Federation of Students Response to the Course Evaluation Project Report

The Federation of Students appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the report of the course evaluation project team. We recognize that this is a sensitive topic, and will have significant impact for many campus stakeholders. CEPT’s work for the past two years has been thorough, and we are thankful that this matter is being given the attention it deserves.

Overall, the Federation of Students is supportive of the draft report, and the direction it is setting for course evaluations at Waterloo. While there are certainly areas of concern remaining, we are happy with the proposed processes and strategies. Feds has standing policy on Course and Instructor Evaluations, and what the report proposes is in near-full alignment with the policy.

Bias in Evaluations

Much of the discussion surrounding course evaluations seems to be centered on bias in evaluations. Feds recognizes this concern, but believes the perception of bias should not disqualify the many different uses of evaluations. It is important to note that whether it be program reviews or faculty performance evaluations, students’ course evaluations make up only a portion of a faculty member’s overall assessments, and every other aspect of assessment will have its own shortcomings. Students’ assessments, however, are an integral and necessary aspect of evaluating courses.

Cascaded Course Evaluation Model

Feds is in support of this model of evaluations. This is in agreement with our standing policy, and finds the right balance in providing faculties the freedom to tailor their evaluations to their unique situations, while also allowing for a high-level view of trends across the university.

Mid-term Evaluations

Feds policy on course evaluations calls for both end-of-term and mid-term evaluations. We hope that CEPT will take the time to consider mid-term evaluations that will provide feedback to the instructor with enough time to make adjustments, and to gauge student experiences in the classroom at another point time aside from the end of term.

Providing Results to the University Community

The Feds was pleased to see the report recommend that the university community be provided access to the numeric data results from common questions. This measure will allow for greater transparency at the university, and provide valuable information to students about their peers’ experience with various course offerings.

Teaching Assistants

Feds encourages CEPT to give more consideration to the role of TAs, and how they are evaluated. In many undergraduate courses, TAs play an integral role in the teaching of students, and assessment of these individuals is important for their development as teachers, and accountability to their role. Further, this will allow for concrete data on the effectiveness of TAs versus faculty, taking into account of
variables such as course level and field of study. Feds does note that report did make small mention of TAs, but we feel there is more opportunity to consider TA evaluation in a more fulsome manner.

We thank CEPT and its Chair for the hard work they have done these past years. This is a subject with many strong opinions, but we believe the team has completed valuable work for the university community. Feds is pleased to endorse the report of CEPT, and looks forward to more opportunity to work with the various stakeholders on campus to see improvements to Waterloo’s course evaluations.

Sincerely,

Chris Lolas,

President, Federation of Students