

GatorEvals Committee Proposal on MLY Alerts Model

Introduction

The University of Florida (UF) strives to maintain a safe, supportive, and productive learning environment. The GatorEvals course evaluation system asks students to respond to [four qualitative](#) (e.g., free text, open-ended comments) questions as a source of insight into a faculty member's teaching and course.

Members of the evaluation's community recognized the need for a set of guidelines for faculty, staff, and administrators related to student feedback of teaching and courses. UF recently purchased a license for a machine learning tool that analyzes course evaluation comments. One aspect of this tool is to identify potential alerts related to issues such as harassment, threats, or student well-being concerns.

This committee's primary purpose is to develop and oversee a comprehensive, ethical, and efficient process for responding to these alerts. Our goal is to create a clear, actionable framework that ensures student safety and well-being while respecting academic freedom and privacy. We'll need to address complex questions, such as the duty to report, the involvement of different university entities, and the appropriate responses to various types of alerts.

MLY

Introduction to the Tool

MLY is a comment analysis solution that enables organizations to interpret text feedback from students throughout their academic journey. The analysis of these comments reveals key insights that empower leaders to address challenges in areas such as student engagement, course materials, performance, communication, learning outcomes, among other areas.

MLY assesses each individual comment to tag it with topic(s), sentiment within those topics, overall sentiment, if the comment has a recommendation, and if the comment is alert worthy.

Alerts Model

Analyzing student comments using the Alerts Model can help identify issues enabling the university to act quickly to resolve problems to avoid adverse legal consequences and low faculty or student morale. It identifies comments containing harmful text and flags them for

further consideration. These comments can be considered worthy of scrutiny for possible issues, threats, problems, etc.

Each comment is assigned an alert score from 0 to 100%.

Proposed Committee Composition:

- Students (2-3 representatives)
- Faculty (2-3 representatives)
- Academic Leaders (2 Department Chairs, 2 Deans)
- Wellness Center Representative
- Human Resources Representative
- Student Life Representative
- University Police Department Representative
- General Counsel's office Representative

Proposed Agenda for the Inaugural Meeting:

1. **Welcome (5 minutes)**
2. **Introductions (5 minutes)**
3. **Level Setting (10 minutes)**
 - Committee's purpose.
 - Presentation on how MLY identifies and categorizes 'alert' comments.
 - Discussion on the importance of addressing these alerts promptly and effectively.
 - Discussion on the importance of balancing safety concerns with privacy and academic freedom.
 - Review policy and process examples from outside institutions.
4. **Outcomes of the Committee (10 minutes)**
 - Develop a clear process for handling different types of alerts.
 - Establish guidelines for notifying appropriate parties.
 - Create a communication plan for faculty and students.
 - Ensure compliance with legal and ethical standards.

Key Questions for Discussion:

- 1. What to do with student comments that trigger an 'alert'?**
 - Define the immediate steps to be taken once an alert is identified.
 - Establish a protocol for initial assessment and response.
- 2. What is the step-by-step process for handling each type of alert?**
 - Develop detailed procedures for different categories of alerts (e.g., harassment, weapons, suicide ideation).
 - Assign responsibilities for each step in the process to appropriate committee members or departments.
- 3. How should faculty notify the committee or appropriate staff when they find a comment of concern?**
 - Create a clear and accessible reporting mechanism for faculty to use.
 - Determine the communication channels and documentation required for reporting.
- 4. Are faculty required to notify the committee of concerning comments?**
 - Discuss whether notification should be mandatory or voluntary.
 - Consider the implications of mandatory reporting, including the need for training and support for faculty.
- 5. Does mandatory notification need to be collectively bargained?**
 - Evaluate whether the requirement for faculty to report alerts must be negotiated with faculty unions or other bargaining units.
 - Plan for discussions with relevant stakeholders to address collective bargaining considerations.

Implementation Plan:

- 1. Formation of Subcommittees:**
 - Establish subcommittees focused on specific types of alerts to streamline the review process.
 - Assign members to subcommittees based on their expertise and role within the university.
- 2. Development of Policies and Procedures:**
 - Collaborate to draft comprehensive policies and procedures for handling alerts.
 - Ensure that these policies comply with university regulations and legal requirements.
- 3. Training and Support:**
 - Provide training sessions for faculty and staff on recognizing and reporting concerning comments.
 - Offer resources and support to committee members to effectively manage and respond to alerts.
- 4. Communication Strategy:**
 - Develop a communication plan to inform the university community about the committee's role and the reporting process.
 - Ensure transparency and encourage reporting by promoting a culture of safety and support.
- 5. Review and Evaluation:**
 - Set up a mechanism for regular review and evaluation of the committee's effectiveness.

- Adjust policies and procedures based on feedback and evolving needs.

Workflow for Immediate Threats (e.g., Suicide Ideation, Potential Violence)

- 1. Detection and Initial Processing**
 - **Step 1:** Instructional Assessment Coordinator (IAC) downloads the evaluation data and inputs it into MLY.
 - **Step 2:** The tool scans the data and identifies concerning comments.
 - **Step 3:** The tool automatically flags comments that indicate immediate threats (e.g., suicide ideation, potential violence).
- 2. Notification and Initial Assessment**
 - **Step 4:** The IAC immediately notifies Academic Leadership (e.g., Dean of Students, relevant department chair) about the flagged comment.
 - **Step 5:** Academic Leadership conducts an initial assessment of the comment to determine the severity and immediacy of the threat.
- 3. Engagement of Support Services**
 - **Step 6:** If the threat is deemed immediate, Academic Leadership promptly notifies the Student Life and Wellness Center.
 - **Step 7:** The Wellness Center contacts the student involved to provide immediate support and assess their well-being.
- 4. Involving Security and Emergency Services**
 - **Step 8:** If the threat involves potential violence, Academic Leadership also notifies the University Police Department.
 - **Step 9:** The University Police Department assesses the situation and takes necessary security measures.
- 5. Follow-Up and Monitoring**
 - **Step 10:** The Wellness Center continues to support the student and monitors their situation.
 - **Step 11:** Academic Leadership and the IAC document the incident and actions taken, ensuring proper records are maintained.

Workflow for Faculty Harassment of Students

- 1. Detection and Initial Processing**
 - **Step 1:** Instructional Assessment Coordinator (IAC) downloads the evaluation data and inputs it into MLY.
 - **Step 2:** The tool scans the data and identifies concerning comments.
 - **Step 3:** The tool automatically flags comments related to faculty harassment and sends an alert to the IAC.
- 2. Notification and Initial Assessment**
 - **Step 4:** The IAC notifies Academic Leadership (e.g., Dean of Students, relevant department chair) about the flagged comment.
 - **Step 5:** Academic Leadership conducts an initial assessment of the comment to determine its validity and severity.
- 3. Engagement of Relevant Authorities**

- **Step 6:** If the comment is deemed credible, Academic Leadership notifies the relevant department chair and dean.
 - **Step 7:** Academic Leadership also informs Central Human Resources (HR) for further action.
4. **Investigation and Action**
 - **Step 8:** The department chair and HR initiate a formal investigation into the harassment claim.
 - **Step 9:** If necessary, the faculty member is placed on administrative leave pending the outcome of the investigation.
 5. **Support for the Student**
 - **Step 10:** Student Life and the Wellness Center are notified to provide support to the student involved.
 - **Step 11:** The Wellness Center contacts the student to offer counseling and support services.
 6. **Resolution and Follow-Up**
 - **Step 12:** Based on the investigation's findings, appropriate disciplinary actions are taken against the faculty member if the claim is substantiated.
 - **Step 13:** Academic Leadership and HR ensure that the student is kept informed of the investigation's progress and outcome.
 - **Step 14:** The IAC documents the incident and actions taken, maintaining proper records for accountability.

General Steps for Other Types of Alerts

1. **Detection and Initial Processing**
 - **Step 1:** Instructional Assessment Coordinator (IAC) downloads the evaluation data and inputs it into MLY.
 - **Step 2:** The tool scans the data and identifies concerning comments.
 - **Step 3:** The tool flags comments of concern and sends an alert to the IAC.
2. **Notification and Initial Assessment**
 - **Step 4:** The IAC notifies Academic Leadership (e.g., Dean of Students, relevant department chair) about the flagged comment.
 - **Step 5:** Academic Leadership conducts an initial assessment of the comment.
3. **Engagement of Relevant Services**
 - **Step 6:** Depending on the nature of the comment, Academic Leadership notifies the appropriate university services (e.g., Wellness Center, HR, Student Affairs).
4. **Follow-Up and Monitoring**
 - **Step 7:** The relevant services take necessary actions and provide support as required.
 - **Step 8:** Academic Leadership and the IAC document the incident and actions taken, ensuring proper records are maintained.

Policy Examples

Comments Outside of Instruction and Course

1. Student evaluation feedback should focus on course and instructional content (assignments, readings, in-class materials) and not unrelated matters (instructor's appearance).
 - a. To address issues students may have experienced that fall outside of these matters, please review the following institutional resources for additional guidance and reporting:
 - i. **Data Collection and Preparation:** The Institutional Assessment Coordinator collects course evaluation data, including both quantitative (ratings) and qualitative (free-text comments) components. The free-text comments are extracted for further analysis.
 - ii. **Alerts Model Analysis:** The extracted free-text comments are submitted to an alerts model for automated analysis. The alerts model identifies comments that raise concern, such as those related to self-harm or harassment.
 - iii. **Categorization:** The Institutional Assessment Coordinator reviews and categorizes the comments into relevant topic areas and flagged for further action.
 - iv. **Escalation Process:** comments of serious concern (e.g. harassment, threats, self-harm, etc.) will be forwarded to the relevant academic leadership, Human Resources, Student Affairs, Counseling & Wellness Center, and Campus Security.
 - v. **Documentation and Follow-up:** all actions taken are documented and follow-up actions will be assigned to the relevant university parties. Regular reviews will ensure timely resolution.
1. University of Newcastle
 - a. [Student Participant Privacy Policy](#)
 - i. Where responses to a survey question raise concerns, your response will be shared with authorized university staff for assessment. Only the response of concern will be released. No responses to other survey questions will be released.
 1. If your response is approaching a breach of the Code of Conduct, you may be contacted to address these concerns. If your response is a considered a clear breach of the Code of Conduct, your response and contact details will be shared with the DVC(A) or the Chief People and Culture Officer in Human Resources.
 2. If your response is considered to indicate a risk of self-harm or harm to others, your response and contact details will be released to the university health intervention team and / or counselling staff.
 3. If your response reports a clear breach of the Code of Conduct of a staff member, your response will be shared with the DVC(A).

Your contact details will not be shared in this circumstance. Should it be deemed necessary to seek further input from yourself on the matter, you will be contacted by an authorized staff member (member of the Strategy, Planning and Performance team responsible for the data collection process) to seek your approval first. You have the right to refuse further participation in reporting details of the breach.

2. University of British Columbia
 - a. [Senate Report on Automated Text Analysis](#) – starting page 90
 - i. Used a natural language processing tool, machine learning, Blue Text Analytics (from eXplorance), and Blue ML (now MLY from eXplorance).
3. Dalhousie University
 - a. [Student Feedback on Learning Experience Policy](#)
 - i. **Deletion of Discriminatory or Harassing Comments.** When the Instructors receive their reports, if they believe that they received a comment in Section D that constitutes either harassment or discrimination, then they may request that it be removed from their report. Once such a request is submitted to the SLEQ Data Custodian, the complaint is then reviewed by a review committee comprising the Vice-Provost Equity and Inclusion, the Vice-Provost Student Affairs, the Associate Vice-President Human Resources, the Chair of the Senate Learning and Teaching Committee, and the University General Counsel (or their designates). If the comment is deemed to constitute discrimination or harassment, then the review committee may request that the comment be deleted from the Instructor's data along with all of the other responses submitted by that student across all sections of the SLEQ form completed for that course. In addition, if the comment is deemed to have violated the university's policies on harassment, discrimination, sexualized violence, the student code of conduct and/or the use of computing and communication infrastructure, then the review committee may ask for the identity of the student to be revealed for the purposes of a complaint under the relevant policy.
 - ii. **Alerts.** The SLEQ Administrator will use the Text Analytics tool in the SLEQ software to run a report each semester looking for threats of violence or threats of self-harm. These will be reviewed by the SLEQ Data Custodian and, where there are comments of concern, forwarded to either the Vice-Provost Student Affairs or the Director of Campus Security to assess whether or not intervention is required under Dalhousie's crisis intervention processes. If intervention is required, then the identity of the student who completed that evaluation may be identified for purposes of intervention.
4. [University of Chicago Evaluation Policy](#)

FAQs

Pedagogy as the Primary Purpose

The primary purpose of MLY is to identify trends in student comments related to pedagogy and course content, with the goal of improving teaching and learning.

Limited Scope

The committee will establish a clear and transparent process for responding to alerts, which will include guidelines for determining when an alert is actionable and when anonymity can be broken. This process will prioritize academic freedom and ensure that faculty members' rights are respected.

Timeline

The university purchased a license for MLY that will go into effect in the Spring 2025 term. Over the last year, the university was able to pilot the tool to review its capabilities and models prior to a purchasing agreement.

Student Confidentiality

The committee will establish clear guidelines for maintaining student confidentiality, including de-identifying student comments and only breaking anonymity in cases where an alert is deemed actionable.