Memo

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To: Francine Vachon, Chair, IT&IC

From: Rajiv Jhangiani, Vice Provost, Teaching and Learning

Date: February 26, 2025

Subject: **Developing an ethical framework for educational technologies**

Background

Among the 44 actions listed in Brock University's academic plan is a commitment to "develop and adopt an ethical framework for educational technologies that ensures the procurement of digital tools do not perpetuate and reinforce systemic inequalities and racial biases" (Action 4e).

More broadly, our academic plan also pledges to combat ableism and antidisability, to identify and work to dismantle systemic academic barriers experienced by BIPOC, disabled, 2SLGBTQ+, and gender-diverse faculty, staff, and students, and to create a campus culture that is safe welcoming, and inclusive and that adopts an intersectional approach to advance social justice.

When legislation (e.g., Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act) is mistakenly viewed as the only relevant ethical consideration during the procurement, renewal, or implementation of educational technologies, universities risk perpetrating harm and widening inequities while also increasing staff workloads and straining severely limited resources.

Consider, for example, a digital course readings platform that is inaccessible to students with disabilities, a learning management system that defaults to legal names (thereby deadnaming trans students), the use of remote exam proctoring software that disproportionately flag students with darker skin tones as "cheating," plagiarism detection tools that capture and monetize students' intellectual property, digital surveillance technologies such a facial recognition that track student movement across the campus, or artificial intelligence tools that have a negative environmental impact and that "hallucinate" in ways that amplify societal biases.

Following a preliminary discussion at Senate Teaching & Learning Policy Committee on February 12, we hope to receive input and feedback from IT&IC members concerning potential dimensions (e.g., accessibility, privacy, algorithmic bias, environmental impact, etc.), key components (e.g., basic principles, key questions, companion checklists, etc.), areas of practice (e.g., student assessment, learning analytics, etc.), and other elements that we wish to be represented in a draft ethical framework for educational technologies that will be brought to a future meeting for consideration. Expressions of interest in helping develop the framework are also welcome. The intention is for this framework, once approved by Senate, to guide decision-making and support good practice across the university.