The GSA would like to acknowledge the commitment and effort of the Course Evaluation Project Team (CEPT) in the review and investigation of the evaluation process of courses and teaching at the University of Waterloo. We respect that each campus stakeholder is mandated to represent the needs of their members. While some of these needs are different, an extraordinary effort to find common and equitable solutions was taken up by CEPT.

The Course Evaluation Project to date has spanned more than two years, which places a great deal of importance on resources to effectively gather and share information with the GSA team. The analysis of the CEP on-line form, that closed on December 31, 2016, will provide additional opinion from the campus community.

In addition to GSA participation on CEPT and in collaboration with our campus partners, a review of research and consultation with the GSA Council (May 2016), we respectfully submit the following response to the questions posed by CEPT.

- **What are the advantages and disadvantages of Waterloo adopting a cascaded model for course evaluation?**

  A common campus-wide instrument may provide meaningful information for the university as a whole. This will depend on the ability to minimize cultural differences, which may translate into biases internally and between faculties. Careful consideration of the questions to maximize the student’s reliability to answer must be made.

- **How well do the sample questions (see Table 1) align with the instrument design principles outlined in this report?**

  Assuming there is agreement to:
  a. the instrument design defined in the report, and
  b. the eight principles recommended in the report (page 4), and
  c. “Outcomes based funding model” for post-secondary education in Ontario will use course evaluation data.

**Course Design**

The questions provide a student perspective of expectations/outcomes. This is not an evaluation of course design, as the reliable evaluation of course design would require a level of knowledge of course design. It is important to note that this is a
reporting of student “experience”. Many variables may affect the student experience, including culture, time & length of the class, content, etc., and academic “culture” between faculties. *(I.e. if the student did not know what they were expected to learn in the course – is that an issue with course design? A lack of course information provided, a lack of understanding information provided, or lack of adequate course prep on the part of the student?)*

How does this information inform campus wide decisions on course design?
If the instructor, as a TA, has little input into the design of the course how will the outcome benefit the course design?
The questions that will inform course design on the campus wide level must be conveyed to ensure reliable responses and convey the student experience.

**Course delivery**
This section specifically addresses measurable aspects of the material and instructors teaching style. Styles may vary across campus and disciplines, but some aspects are universal...such as timeliness, clarity in communication, motivation and support.

**Learning Experience**
Open ended questions are important to the specific course and to teaching styles. These may provide information on trends that are experienced campus wide.
The open comments provide a valuable tool for instructors, especially if there is a mid-term opportunity for feedback.

We agree with mandatory training on the use and intent of the eValuate or similar electronic instrument. Providing in-class opportunity to submit an anonymous online survey should increase engagement.

- **What are the advantages and disadvantages of access to course evaluation information as presented in this report?**

We are in agreement with the CEPT report recommendations.

The information used as a part of performance evaluations must respect the privacy of the individual. Access to course evaluations must comply with applicable laws, agreements, and policies such as UW policy 30 (under review), policy 46, Policy 75, Policy 77, FAUW MoA, and CAUT policies.

We expect that evaluation information applied to graduate student instructors would mirror similar policy principles.
Written comments from students are intended for the instructors use only and shared with TAs to improve the quality of the academic experience of students.
• Additional Comments

We recommend that on-going review, assessment, and discussion about how to best serve the needs of all campus partners must continue. Each person/group must feel respected in their role to provide a “vibrant student experience” and a “robust employer-employee relationship”. Academic freedom and integrity must be upheld.

We believe that pursuit of academic excellence requires that the “Course Evaluation Project” broaden its scope to include

i.) “Student perception reports” for graduate student/supervisor experiences, and
ii.) Submission by TAs regarding course design and delivery.

We believe that students and their organizations want access to student perceptions of the quality of their experience at their institutions, and want to have a mechanism to draw comparisons with other institutions. These experiences are not specifically qualified to be an evaluation of teaching, or validate that higher rated “teachers” provide higher/better outcomes for learners. Therefore information that could be accessed should exclude any type of ratings of individuals and restrict accessible data to course design and delivery aspects of student experience surveys.

We believe that the term “evaluation” should not be aligned with student surveys, and that actual course/teaching evaluations must be performed by those that have expertise to “evaluate” – such as academic peers and experts.
Appendix 2:
From the minutes of May 14, 2015 Council meeting held at UW Needles Hall.
Consultation with GSA council.

Presentation on Course Evaluation Project (Mark Seasons)

Council heard a presentation by Mark Seasons, School of Planning, and Chair of Course Evaluation Project Committee. The committee is mandated to recommend a course evaluation model that meets the needs of Waterloo students, instructors, staff, and administrators.

*Policy 77 – required end of course evaluation. This tool may provide an opportunity to hold a mid-course evaluation to be used as a diagnostic.

Questions:

How will the new model be rolled out? There is a window of opportunity and to maintain momentum, it is recommended not to roll out the new model incrementally. It could cause a drift. Mark Seasons is interested in hearing what the Council thinks.

Q: Accountability? What are the privacy concerns? Where is the middle ground? The privacy of instructors as well as students has to be very carefully managed. The vulnerabilities of this could be used for public shaming. The data could be aggregated to course rather than to an individual, while some feel that all the information should be available.

Q: Is there a concern about the turn out? How have the 3 online uses been in terms of turnout? [Completion of the forms online]
Literature says participation slumps then bounces back. On campus, it has been stable. This factor has to be designed into the system.

Q: Are TA’s as instructors included in this project? What does it mean? When students give evaluations there be a section that is “this is your TA” The technology will let you segment out whether it is an instructor vs TA.

Q: Tenure track research vs. teaching what is the ratio? What are the ramifications of consistently negative UW evaluations?
The ratio/mix in theory is 40 research: 40 teaching: 20 service.

Q: Are faculty supposed to be good at everything? Not everyone is good at everything. An older graduate student (more experienced?) would advocate stronger for research. One may be excellent in research and “good” in teaching…
Q: Is the data meaningful?
It is part of the annual performance evaluation.
When you apply for tenure and promotion, you provide all kinds of lines of evidence.

Q: If Waterloo moves to an online basis for the evaluations— it seems there may be a lack of people that would respond, and may be one of the extremes. How do you encourage completion?
Evidence does not show that there is a drop in completion. The completion rates depend on the relevance of the data. The data has to be used to inform a culture change.

Q: Is the TA being evaluated in this process?
Instructor is interpreted to be a TA.

Q: Has there been any consideration for graduate students to give feedback on their supervisor?
The relationship between the graduate student and the supervisor is a one: one relationship. (This is a good suggestion)

Q: There is a need for a shift in the culture of learning. Disclosing the professors’ information is important to support the cultural shift. If we do not share the information, it will reduce the ‘buy-in’ from students. They will go to “rate my professor” etc. and will devaluate the data.

The comments are being used at the instructors’ own discretion. That introduces bias. Chair wants a full picture of what is going on.

Q: Supervisory and mentorship assessment
There is no training for mentorship. There are lots of opportunities to become a better teacher.

There are still many challenges facing this project.
Anything is possible in the technology.
Faculty may not want to do this.
Gender bias is perceived on campus, especially with female faculty.

Q: Teaching quality, are you trying to anticipate the good or the bad?

Q: How long is the data record kept?
Is there a current summary of such blogs as “rate my professor”, and would there be some evaluation between the Waterloo system and more public systems?

Mark Seasons requests additional feedback from the GSA as a group.
CAUT Policy Statements:

**Use of Student Opinion Surveys**

Because surveys of student opinion about teaching do not measure teaching effectiveness,[1] and because research shows that they involve prejudices to the disadvantage of equity-seeking groups, student opinion surveys should not be used in any career procedures and decision making involving academic staff. Where/when student organizations conduct anonymous student surveys and publish the results in order to assist students in the selection of their courses, academic staff participation should be optional, and no penalties direct or indirect should follow a refusal to participate. Such student-organized evaluations should not be used by post-secondary institution administrations as a means of assessing teaching performance and not be included in any academic staff member's personnel file.

**Approved by the CAUT Council, November 2016.**

**Evaluation of Teaching**

The evaluation of teaching is negotiated with the academic staff association, and is incorporated in the collective agreement. Procedures for the evaluation of teaching should take into account all information about teaching that the academic staff member chooses to provide in their teaching dossier. Results of student opinion surveys should not be included in that dossier.[1] The evaluation should take into account the context of teaching: the size, type and nature of courses, and the amount and type of pedagogical development by the academic staff member.

All academic staff have the right to develop and maintain their teaching competence and effectiveness, and to develop their pedagogy under the protection of academic freedom. The character and quality of post-secondary education and the learning experiences of students require the strongest support of teaching as a mode of critical inquiry.

**Approved by the CAUT Council, November 2016**

**Confidentiality of Information Used in Career Decisions**
Post-secondary institutions must comply with privacy laws and principles in collecting, using, and disclosing information pertaining to their employees. Academic staff have broad rights to privacy of information collected, used or disclosed by the employer, including information utilized in career decisions. The employer and the academic staff association shall negotiate an agreement on the content and use of personnel files utilized in career decisions about members of the academic staff. The agreement should include the following:

1. The location of files should be specified. There should be one, and only one, file which should be consulted for any decision regarding the academic status of academic staff members.

2. Post-secondary institutions’ computer systems are likely to contain additional information for payroll, pensions and benefits. Security of these files from computer hackers and other unauthorized users must be assured. Because of the increased risk of security breaches and privacy violations, and data collection by service providers, institutions should prohibit outsourcing of information technology services and/or use of cloud based computing for processing or storing any information, including personnel information.

3. Information in an individual’s personnel file shall be confidential and available only to authorized persons on a need-to-know basis. Any person or committee who for purposes of the agreement may have access to information contained in personnel files shall be bound by the ordinary rules of confidentiality.

4. Academic staff members or their duly designated representatives have the right to inspect and to obtain copies of all material in their individual files. Duly authorized representatives of the academic staff association shall have access to information contained in personnel files for purposes of administering the collective agreement or academic staff handbook.

5. Academic staff members shall have the right to review and correct any errors in the file, and to add any relevant material to the file. Out-of-date or irrelevant material shall be removed.

6. No anonymous material shall be retained in the file. Any exception, such as authorized statistics from authorized student surveys or other aggregated statistical surveys approved by the academic staff association, shall be negotiated and subject to agreement between the parties.

7. Any complaint or allegation which could result in the imposition of discipline shall be acted upon in a timely fashion. Should the dean or other designated authority choose not to investigate, then all complaints or allegations shall be removed from the file. Should the dean or other designated authority initiate an investigation which does not end in discipline, all records of the investigation and the complaints or allegations upon which it
was based shall be removed from the file. Should discipline result from an investigation, the
record of the investigation and the complaints or allegations upon which it was based shall
be removed from the file after an appropriate period during which no further discipline has
been imposed.

8. Any person or committee required to make a recommendation or a decision concerning
contract renewal, tenure, promotion or discipline shall have access to, and shall base their
recommendation or decision upon, the relevant information contained in the personnel
file. Due diligence shall be taken to insure that the identity of those who have provided
information on a confidential basis is protected. It is understood that should the matter
lead to grievance/arbitration there shall be full disclosure.

9. The agreement shall ensure that the content of the file cannot be made available to third
parties except as required:

   a) in grievance and arbitration procedure;
   b) at the request of the individual; and
   c) as provided by law and in accordance with all governing privacy laws.

Approved by the CAUT Council, November 2015

Flaherty, Colleen, (2016), Zero Correlation Between Evaluations and Learning:
New study adds to evidence that student reviews of professors have limited validity. Inside
study-could-be-another-nail-coffin-validity-student-evaluations-teaching

from http://cou.on.ca/papers/student-evaluations-of-teaching-effectiveness/

Retrieved from FAUW website:

   FAUW response to CEPT report (PDF)
   SWEC response to CEPT report (PDF)
   Psychology faculty members' response to CEPT report (PDF)