

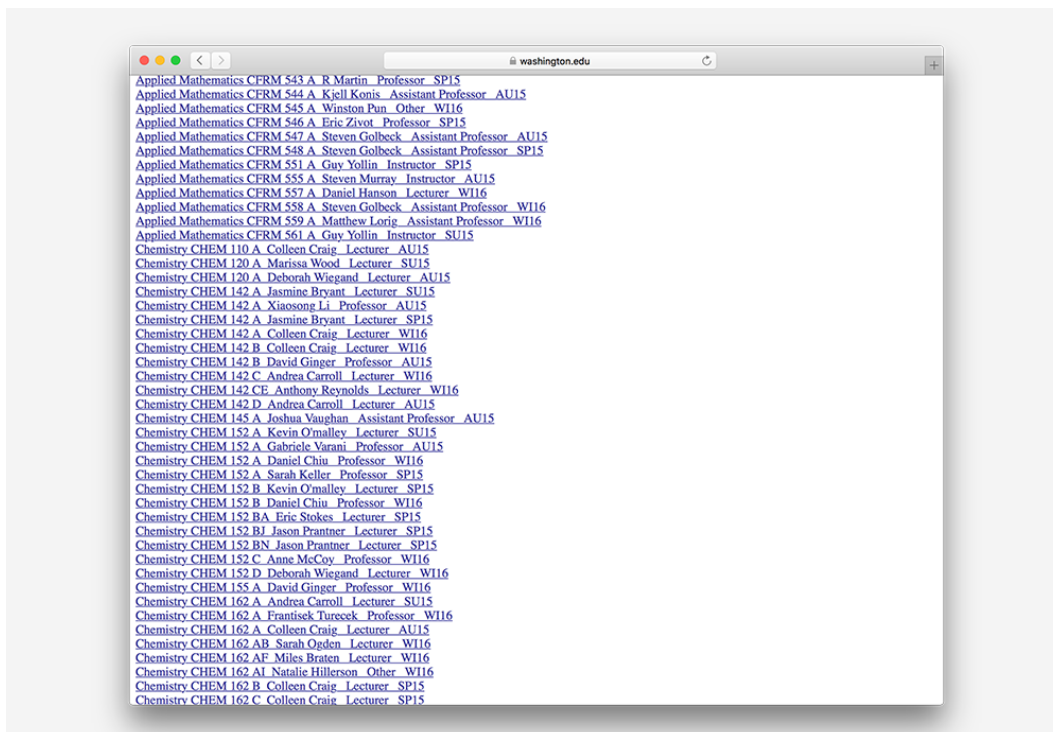
S1: User Research

Project Description

Teaching is a complex job that, in order to do well, requires the proper tools, training, and experience. As young professionals pursuing a career in education get their first job as a teaching assistant, they face a steep learning curve on how to become an effective instructor. Our project is focused on tackling the problems that face new instructors by creating tools to help them become a better teacher as efficiently and effectively as possible.

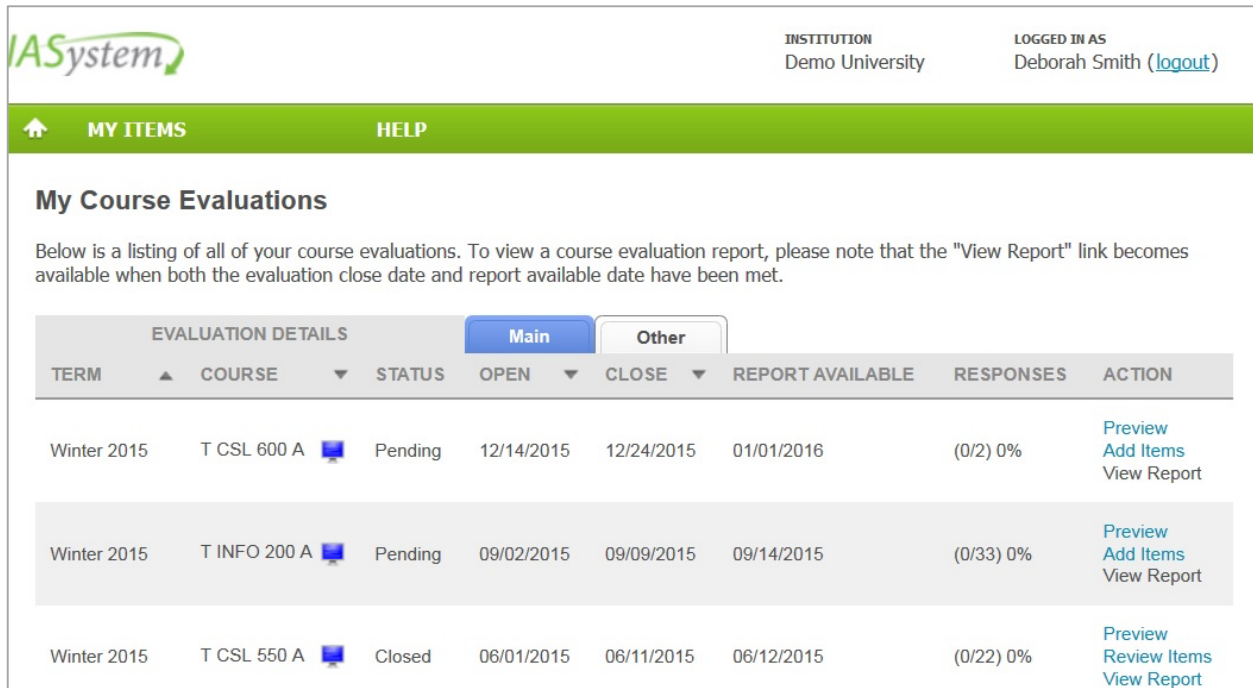
Competitive Analysis of IAS/UWCE

The product I will choose to focus on is UW's Course Evaluation (UWCE) system and the Instructional Assessment System (IAS). The UWCE is a resource that many students rely on each quarter when trying to figure out which classes to take. It's also a tool that professors and TAs use to gather feedback on how the quarter went. They get to learn what worked well and what needs improvement.



Course evaluations consist of two portions. The first is a group of multiple choice questions that rank aspects of the class/teacher such as content, instructor effectiveness, amount learned, and grading techniques. The second is a few short response text fields that students fill out to provide detailed feedback to the instructor.¹

To view the Course Evaluation responses, instructors use the IAS which is a platform used to view all evaluations from various quarters and such.²



The screenshot shows the IASystem interface. At the top left is the IASystem logo. At the top right, it displays 'INSTITUTION Demo University' and 'LOGGED IN AS Deborah Smith (logout)'. Below this is a green navigation bar with 'MY ITEMS' and 'HELP'. The main content area is titled 'My Course Evaluations' and includes a note: 'Below is a listing of all of your course evaluations. To view a course evaluation report, please note that the "View Report" link becomes available when both the evaluation close date and report available date have been met.'

The table below shows the evaluation details:

EVALUATION DETAILS		Main		Other					
TERM	COURSE	STATUS	OPEN	CLOSE	REPORT AVAILABLE	RESPONSES	ACTION		
Winter 2015	T CSL 600 A	Pending	12/14/2015	12/24/2015	01/01/2016	(0/2) 0%	Preview	Add Items	View Report
Winter 2015	T INFO 200 A	Pending	09/02/2015	09/09/2015	09/14/2015	(0/33) 0%	Preview	Add Items	View Report
Winter 2015	T CSL 550 A	Closed	06/01/2015	06/11/2015	06/12/2015	(0/22) 0%	Preview	Review Items	View Report

Strengths

IAS aggregates all of an instructor's course evaluations in one place, making it easy for to manage and view multiple course evaluations. IAS also includes various functionality for instructors to filter and organize their course evaluations to find what they are looking for. The program also gives back metrics on each evaluation such as response rate which gives the instructor an easy understanding of engagement in the feedback survey.³ These features do a good job in helping the instructor manage and review their course evaluation results.

The UWCE is a highly functional and familiar surveying platform for students to use to provide feedback. Because of its conventional format of multiple choice questions and short answer responses, there is little to no learning curve for students, which in turn yields a higher completion rate.

Weaknesses

While the IAS is highly functional, the design of the system is antiquated. I would be hard pressed to think that instructors feel delighted when using the system. The IAS is also not built to handle regular feedback forms throughout the quarter. Because of this, it limits the use of the system for when instructors want to start getting intermediary feedback from students.

UWCE being distributed at the end of the quarter is a flawed system. Because instructors do not have to get regular feedback from students, it hinders the potential for the course and teaching to be improved as it progresses instead of when the students are already done with the class. While many instructors do provide formal and informal ways to get feedback throughout the class, it should be a requirement for professors. UWCE are simply too limited to one specific use case. UWCE is also designed in such a way that there is very little customization to the class itself and over generalizes. The instructor is unable to ask more specific questions about various aspects of their class and that prevents them from being able to improve class specific facets.

Interview Questions

1. What made you want to be a TA?

- a. Always liked teaching.
- b. Being TA was cool because it can help them learn.
- c. "Figuring out ways for them to learn".
- d. "Pay is good".
- e. Great way to work with professor. Nice to see perspective from TA side. Gave her "insight into what it takes to run a successful course".
- f. Enjoyed attending classes.
- g. Enriched her own education.

2. What are your goals as a TA?

- a. Has to plan out weekly section.
 - i. Aimed towards focusing on "hammering down the concepts".
 - ii. Supposed to be more of an intimate time compared to lecture.
 - iii. There to advocate for the students from a student perspective.
- b. Nice to see which students are there for participation and who's there for understanding content.
- c. Got students to interact with course material.
- d. Stay on top of logistics and planning of course material.
- e. Personal Goal: hold office hours even though she doesn't have to.

3. What are your personal goals as a TA?

- a. TA job is more leadership than she's used to.
 - i. Learning to take the lead and direct her section the way she wants.
 - ii. Being more comfortable/confident in a role where she needs to take charge.
 - iii. Usually, in Dream Project, she'd say "What do you want to do?" and going with that.
- b. Learning to verbal/written communicate
 - i. Learn how to write in a "friendly" manner while still getting to the point.
- c. Strengthened the foundation of her knowledge of the course material by being able to teach another student that concepts.

4. What are some challenges you face as a TA?

- a. Personal: having students who she knew already was awkward because it was challenging for her to learn how to deal with people's perception of her and not letting that affect her performance.
 - i. A lot of it has been her own perception of what they think about her.
 - ii. Learning to deal with her own perceived abilities.
 - iii. Trying to figure out if it's her ability.
 - iv. Dealing with the problem:
 - 1. Talk to other friends about it and them giving encouragement.
 - 2. TA team is nice
 - a. Not the only new TA.
 - b. Has veteran TAs to help her.
 - v. It was a support system that she seek out herself.
- b. Learning how to communicate/explain concepts to students.
 - i. Had to see from their perspective
 - ii. Had to make sure not to just give answers but to help students get to answer.

5. What forms of communication do you use to interact with your students?

- a. Slack (main)
- b. Email
 - i. She says "Slack Me"
 - ii. Likes the chat interface of slack.
 - iii. Doesn't like the formality of email.
 - iv. "At the end of the day, they want a fast response too"
 - v. "Students are trying to hold a conversation in some regard."
- c. General Tools
 - i. Canvas

1. Use for taking attendance
 2. Grading
 - ii. Google docs and drive
 1. TA Meeting notes
 2. Course Materials (ex. lab slides)
 - iii. GitHub Classroom
 1. Create an organization of repos surrounding the classroom
 2. Has an admin aspect to it
6. **Do you ever receive teaching feedback from your students? If yes, how so and how often?**
 - a. All feedback has been informal
 - i. In person
 - ii. At office hours
 - b. All casual positive feedback

References

1. UW Course Evaluation Catalog - <https://www.washington.edu/cec/index.html>
2. IAS User Guide - <http://iasystem.org/help-main/faculty-user-guide/>
3. IAS Home Page - <http://iasystem.org/>
4. Office of Educational Assessment - <http://www.washington.edu/assessment/course-evaluations/>