1. Preamble

The University of Guelph is committed to the cultivation of an academic community which is learner-centred. As such, teaching is defined as an interactive process between a teacher and a student that promotes and facilitates learning. Effective teaching and effective learning are closely connected. Just as an instructor is in a position to assess student learning, a student is comparably positioned to assess an instructor’s teaching. Student evaluation of teaching (SET), while not the only means to assess instruction, it is nevertheless an extremely important component.

Teaching evaluations vary widely across the University, with different questions or statements to which students are asked to respond. In some instances, the questions or statements do not address the University’s Learning Outcomes. Students are uncertain about the vital role of SET in providing feedback to their instructors, and how this feedback contributes to improved teaching and, by extension, learning. The absence of a SET mechanism which has some degree of standardization across the University has led to concerns among some instructors over the validity and effectiveness of SET for both summative and formative purposes.¹

Beyond these internal issues, which are specific to our campus, is the fact that the University is a public institution that must remain accountable to the citizens of Ontario. More specifically, the quality of undergraduate education in universities was among the items selected for audit in 2012. As a result, in its annual report, the Office of the Auditor-General of Ontario makes a number of recommendations, including one which aims to ensure that there is “sufficient information” for administrators and students “to make informed decisions, and that all faculty members receive the necessary feedback to maintain or enhance teaching quality” (Auditor-General of Ontario 2012, 281). Accordingly, the following measures were suggested:

- consider means to aggregate student course evaluation information at the university, faculty and department levels so that administrators can identify best practices and areas requiring attention;
- develop a core set of student course evaluation questions to be used throughout the university to facilitate comparison of student evaluation results;

¹ In this document, summative evaluation means evaluation that is carried out for purpose of “administrative decision-making” regarding tenure and promotion, as well as merit-based salary increments (Hoyt and Pallett 1999, 3); whereas formative evaluation “focuses on using evaluative information to improve on performance” (Hoyt and Pallett 1999, 3). As such, the former is an essential component of institutional personnel management process while the latter is about the professional development of individual instructors.
• provide students with the summarized results of student course evaluations to assist them in making informed decisions on course selection; and
• ensure that faculty, including sessional faculty, periodically receive constructive feedback on their teaching effectiveness, and encourage faculty to undertake any necessary professional development (Auditor-General of Ontario 2012, 281).

2. Study and Recommendations

In Fall 2012, the Provost, Maureen Mancuso, struck a working group to review practices relating to teaching evaluations. The group’s mandate was to make recommendations on how teaching evaluations might be used to improve the following:

• the University’s ability to meet its learning outcomes;
• the quality of instruction;
• improved rates of completion of evaluations by students;
• student participation in the teaching and course evaluation process;
• and transparency and accountability.

To carry out this mandate, the Working Group studied existing literature on teaching evaluations and reviewed the evaluations currently being used across campus. Several preliminary consultations with a small number of students were carried out to test statements which were being proposed to be included in the evaluation, and to obtain information on student’s perceptions and understanding of the statements.

Additionally, the Working Group examined closely the highly successful implementation of a revised process of evaluating teaching at the University of Toronto where some elements of the evaluation are common to the entire campus. In the spring of 2013, representatives of the Working Group were able to meet with their counterparts at the University of Toronto to discuss the entire process—from its inception to consultation, development, and its phased-in implementation among all academic units and professional schools.

The Working Group learned much from the consultation meeting and is deeply grateful for the generosity of colleagues from the University of Toronto in sharing valuable information and insight. The Group also acknowledges the selected adoption of Toronto’s institutional questions in drafting proposed statements (see Appendix Three).

The Working Group concluded its study in Winter 2014 and reported to the Provost with the following recommendations:

• That the University of Guelph adopt a tiered SET evaluation which includes core institutional questions, college-level items, and instructor-selected statements;
• That teaching evaluations be administered electronically, in-class;
That the aggregated scores for a selected number of responses to core institutional questions be released to students to assist in course selection.

2.1 The Tiered System

In making the first recommendation, the Working Group suggests the adoption of the system that is now being phased in at the University of Toronto. The tiered system can accommodate core institutional teaching priorities, along with those identified at the level of the divisions, and department and instructor (see Appendix Four). Accordingly, the University of Toronto’s statements which make up its teaching evaluation are organized as follows:

   a) statements that are common across the University;
   b) statements that are common to a division or faculty, to be selected by the division/faculty from a shared institutional question bank;
   c) (optional) departmental statements drawn from the same question bank;
   d) (optional) statements selected by the instructor from the question bank.

Building from this model, the Working Group recommends a three-tier system whereby the first two sections of the course evaluation contain university-wide and college-level questions. The third section consists of statements that are chosen by instructors from an institutional bank of statements. In its report to the Provost, the Working Group proposed a total of eleven statements to which students would respond using a five-point scale. These statements are divided into three categories: statements pertaining to the course; statements pertaining to the instructor’s delivery of the course; and general statements. The Working Group suggests that a box be provided at the end of each cluster to allow students the option of providing comments.

Statements which are common across the institution, and a second level of statements which are specific to each college, would be a significant improvement over existing practices. Common language would ease the task of college-level promotion and tenure committees which, on occasion, may struggle to assess teaching in a fair and equitable manner given the variability of the evaluations currently used within colleges. The use of an evaluation with statements common across the University would allow information to be collected with consistency. Promotion and tenure committees would have access to responses to university-wide and college-level statements. Data generated by instructor-level questions are accessible only to the instructor who has the discretion to make these results available to promotion and tenure committees at the department/school and college levels.

The literature dealing with effective teaching evaluations indicates that the validity of data generated by SET is closely linked to the quality of statements used in the evaluation. Common pitfalls in teaching evaluations include ambiguous statements, suggestive as opposed to neutral wording, and a statement which compresses several aspects of the course and its delivery into a single statement. To ensure that the statements are simple, direct and clear, the Working
Group strongly urges that the statements be tested by groups of students from a full range of degree programs on campus, and who are at different levels in their study.

2.2 Campus-wide Online Evaluation

Currently instructors can choose to have course evaluation done electronically or in paper format. Both are carried out during the last two weeks of class in a given semester. Paper format means having a third party come into the classroom to distribute copies of evaluation to students, and collect the copies as they are completed. Further labour is required to tabulate the results, and to make them available to instructors and their academic units. In short, the paper format is a labour-intensive way of gathering relevant data. The online format currently used is supported by an in-house program that enables students in a course to login and complete the evaluation on their own time. Once submitted, the evaluation is stored and tabulated electronically. In both the paper and online formats, results are made available to instructors and their academic units only after the final grades are released. The two parallel systems have been in place for several years, with mixed results. While electronic evaluation has proven to be successful in some areas of the campus, the overall participation rate appears to be notably lower than the in-class format. This seems to be the main reason why some instructors continue to prefer paper evaluation.

Against this background, the Working Group identified the need to design an evaluation format that can enhance the student participation rate in a manner that is both time and cost efficient, and respects the University of Guelph’s commitment to environmental sustainability. In discussing these concerns with those from the University of Toronto who implemented the tiered-evaluation, the Working Group was impressed by the fact that the overall participation rate has gone from an average of 40% to 70% using an evaluation which is only available online. In addition, colleagues at the University of Toronto noted that the online system makes the task of evaluating team-taught courses significantly more manageable.

Based on the experience of the University of Toronto, the Working Group recommends that the University of Guelph adopt a well-designed and appropriately supported online system for teaching evaluations. The Working Group recommends that the online evaluation to be completed in-class, by students using either a free app on their electronic devices or a lap top. Students would have the option of continuing or editing the evaluation outside class. By providing class time for students to complete teaching evaluation, the proposed online system aims to address existing concerns regarding low rates of participation. Yet it retains the flexibility of an online system by making the evaluation available beyond the classroom space. In either instance, security measures would need to be in place to ensure that only students who are registered in the course are able to complete the evaluation. Once the evaluation is submitted, measures would need to be in place to ensure the security of the data, and that only authorized individuals have access to the appropriate parts of the evaluation.
2.3 Enhancing Student Engagement and Release of Selected Evaluation Data to Students

One task with which the Provost charged the Working Group was to identify ways to increase the percentage of students completing teaching evaluations. To this end, the Working Group held two separate, informal sessions with a handful of students in the summer of 2013, and a focus group study with a group of student senators facilitated by Natasha Kenny of the Teaching Support Services in the winter of 2014. The Working Group learned that students have little sense how their feedback is used. In addition, students raised concern over possible reprisal from instructors, especially regarding the requirement of signing evaluations, and the perceived lack of assurance that the results of evaluations are available to instructors only after final grades are submitted.

There is a critical need to educate students about how information obtained from student evaluation is used (that is, both summative and formative.). The Working Group recommends that there should be a standard introduction to SET that is both accessible and appealing to students. This can be accomplished by way of a short video presentation that is readily available on multiple platforms, including Courselink or on social media sites. A video used by the University of Toronto to introduce teaching evaluations appears to be effective. In addition, the new teaching evaluation should be have prefatory information regarding its use, including assurance that results will not be released to instructors until the final grades for the course are submitted. This simple measure can substantially allay students’ apparent fear of reprisal.

The Working Group recommends an examination of the rationale for student signatures on evaluations if comments are going to be used as part of the promotion and tenure committees as part of their deliberations. If the original intent for signatures was for promotion and tenure committees to be able to obtain additional information or clarification in some cases, then perhaps other options made possible by electronic evaluations could be leveraged without the need for student names or signatures being released to the instructor. If the original intent for signatures was to hold students accountable for their comments, then greater education of students regarding the uses of evaluations might reduce students’ fear and improve the quality of feedback to the point that signatures are no longer required.

Currently, students at the University of Guelph have minimal–if any–access to information generated from teaching evaluations. One can understand how such an arrangement can easily lead to frustration on the part of those students who take the time and effort to complete the evaluation. This is a factor that needs to be addressed as part of the institutional effort to encourage student participation, which is keeping with the University’s commitment to learner-centredness and to the recent recommendation by the Office of the Auditor-General of Ontario regarding accessibility of teaching-related information by students.
The Working Group recommends that the University make available to students aggregate data on predetermined institutional statements. In addition to addressing both institutional commitment and provincial guidelines, the release of selected SET results may enable the institution to retain some modest measure of control over the proliferation of information—and often misinformation—through sites such as RateMyProfessor and Facebook. If aggregate data from a limited and preselected statements were available to students, they would have the option of obtaining information about courses which has been collected through processes supported by the institution.

3. The Next Step

The Interim Provost invites the larger University community to participate in a campus-wide consultation process. In the fall, an ad hoc committee consisting of representatives of all stakeholders (instructors, students and staff) will be constituted to facilitate the process. The report of the Working Group, and its recommendations, provides a frame for this broad process of consultation.


Appendix One: Proposed Core Institutional Teaching Evaluation Statements

A. Course (five-point rating scale)
   1. I found the course intellectually stimulating.
   2. The course provided me with a deeper understanding of the subject matter.
   3. Course projects, assignments, and tests provided opportunities for me to demonstrate an
      understanding of the course material.
   4. All aspects of the course contribute to the learning outcomes, as stated in the course outline.
      Comment Box

B. Instructor (five-point rating scale)
   1. The instructor created a learning environment that supported my engagement with the course.
   2. The instructor was responsive to course-related academic consultation beyond mandated
      classroom time.
   3. The instructor presented materials clearly.
   4. The instructor encouraged me to think critically about the subject matter.
      Comment Box

C. General
   1. Overall, the quality of my learning experience in this course was: Rating Scale
   2. The overall quality of instruction, from the instructors being evaluated, was: Rating Scale
   3. Please comment on the overall quality of the instruction in the course. Open-ended

D. Learner
   1. What is your semester level?
      a) 1 to 2
      b) 3 to 4
      c) 5 to 6
      d) 7 to 8
      e) 9 and beyond
   2. What was the amount of effort that you put into the course, measured by average number of
      hours per week, including class time?
      a) less than 2
      b) 3 to 6
      c) 6 to 9
      d) more than 9
   3. At the time of this evaluation, how much of course requirement was completed and on time?
      a) Less than 50%
      b) 50% to 75%
      c) More than 75%
      d) 100%
Appendix Two:
University Learning Outcomes (Undergraduate and Graduate)

University of Guelph 2012 Learning Outcomes

Undergraduate Degree

Critical and Creative Thinking

Inquiry and Analysis · Problem Solving · Creativity · Depth and Breadth of Understanding

Critical and creative thinking is a concept in which one applies logical principles, after much inquiry and analysis, to solve problems in with a high degree of innovation, divergent thinking and risk taking. Those mastering this outcome show evidence of integrating knowledge and applying this knowledge across disciplinary boundaries. Depth and breadth of understanding of disciplines is essential to this outcome.

Literacy

Information Literacy · Quantitative Literacy · Technological Literacy · Visual Literacy

Literacy is the ability to extract information from a variety of resources, assess the quality and validity of material, and use it to discover new knowledge. The comfort in using quantitative literacy also exists in this definition, as does using technology effectively and developing visual literacy.

Global Understanding

Global Understanding · Sense of Historical Development · Civic Knowledge and Engagement

Intercultural Competence

Global understanding encompasses the knowledge of cultural similarities and differences, the context (historical, geographical, political and environmental) from which these arise, and how they are manifest in modern society. Global understanding is exercised as civic engagement, intercultural competence and the ability to understand an academic discipline outside of the domestic context.

Communicating

Oral Communication · Written Communication · Reading Comprehension · Integrative Communication

Communicating is the ability to interact effectively with a variety of individuals and groups, and convey information successfully in a variety of formats including oral and written communication. Communicating also comprises attentiveness and listening, as well as reading comprehension. It includes the ability to communicate and synthesize information, arguments, and analyses accurately and reliably.

Professional and Ethical Behaviour

Teamwork · Ethical Reasoning · Leadership · Personal Organization and Time Management

Professional and ethical behaviour requires the ability to accomplish the tasks at hand with proficient skills in teamwork and leadership, while remembering ethical reasoning behind all decisions. The ability for organizational and time management skills is essential in bringing together all aspects of managing self and others. Academic integrity is central to mastery in this outcome.
University of Guelph 2013 Learning Outcomes  
**Graduate Degree**

### Critical and Creative Thinking  
*Independent Inquiry and Analysis ∙ Problem Solving ∙ Creativity ∙ Depth and Breadth of Understanding*

Critical and creative thinking is a concept in which one applies logical principles, after much inquiry and analysis, to solve problems with a high degree of innovation, divergent thinking and risk taking. Those mastering this outcome shows evidence of integrating knowledge and applying this knowledge across disciplinary boundaries. Depth and breadth of understanding of disciplines is essential to this outcome. At the graduate level, originality in the application of knowledge (master’s) and undertaking of research (doctoral) is expected.

### Literacy  
*Information Literacy ∙ Quantitative Literacy ∙ Technological Literacy ∙ Visual Literacy*

Literacy is the ability to extract material from a variety of resources, assess the quality and validity of the material, and use it to discover new knowledge. The comfort in using quantitative literacy also exists in this definition, as does using technology effectively and developing visual literacy.

### Global Understanding  
*Global Understanding ∙ Sense of Historical Development ∙ Civic Knowledge and Engagement ∙ Intercultural Knowledge and Competence*

Global understanding encompasses the knowledge of cultural similarities and differences, the context (historical, geographical, political and environmental) from which these arise, and how they are manifest in modern society. Global understanding is exercised as civic engagement, intercultural competence and the ability to understand an academic discipline outside of the domestic context.

### Communicating  
*Oral Communication ∙ Written Communication ∙ Reading Comprehension ∙ Integrative Communication*

Communicating is the ability to interact effectively with a variety of individuals and groups, and convey information successfully in a variety of formats including oral and written communication. Communicating also comprises attentiveness and listening, as well as reading comprehension. It is the ability to communicate and synthesize information, arguments, and analyses accurately and reliably.

### Professional and Ethical Behaviour  
*Teamwork ∙ Ethical Reasoning ∙ Leadership ∙ Personal Organization & Time Management ∙ Intellectual Independence*

Professional and ethical behaviour requires the ability to accomplish the tasks at hand with proficient skills in teamwork and leadership, while remembering ethical reasoning behind all decisions. The ability for organizational and time management skills is essential in bringing together all aspects of managing self and others. Academic integrity is central to mastery in this outcome. At the graduate level, intellectual independence is needed for professional and academic development and engagement.
Appendix Three:  
Provost’s Working Group on Evaluation of Teaching and Learning

Chair – Theresa Lee (College of Social and Applied Human Sciences)

Members – Gregoy Bedecarrats (Ontario Agricultural College)

John Dawson (College of Biological Science)

Kerry Godfrey (College of Management and Economics)

Brad Hanna (Ontario Veterinary College)

Tracey Jandrisits (Office of the Provost)

Eric Poisson (College of Physical and Engineering Science)

Deidre Rose (sessional instructor)

Ann Wilson (College of Arts)
### Appendix Four: Access Chart

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<tr>
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<th>University-level Questions</th>
<th>College-level Questions</th>
<th>Instructor-level Questions</th>
<th>Open-ended Questions / Comments (unsigned)</th>
<th>Open-ended Questions / Comments (signed)</th>
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