

Another major benefit of the Bluepulse platform is the ability to investigate teaching and learning strategies on a granular level. Instead of focusing on high-level areas such as informative PowerPoint slides, a greater emphasis can be placed on how that information is delivered. Most of what will be taught in the classroom will be determined by curriculum so the opportunity to discover new and effective ways of conveying that information in a meaningful manner can be done using Bluepulse.

In this rubric, Bluepulse makes a great addition to professional development initiatives for departments of Teaching and Learning where this sort of introspection and accountability for best practices is important.
About Bluepulse

Bluepulse™ is an adaptive social feedback tool designed to help 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 the evaluations that really matter.

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