

**Date:** April 2, 2019

**To:** Chabriol Colebatch  
Secretary to the University and General Council

**From:** David Hutchison  
Chair, Ad Hoc Committee on Teaching Evaluation

**Re:** Final Report - Ad Hoc Committee on Teaching Evaluation

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## INTRODUCTION

### MANDATE AND TIMELINE

The Ad Hoc Committee on Teaching Evaluation was struck at the April 11, 2018 meeting of Senate. The mandate of the Committee is "to examine the development of a policy for teaching evaluations for Brock University." The Committee was requested to submit its final report to Senate no later than April 2019.

### MEMBERSHIP

Please see *Appendix D: Committee Membership*.

### PROCESS

The Ad Hoc Committee on Teaching Evaluation has met on six occasions, roughly monthly. Background material which has been collected and reviewed by the Committee includes the publicly posted teaching evaluation policies of six other Canadian universities, the 2017 "Course Evaluation at Brock University" report prepared by the Centre for Pedagogical Innovation, and scholarly/research-based articles related to issues in teaching evaluation (e.g., bias, use of teaching evaluations in the tenure and promotion process, and factors impacting teaching evaluation response rates) as contributed by committee members.

With the support of Senate, the ad hoc Committee on Teaching Evaluation conducted an online survey of the university community from March 18 - 27, 2019 (see Appendices A and F). All of the survey responses were shared with members of the Committee which then met to discuss potential revisions to the Committee's final

report and draft teaching evaluation policy in light of the feedback received. The survey responses (with personal identifying information redacted) are available via the University Secretariat Document Library:

<https://brocku.ca/university-secretariat/senate/committee-meetings/>

Also posted to the University Secretariat Document Library is a version of this final report which highlights (in blue) the revisions that were made to the draft report as submitted to the March 2019 Senate meeting.

## BACKGROUND

### CURRENT PRACTICE

Currently, there are few consistent or standardized teaching evaluation practices in place at Brock University. While each academic unit is responsible for "establishing procedures for the format, content, and collection of student evaluations" (Article 16.03.g of the *Collective Agreement between Brock University and the Brock University Faculty Association, 2017 - 2020* (hereafter referred to as the *Brock/BUFA Collective Agreement*), and while similar practices do appear in multiple units, few, if any, of these processes are codified or applied consistently across the university. Hence, the teaching evaluation experiences of instructors are largely contextualized exclusively within each individual's home academic unit.

Since 2015, the university has utilized *eXplorance Blue* to conduct online teaching evaluations for online courses and some face-to-face courses (at the request of academic units). As of 2018-19, approximately one-third of teaching evaluations at Brock were conducted online. Two-thirds were conducted on paper using Scantron or alternate means. Twenty-four academic units currently use *eXplorance Blue* as their primary method of conducting teaching evaluations.

### POLICY CONTEXT

Brock University does not have a university-wide teaching evaluation policy. However, teaching evaluation policy provisions are embedded in the *Brock/BUFA Collective Agreement*.<sup>1</sup>

*Appendix E: Brock/BUFA Collective Agreement Teaching Evaluation Excerpts* quotes the teaching evaluation policy provisions from the Collective Agreement.

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<sup>1</sup> There are no teaching evaluation policy provisions in the *Collective Agreement between Brock University and the Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 4207 Unit 1, 2016 – 2019*.

The recommendations in the “Recommendations: Current Policy Context” section which follows are aligned with these policy provisions. The recommendations in the “Recommendations: Potential Future Policy Contexts” section are forward-looking in considering potential future policy contexts.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### RECOMMENDATIONS: CURRENT POLICY CONTEXT

Given the current provisions in the *Brock/BUFA Collective Agreement*, the Committee recommends the following:

1. That *Appendix B: Proposed Teaching Evaluation Policy* be adopted as Brock University’s formal teaching evaluation policy;
2. That, where feasible within the current policy context, the term “student course experience survey” be used in place of “teaching evaluation” and “course evaluation” in order to more directly denote the role that such surveys play in documenting the experience of students in a course;
3. That the University, Brock University Students Union (BUSU), and Graduate Students Association (GSA), in consultation with faculty and sessional instructors/course coordinators/TAs/lab demonstrators and the Office of Human Rights and Equity, cooperate on a joint effort to inform students about the value, limits, and use of student course experience surveys, including encouraging students to complete such surveys in a respectful manner that provides constructive feedback. The Committee also emphasizes the importance of Article 2 in *Appendix B: Proposed Teaching Evaluation Policy*;
4. That the Centre for Pedagogical Innovation develop and share best practices for the formative assessment of courses to be used at the discretion of individual instructors;
5. That the serious policy gap related to the teaching evaluation feedback (or lack thereof) received by teaching assistants and lab demonstrators be addressed. The Committee has learned anecdotally that in some academic units, teaching assistants and lab demonstrators receive ample course evaluation feedback. However, in other academic units, little or no course evaluation feedback is provided to teaching assistants and lab demonstrators. In this regard, the Committee emphasizes the importance of Articles 4.h and 5.g in *Appendix B: Proposed Teaching Evaluation Policy*;
6. That the University emphasize the importance of Article 5 in *Appendix B: Proposed Teaching Evaluation Policy* (see #1 and 2 below) and the teaching evaluation provisions in the *Brock/BUFA Collective Agreement* (see #3 below). In the university-wide survey that was conducted (and anecdotal feedback

received) concerns were raised regarding: 1) instructors sometimes being present in class when teaching evaluations are completed by students; 2) teaching evaluations not being securely stored whilst in the custody of program administration offices; 3) some courses with less than five students conducting teaching evaluations; and 4) anecdotal reports of student volunteers tampering with teaching evaluations.

## RECOMMENDATIONS: POTENTIAL FUTURE POLICY CONTEXTS

Given that Brock University's teaching evaluation policies will likely continue to be framed by the University's collective agreements with faculty and sessional instructors, TAs, lab demonstrators, and course coordinators (i.e., BUFA and CUPE 4207), among other constituencies, the Committee strongly recommends the following:

1. The Committee notes that in recent years some universities have either abolished teaching evaluations or greatly attenuated their role in tenure and promotion. The research examined by the Committee includes evidence that teaching evaluations (i.e., the instructor evaluations completed by students) can include expressions of implicit and explicit bias against instructors on the basis of gender, race, class size, and other factors. Given this, the Committee recommends that the University and BUFA, through the Joint Committee on the Administration of the Agreement, meet to discuss the merits of reducing or eliminating the reliance on teaching evaluations in the tenure and promotion process, in favour of other evidence of teaching effectiveness, including teaching dossiers, peer observation and feedback, and/or testimonial letters;
2. The *Brock/BUFA Collective Agreement* stipulates that "the results of student course evaluations shall be made available by members to their Deans during the Annual Review process...as a source of information about teaching quality and effectiveness" (Article 12.07.d) plus additional information provided by the faculty member (Article 12.07.c). Currently, the annual report submission site and help document provide limited prompts as to what constitutes the minimum level of "student course evaluation" "results" that should be uploaded for each taught course with five or more students. The Committee recommends that, to ensure equity, the University and BUFA, through the Joint Committee on the Administration of the Agreement, meet to consider a university-wide standard for this requirement. The Committee notes that, save for tenure and promotion, this process is the only formalized means through which the University is able to monitor the effective teaching of faculty-taught courses at Brock University. Hence, the importance of "making available" sufficient and meaningful "student course evaluation" "results" plus additional information as desired by faculty members;
3. That in the next round of collective agreement negotiations between the University and the Brock University Faculty Association, consideration be given

for the consistent use of the terms “student evaluations” and “teaching evaluations” in the Collective Agreement, with the term “student course experience surveys” also given consideration. Similarly, the Committee recommends that consideration be given to how the terms “instruction” and “teaching” might be more meaningfully referenced in Brock policy documents;

4. There may come a time when the University needs to collect aggregate teaching evaluation data for the purposes of provincial reporting and/or institutional quality assurance. The Committee recommends that the University and BUFA, through the Joint Committee on the Administration of the Agreement, meet to discuss a pathway forward to address this potential need, well ahead of it potentially being imposed on the University (possibly with a need to provide historical/trend data which goes back some years).

## APPENDIX A: TEACHING EVALUATION POLICY SURVEY

The ad hoc Committee on Teaching Evaluation was struck by Senate in April 2018 “to examine the development of a policy for teaching evaluations for Brock University.” Among the teaching evaluation topics the Committee has discussed is the potential for bias in teaching evaluations (e.g., on the basis of gender and race) for which there is research evidence.

Per its mandate, the Committee has developed a draft teaching evaluation policy for Brock University. At the March 2019 Senate meeting, the Committee sought Senate’s support to solicit the feedback of the university community through this online survey.

Your feedback will assist the Committee in finalizing a draft teaching evaluation policy for Brock University which will be considered by Senate at an upcoming meeting. This survey will be open for seven days until [insert date]. Thank you for participating.

The draft teaching evaluation policy can be viewed here:

[insert web link]

The Senate report in which the draft teaching evaluation policy is included can be viewed here:

[insert web link]

I am a:

- undergraduate student
- graduate student
- faculty member
- sessional (CUPE) instructor
- course coordinator
- teaching assistant
- lab demonstrator
- marker-grader
- administrative staff member
- member of the senior university administration
- other: \_\_\_\_\_

Please enter your feedback for the Committee into the box below:

## APPENDIX B: PROPOSED BROCK UNIVERSITY TEACHING EVALUATION POLICY

### Introduction

1. Definitions:
  - a. *Teaching Evaluation*: The formal assessment of teaching, normally relying on a variety of evidence, including, but not limited to, student course experience surveys (aka course evaluations), teaching dossiers, peer observation and feedback, and testimonial letters;
  - b. *Student Course Experience Survey*: The feedback provided by students in a course, through an online or paper-based survey, which focuses on each student's experience in the course. Formally referred to as course evaluations (or teaching evaluations) in the academic literature;
2. Student course experience surveys (aka course evaluations) serve as one component of a multifaceted approach to teaching evaluation. Student course experience surveys are valuable as they provide a direct, confidential, systematic, and formalized means by which each student in a course can provide feedback on his or her experience in the course. However, the academic literature also highlights the potential for bias in student course experience surveys (course evaluations) on the basis of gender, race, class size, and other factors. Therefore, in evaluating teaching effectiveness, it is important to consider a variety of evidence, including student course experience surveys, teaching dossiers, peer observation and feedback, testimonial letters, and other evidence of teaching effectiveness;
3. With reference to the *Collective Agreement between Brock University and the Brock University Faculty Association, 2017 - 2020* (hereafter referred to as the *Brock/BUFA Collective Agreement*):
  - a. student course evaluations (aka teaching evaluations) shall be conducted for all Brock courses with five or more students (Article 12.04.v);
  - b. “student course evaluations are not public documents and are the property of the instructor” (Article 12.07.d)
  - c. “the results of student course evaluations shall be made available by [faculty members] to their Deans during the Annual Review process and other processes as provided for in this Agreement as a source of information about teaching quality and effectiveness” (Article 12.07.d)
  - d. Departments, Centres, and Program Committees “shall establish procedures for the format, content, and collection of student evaluations” of courses in the academic unit (Articles 16.03.g, 16.04, and 16A.03.h)

### Student Course Experience Survey System

4. With reference to the *Brock/BUFA Collective Agreement*, to aid academic units in establishing “procedures for the format, content, and collection of student course experiences,” the University shall maintain a centralized online course experience system (hereafter referred to as the System) which departments, centres, and programs can choose to opt into. The System shall:
  - a. be called the “Student Course Experience Survey System”;
  - b. be managed by the Centre for Pedagogical Innovation;
  - c. allow an academic unit to choose to opt into the System;
  - d. allow academic units that choose to opt in a mechanism to opt specific courses out of the System (e.g., due to low enrolment or their specialized nature);
  - e. support variable Likert-type rating scales (i.e., 1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Undecided, 4-Agree, 5-Strongly Agree, 6-N/A) in addition to open-ended response questions;
  - f. include the following levels of questions:
    - i. university level: the following university-wide global questions:
      1. I found the course engaging. (Likert rating)
      2. The course deepened my understanding of the subject matter. (Likert rating)
      3. The instructor fostered a respectful learning environment. (Likert rating)
      4. I had a positive experience in this course. (Likert rating)
      5. What aspects of the course did you find most engaging? (open-ended)
      6. What would enhance your learning experience in this course? (open-ended)
    - ii. program level: one set of questions per academic unit, per academic code, to which a course belongs (as provided by the academic unit);
    - iii. instructor level: questions which are specific to a course (as optionally provided by the instructor);
  - g. support multiple instructors per course (each receiving confidential feedback);
  - h. where applicable, ask respondents to identify and provide feedback related to their teaching assistant and/or lab demonstrator;



- i. follow consistent practices related to the delivery and communication of survey tasks to instructors and students via email, the learning management system, and other applicable methods of communication, accommodating for accessibility needs;
- j. automatically generate and communicate summary reports to instructors;
- k. collate and visually present summary results in a meaningful way, while maintaining student confidentiality;
- l. feature robust standards to ensure that the privacy, confidentiality, and security of collected data is maintained;
- m. include a process for the removal of comments deemed discriminatory, harmful, or contrary to Brock University's *Respectful Work and Learning Environment Policy*, in consultation with, at minimum, the course instructor;
- n. under the purview of the Provost and Vice-President - Academic, and in consultation with the Presidents of BUSU and GSA, develop a process for the de-anonymization of data in extreme situations which include threats of violence or self-harm;
- o. include provisions for soliciting user feedback in order to improve the System on an ongoing basis.

#### Paper-based Course Evaluations

- 5. For offline paper-based course evaluations, it is recommended that academic units include the following provisions in their Rules:
  - a. the instructor should not be present when course evaluations are completed by students;
  - b. a student in a course should administer, seal in an envelope, and deliver, to the academic unit office to which the course belongs, the completed course evaluations, along with any unused evaluation forms;
  - c. the course evaluations for faculty members should remain sealed while in the custody of the program administration office;
  - d. the teaching evaluations for CUPE personnel should be processed according to the Rules as established by the academic unit;
  - e. while in the custody of the program administration office, teaching evaluations should be securely stored in a locked storage area;
  - f. teaching evaluations should not be reviewed by faculty members or CUPE personnel until the final grades for the course have been submitted;
  - g. there should be provisions for teaching assistants and lab demonstrators to receive course evaluation feedback from students;

- h. there should be a process for the removal of comments deemed discriminatory, harmful, or contrary to Brock University's *Respectful Work and Learning Environment Policy*, in consultation with, at minimum, the course instructor.

#### Miscellaneous

6. It is recommended that instructors provide sufficient time during the last or second last class in a face-to-face course for students to complete the online student course experience survey or paper-based teaching evaluation;
7. Academic units and instructors are encouraged to consult with the Centre for Pedagogical Innovation in choosing the questions to include in student course experience surveys;
8. Students are advised of their right to consult with the Ombudsperson or Chair/Director of the program a course belongs to should they wish to provide in-person feedback about a course;
9. Students are encouraged to nominate exemplary instructors for teaching awards as listed at Brock University's Centre for Pedagogical Innovation website;
10. It is recommended that this teaching evaluation policy be reviewed by Senate every five years (or earlier if warranted).

## **APPENDIX C: UNIVERSITY LEVEL STUDENT COURSE EXPERIENCE SURVEY QUESTIONS**

The following script and questions were developed (with reference to existing banks of course evaluation questions) by a sub-committee of the ad hoc Committee on Teaching Evaluation. It is proposed that they form the basis for the university level student course experience survey questions that are posed for courses which are housed in academic units that opt to use the University's Student Course Experience Survey System.

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As part of Brock University's commitment to high quality student learning, you are invited to share your views on your learning experiences in this course. Your comments and responses are confidential. It is Brock University policy that student experience survey results are not released to instructors until the date has passed for final course grades to be received by the Registrar's Office.

We encourage thorough, respectful, and constructive feedback that is aligned with Brock University's Respectful Work and Learning Environment Policy.

Your feedback is valuable to instructors.

### **University Level Questions**

1. I found the course engaging. (Likert rating)
2. The course deepened my understanding of the subject matter. (Likert rating)
3. The instructor fostered a respectful learning environment. (Likert rating)
4. I had a positive experience in this course. (Likert rating)
  
5. What aspects of the course did you find most engaging? (open-ended)
6. What would enhance your learning experience in this course? (open-ended)

### **Program Level Questions**

[To be provided by the academic unit to which the course belongs.]

### **Instructor Level Questions**

[To be optionally provided by the course instructor.]

## APPENDIX D: COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

### Voting Members

Fayez Elayan  
Goodman School of Business

Lianne Fisher  
Graduate Student Association (GSA)

David Hutchison (Chair)  
Faculty of Education

Tamari Kitossa  
Faculty of Social Sciences

Timothy O'Connell  
Faculty of Applied Health Sciences

Behnaz Mirzai  
Faculty of Humanities

Cara Persia  
Brock University Student Union (BUSU)

Colin Rose  
Senate Graduate Studies Committee

Matthew Royal  
Senate Teaching and Learning Policy Committee

David Stark (Vice-chair)  
Senate Undergraduate Student Affairs Committee

Ke Qiu  
Faculty of Mathematics and Science

### Non-voting Resource Staff

Jill Grose  
Centre for Pedagogical Innovation

Anna Lathrop

Vice Provost, Teaching, Learning & Student Success

Madelyn Law  
Senate Teaching and Learning Policy Committee

Non-voting Observers

Nathan Cecckin  
CUPE 4207 Representative

Tim Murphy  
BUFA Representative

**APPENDIX E:  
Brock/BUFA COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT  
TEACHING EVALUATION EXCERPTS**

Page 22:

12.04 Teaching Responsibilities of Faculty Members

v. allocating an appropriate amount of time in each regularly scheduled course of five (5) or more students for student course evaluations as specified in the procedures of the Department or Centre;

Page 24 - 25:

12.07 Annual Report and Use of Teaching Evaluations

Teaching Evaluations

c. An essential component of the commitment to teaching excellence is the regular teaching evaluations by students. Although teaching evaluations are just one component of teaching assessment, they provide valuable information to faculty members for the continuous improvement of their teaching.

When reporting on teaching, faculty members shall provide information about their teaching during the evaluation period by means of student evaluations and, if desired by the member, additional information as described in Article 21.06 (a) (Tenure and Promotion - Provisions for Full-time Faculty). The Parties agree that no single measure provides complete information about teaching quality and effectiveness. Therefore, when assessing teaching quality and effectiveness, Deans shall ensure that all evidence provided by the faculty member is evaluated in the full context of available information.

d. Student course evaluations are not public documents and are the property of the instructor. The results of student course evaluations shall be made available by members to their Deans during the Annual Review process and other processes as provided for in this Agreement as a source of information about teaching quality and effectiveness.

Page 31:

16.02 Committee Membership and Responsibilities of Departments and Centres

f. The Departmental or Centre Committee is responsible, inter alia, for academic and long-term planning and student evaluations. All members of Departments or Centres will have a full and equal opportunity to contribute to matters under discussion except where limited elsewhere in this Agreement.

Page 33:

16.03 The Role of the Departmental Committee

g. The Departmental Committee, after consulting with the Dean, shall establish procedures for the format, content, and collection of student evaluations of all departmental courses with enrollments of five (5) or more students. In addition to student evaluations, other methods of evaluation may also be practiced (examples

include teaching portfolios, written testimonials from colleagues, and peer review) (see Article 21.06 - Evidence of Teaching, Research/Scholarly Activity and Service). These procedures are subject to annual review and approval as part of the Departmental rules.

Page 34:

#### 16.04 The Role of the Centre Committee

i. The Centre Committee, after consulting with the Dean, shall establish procedures for the format, content, and collection of student evaluations of all Centre courses with enrollments of five (5) or more students. In addition to student evaluations, other methods of evaluation may also be practiced (examples include teaching portfolios, written testimonials from colleagues, and peer review) (see Article 21.06 - Evidence of Teaching, Research/Scholarly Activity and Service). These procedures are subject to annual review and approval as part of the Centre rules.

Page 36:

#### 16A.03 Roles and Responsibilities of the Program Committee

f. The Program Committee is responsible, inter alia, for academic and long term program planning and student evaluations. All members of the Program Committee will have a full and equal opportunity to contribute to matters under discussion except where limited elsewhere in this Agreement.

h. The Program Committee, after consulting with the appropriate Department Chair(s), Centre Director(s), and/or Dean(s), shall establish procedures for the format, content, and collection of student evaluations of all program courses with enrolments of five (5) or more students. In addition to student evaluations, other methods of evaluation may also be practiced (examples include teaching portfolios, written testimonials from colleagues, and peer review). (see Article 21.06 - Evidence of Teaching, Research/Scholarly Activity and Service). These procedures are subject to annual review and approval as part of the Committee rules.

Page 69:

#### 21.06 Evidence of Teaching, Research/Scholarly Activity, and Service

Student course evaluations for all courses with five (5) or more students taught by the candidate since the date of last promotion or appointment must be included.

## APPENDIX F: TEACHING EVALUATION SURVEY SUMMARY

With the support of Senate, the ad hoc Committee on Teaching Evaluation conducted an online survey (see Appendix A) from March 18 - 27, 2019. Email invitations to complete the survey (with a request for wide distribution to students, faculty, and CUPE personnel) were sent to Deans and their Executive Assistants, BUSU, GSA, BUFA, and CUPE. A Brock News article encouraging members of the University community to provide input via the survey was published on March 21<sup>st</sup>.

A total of 76 responses were received:

• undergraduate students	26
• graduate students	5
• faculty members	29
• sessional (CUPE) instructors	4
• course coordinators	0
• teaching assistants	1
• lab demonstrators	0
• marker-graders	0
• administrative staff members	10
• members of the senior university administration	0
• other	1

All of the survey responses were shared with members of the Committee which then met to discuss potential revisions to the Committee's final report and draft teaching evaluation policy in light of the feedback received. The survey responses (with personal identifying information redacted) are available via the University Secretariat Document Library:

<https://brocku.ca/university-secretariat/senate/committee-meetings/>