I apologise for the delayed Senate response to a proposal to introduce online ESCI evaluations for all courses. Senate was preparing to send in our response in June 2014. I then became busy with unexpected events and computer woes. As a result, this memo fell through the cracks. My apologies.

The following councils and committees reviewed the Pilot Program Report on Online Delivery of Course Evaluations as produced by the Ad Hoc Committee on Online Course Evaluation: Council on Planning and Budget (CPB), Undergraduate Council (UgC), Graduate Council (GC), Council on Research and Instructional Resources (CRIR), Council on Faculty Issues and Awards (CFIA), the Committee on Diversity and Equity (D&E), and the Faculty Executive Committees from the College of Engineering (COE FEC), College of Letters and Science (L&S FEC), the College of Creative Studies (CCS FEC), and the BREN School FEC.

The BREN School is most supportive of the proposed Pilot and their memo provides a detailed description of how they intend to implement online evaluations. I attach that memo. Most of the responses expressed deep concerns with the Pilot Program and some offered suggestions on how best to move forward with a one year pilot in 2015 such as the COE FEC who support further development of online evaluation.

**General Comments**

All groups appreciated the significant amount of work that has gone into modifying the ESCI questions, implementing the pilot program, conducting surveys, and preparing the report. However, from a procedural perspective, groups questioned why the Pilot Project had started without support from the Academic Senate. Some reviewing groups were not convinced the concerns laid out in Senate Chair Bohn’s June 2011 memo had been addressed in the pilot ESCI programs of 2013-2014, and requested that these concerns be explicitly addressed before any programs were implemented. For your information, I also attach the June 2011 memo on online ESCIs from Senate Chair Bohn.

Groups also expressed concern that the Pilot Project Report was provided as an information item rather than as a plan about which the Senate would comment. They also questioned under whose authority the Pilot Program was initiated. For example, CFIA noted that “the Ad Hoc Committee report implies that online ESCI evaluation will be implemented campus
wide, despite the fact that the document expresses doubts on the value of the plan and despite the fact that the Academic Senate has not endorsed the proposal.” CRIR stated that while they appreciated seeing the data in the report, “the conclusions drawn do not follow from that data and the statistical methods used were [inadequate].” CPB said: “course evaluations [are] fundamentally part of the instructional responsibility and privilege of the faculty,” and CDE requests that “the ESCI process be made a more self-reflective process for the students.” Some groups also wanted greater articulation of the pedagogical rationale for moving the process online.

**Budget and IT Infrastructure**

The issue of resources for a robust program and a universally agreed upon strategy was raised by many groups. The Report makes a number of statements about financial savings, but as no specific figures have been provided CPB felt unable to comment on the accuracy of any of the financial statements.

There was concern that the IT infrastructure does not have the necessary bandwidth and infrastructure to sustain online evaluation, particularly if the whole evaluation time frame is during the last week of classes. As an illustration, in my February 2014 informal conversation with Instructional Development I was told that in Winter 2013, due to an email switchover, 60% of students had not received bulk emails reminding them to complete the online ESCI, which partly explains the extremely poor response rate. I was also told that Film and Media Studies and Department of Statistics & Applied Probability withdrew from the pilot project in Spring 2013 due to the very low response rate, the skewed distribution of comments, the longitudinal aspect of the data collection, and human error leading to some confusion.

**Response Rates**

In reflecting on the particulars of the online evaluation system, most groups share deep concerns about participation rates among students, and believe that online evaluations must be implemented in the “right” way so that the greatest number of students can participate, and so that feedback is of use to individual faculty and to reviewing agencies. The College of Engineering FEC feels that “as more courses transition to ESCI Online the response rates would go down even further as students will have multiple evaluations to fill-in and not much motivation to do so.” A number of groups urged that more work be conducted on how best to improve response rates for online ESCIs, and how to avoid a possible selection bias that could accompany lower response rates.

A lower response rate could be rather detrimental for instructors during their promotion and merit reviews, a point made strongly by CRIR: “the way in which ESCI scores are used for merit is in need of careful review and reconsideration” (their italics). One suggestion is that CAP feedback be tracked, and “other metrics be gathered so that a more systematic judgment can be made on its [online ESCI] costs and benefits.” The effect on TA evaluations was noted by Graduate Council: “TAs, whose work is primarily in smaller sections and labs, would derive the least benefit from the move to online ESCIs.”

A number of suggestions were offered on how to improve response rates, and, if another pilot is instituted, we request that Instructional Development discuss these possibilities with Senate.
In order to ensure better response rates than recorded in the pilot, most groups suggested that online ESCIs be filled out during class time, although it was also suggested that that need not be the only time that evaluations are available for completion. Evaluations should be filled out before grades are available to students. Reviewing groups suggest that loaning laptops or similar to students during class time would likely enhance participation rates. The College of Engineering FEC recommends that individual faculty be given discretion about whether it should be mandatory for students to fill out an online evaluation.

Most groups did not feel that a four week window for completing ESCI forms was appropriate, as that could skew the responses in different ways. Groups were concerned that students who do not attend classes might fill out online ESCIs. Whilst all agree that it is important to reflect on why students choose not to attend classes, an online ESCI initiative may not be the best mechanism through which the campus can better understand the choices of those particular students.

On this, I quote the concerns of Graduate Council. “Filling out the ESCI scores becomes more of a forum for, and often fleeting, complaint than a moment of evaluation for the entire course. For that reason alone, the notion of four weeks for an evaluation period strikes us as deeply problematic; even two weeks is problematic. In addition, we believe the optimal time for online evaluation is at the end of the course, not at the mid-point. Finally, we are also concerned that online evaluation may be used for graduate seminars, which seems antithetical to the pedagogical modality of seminars.”

Non-ESCI evaluations – qualitative evaluations -- are often critical for analysing teaching, yet the Report contains little commentary on how a transition between ESCI scores and other methods of evaluation would be achieved.

**Specific concerns from Councils and Committees**

**Committee on Diversity and Equity**

- “There was not sufficient data available to address the [possible impact] on diversity... The data that is available seems to hint that there is a significant drop in inclusivity, which is worrisome. ... Members thought it would be useful to break down the data further for evaluation, particularly by gender and ethnicity.”
- Some members did not feel there was a persuasive pedagogical argument for moving the process online.

**CRIR**

- Council questions whether a student who does not attend class should be allowed to fill out an evaluation.

**COE FEC**

- Only tenured faculty should use an online evaluation system, and they recommend that pilot testing be restricted to courses taught by tenured faculty.
- Any online evaluation system, if implemented, should be integrated into Gauchospace.
CRIR
• Members like the online freehand comments feature. “Written comments are one of the most important aspects of the evaluation.”
• “Decline to fill out” must be an option offered in the survey.

CPB
• CPB wonders how partially-completed evaluations would be managed.

GC:
• GC would like to see ESCII scores, “even as they are currently administered, downplayed in personnel reviews for all our colleagues, faculty or graduate students. …These changes should not be entirely about labor-saving, [and] should produce a better system. We do not see much evidence of that in the proposal as it stands.”

L and S FEC:
• They do not support any further implementation of online evaluations until concerns raised in the 2011 review, as well as current concerns, have been addressed.

• A description of the pilot program should be made available for scrutiny to other Senate committees as soon as possible, and after the Academic Senate supports moving forward.

UGC
• Undergraduate Council recommends termination of this initiative, and a return to scanned paper ESCIs administered in class, as this project is in need of a far more compelling and convincing case for the proposed changes.

Conclusion
The Online Course Evaluation Pilot Program is a controversial project, as far as Senate faculty are concerned.

The Bren School supports the implementation of a three year pilot for online ESCIs. The Undergraduate Council, CFIA, and the CCS FEC recommend that the project be stopped entirely. Other groups (COE FEC, CPB, CRIR, GC, D&E, L&S FEC) supported the concept, but expressed serious concerns as stated above.

Given that ESCI Online will be part of the campus instructional mission for a long time, and given that ESCI scores carry considerable weight in the personnel review process, Senate suggests it is worth getting it right before the final roll-out. To that end, we suggest a more substantial pilot be conducted during 2015 before any longer term project is begun.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.