

# SmarterSurveys

*Data that makes sense*



## Case Study of Pierce College and SmarterSurveys





## Pierce College Online—Background

Pierce College has been developing and offering online courses since the inception of our state-wide consortium in the late 1990s. We have offered a full AA degree since 2003, and continue to add specializations, typically in professional-technical areas such as Fire Command Administration, Occupational Safety and Health, and Homeland Security Emergency Management. We are a two college district with 90 faculty assigned to over 230 online sections annually.



## Course Development Process

Pierce College's campus-based courses have a long history of employing course evaluations as a process to support improvement. The faculty contract stipulates the schedule for applying course evaluation and the use made of that information in review of instructor teaching performance. To comply with those regulations, our online program needed a tool to use that mirrored the face-to-face mark-sense form process used. Obviously, we were not going to require students to come to campus to use the mark-sense system, and postal or electronic distribution didn't provide the controls to assure reliable data collection.

## The Need for Course Evaluation

All online faculty members start their preparation for teaching online by completing a 4-week "How to Teach Online" program. The training's focus is on pedagogy, not LMS skill development, and leads instructors toward a philosophy of active learning and assessment that engages learners in a structured, week-by-week set of learning strategies and assessment activities. As the community and technical college system has embraced Quality Matters, we are incorporating training in the use of the QM Rubric in our training and employing the peer review process to improve course design.

### PIERCE COLLEGE ELEARNING DIRECTOR, ED BACHMANN

*We desperately needed a tool that could marry our current mark-sense system with electronic distribution and reliable data collection.*



**PIERCE COLLEGE ELEARNING  
DIRECTOR, ED BACHMANN**

*We were attracted to SmarterSurveys because of its database-driven functionality.*

## The Need for Course Evaluation

Our initial solution to the need was to use the online version of the evaluation system provided by our on-campus provider; a local university's research office developed tool. The online tool was able to match the on-campus tool, with customizations for eLearning features of courses. There was a modest setup fee for the account and initial survey preparation. We used a Web interface to enter data on our courses and instructors. Then we'd use that to define the individual surveys for sections taught each term. Needless to say, this system took a significant amount of maintenance. In addition, the only way we could manage deployment to assure that only students in the class were able to access the survey was to post the section's specific Web URL in the associated online classroom and hope that students wouldn't pass that on to their friends.

Not only did deployment take a lot of time, but students would have to go to each separate classroom to find the link to the survey. Finally, when the survey period closed, we'd have to manually download a summary report and send it to each instructor and their supervisor. This system incurred a \$25/survey fee and as the eLearning program rapidly grew, our expenditures increased significantly!

We started using SmarterSurveys (formerly known as Post-Course) shortly after the product was launched. We were attracted to the product because of its database-driven functionality. Uploading a list of courses and their enrollments seemed like a streamlined approach to setting up each term's surveys. Deployment at the start of each course evaluation window only required posting of an announcement in each classroom with a link to the system where students could follow the login instructions and see all the evaluations for the courses they were taking.

We were also able to provide instructors with a couple of features they had requested. Those who wanted to provide an incentive by awarding points could review a list of completers and do their grading. We could also allow users to review their summary reports any time in the process and at the end of the survey window with no intervention from the eLearning office.

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*We have been using the product for over two years and continue to be happy with our decision. Recently the second version rolled out and it was seamless.*



## **The Need for Course Evaluation**

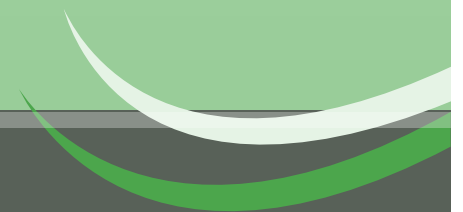
The final selling point for us, however, was the fact that we got all that functionality for a very reasonable flat annual fee and a very minimal per-submission charge. We face the same challenge most colleges face - getting students to complete the online survey. Even if we had 100% participation, the total cost would have been a small fraction of what we had been paying.

## **Our Experience with SmarterSurveys**

For those considering SmarterSurveys as the system for course evaluation and other survey needs, I would encourage you to spend some time with the representatives. You will find as we did that they are great to work with.

We were one of the early adopters of SmarterSurveys and got to work closely with the developer. We sort of wanted it “our way” and every time we made a suggestion, they were right there clarifying our need and willing to make the needed adaptations. We have been using the product for over two years now and continue to be very happy with our decision.

Over the past year we have seen the second version roll out. That transition was essentially seamless, which is saying a lot in this day of enterprise-level, remotely hosted systems. The new functionality and user interface have made the system more user-friendly, more functional, and has streamlined our administrative activities.



## SMARTERSURVEYS

SmarterSurveys is a survey system that allows schools and organizations to automate and organize their data collection process. It can be used for end-of-course evaluations, faculty evaluations, ballots, and general polling.

### BENEFITS

- ◆ Fully Hosted
- ◆ Web-based, on-demand
- ◆ Real time reporting
- ◆ Meaningful Report Data
- ◆ Automated Communication

### FEATURES

- ◆ Data Upload Wizard
- ◆ Survey Builder
- ◆ Unlimited Surveys
- ◆ Tiered Role-Based Admin Access



## The Steps Ahead

We expect to see continued development that adds value through reduced effort on our administrative end. The recent product name change has also signaled expanded functionality as a survey engine which will allow us to easily define and deploy a variety of instruments to our college community. I am sure we'll have other ideas for features, like a nugget for the system directly in Angel, and know the SmarterSurveys team will be receptive to that input.

We are now poised to work on improving participation rates through built-in tools for sending broadcast reminder prompts via e-mail from within the system. We also plan to work on using our Angel LMS platform automation capabilities to drive students who have not engaged the system to do so before they continue their course work. And of course, we will continue to help our faculty find value in the system, so it will become a valid feedback tool for all and lead to continuous course improvement.



## SMARTERSERVICES

SmarterServices (formerly eLearningToolBox) provides the following four products: (1) SmarterMeasure - learning readiness indicator, (2) SmarterSurveys - automated data collection survey system, (3) SmarterFaculty - searchable database of thousands of faculty who want to teach online, and (4) SmarterProctors - searchable database of neutral proctors to administer high stakes exams. Our mission is to organize and analyze data that empowers people to make smarter decisions. We help you obtain data about your students, faculty, teachers, employees, and courses. Data-driven decisions create strong strategic plans, maximize efficiency, and foster an environment of learning - learning from our mistakes, learning about best practices, and learning how to do things better. Learn more at SmarterServices.com.



## SMARTERSERVICES

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