

# Report on Academic Advising in Engineering Winter 2016 Term Two

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## *Introduction*

In the fall of 2016, the Engineering Undergraduate Society (EUS) was made aware of a series of proposed changes to the Engineering Co-op Program (co-op), which provides engineering students with the opportunity to gain paid work experience during their university studies. At the time, the EUS also saw an opportunity to gather data on advising services available within the Faculty of Applied Science. The survey focuses on both Engineering Student Services (ESS) and departmental advising.

This report contains a summary of the advising portion of the aforementioned survey; the results from the co-op portion can be obtained from the EUS website ([ubcengineers.ca](http://ubcengineers.ca)). When applicable, the report references the results of the Alma Mater Society's Academic Experience Survey (AES), specifically results filtered for engineering student responses, for historical reference to the most recent version of questions. The report seeks to make recommendations to the Faculty of Applied Science regarding the future of academic advising. Questions about the report may be directed to EUS VP Academic Affairs Jakob Gattinger at [vpacademic@ubcengineers.ca](mailto:vpacademic@ubcengineers.ca).

## *Methodology*

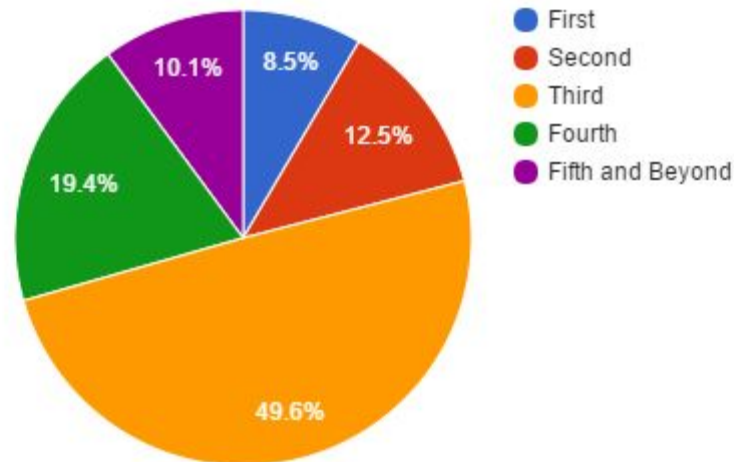
The survey itself was conducted via the UBC Survey tool, and consisted of four pages of questions. Questions were split between empirical and open-ended, to allow a diversity of feedback. The average time taken to complete the survey was approximately ten minutes. In analyzing responses, only those that were completed were considered, to ensure consistency between questions.

Participants were invited to participate through the EUS Newsletter (the e-nEUS), various EUS-affiliated Facebook groups as well as select email lists. Participation was incentivized through a randomized draw of gift cards.

## Demographics of Sample

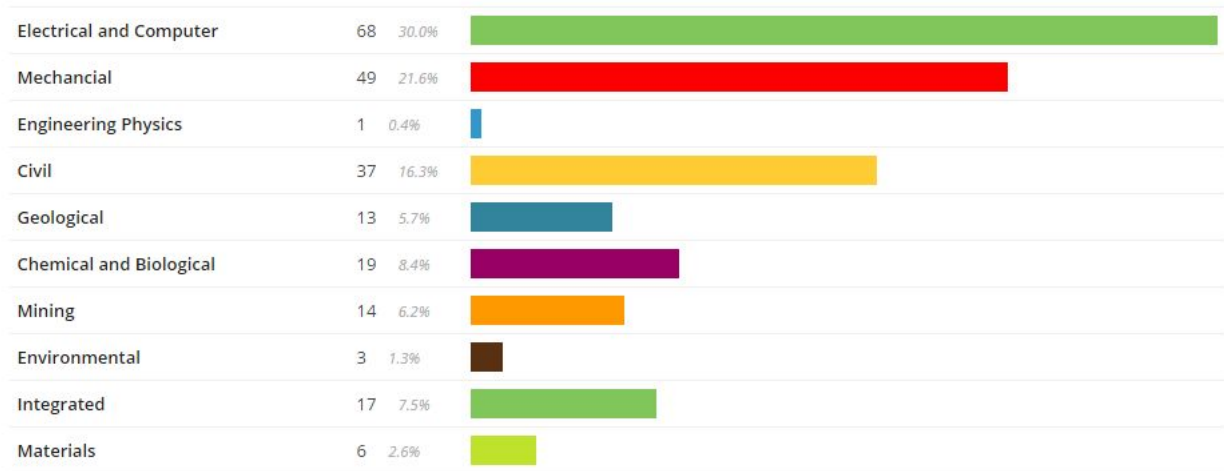
A total of 392 responses were received, of which 248 were complete. The sample of complete responses represents approximately 5.5% of the engineering undergraduate population at UBC.

### What year are you in?



Students from all year levels and disciplines responded to the survey, including those in the first year program. A near-majority of the survey's participants were enrolled in their third year. This can be explained by the tendency of students enrolled in the Engineering Co-op Program, to whom the first portion of the survey was targeted, to spend multiple years with the same academic standing.

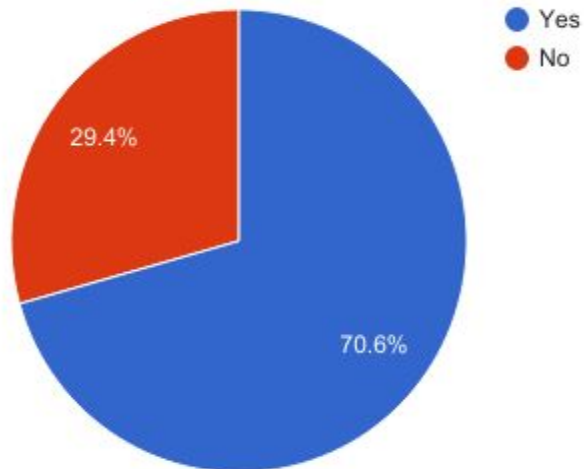
### What is your discipline?



Department representation from survey respondents generally mirrored that of the actual enrollment numbers of UBC Engineering, taken from UBC’s enrolment statistics. A greater percentage of respondents in comparison to discipline enrollment numbers were seen from civil engineering, mechanical engineering, mining engineering, integrated engineering and geological engineering. Under-represented discipline responses were received in chemical/biological engineering, engineering physics and materials engineering. Representation of electrical/computer engineering and environmental engineering respondents matched the actual totals near-identically. No department in the survey varied from their actual representation by more than 6%.

## Opinions on Engineering Student Services

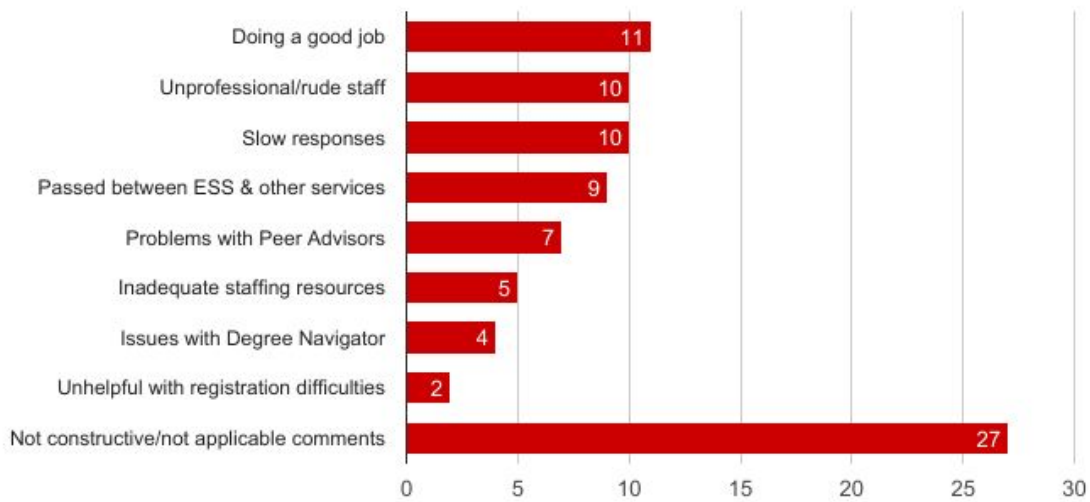
**Have you been able to get the support you need from Engineering Student Services (ESS)?**



Approximately 70% students within engineering at UBC have been able to get the support they need from Engineering Student Services. It is important to note that of the 248 complete responses applicable to this question, 101 were not included because those students reported that they have not used ESS during their time in UBC Engineering. Compared to the results of the AMS Academic Experience Survey in the spring of 2015, the proportion of students reporting receiving adequate support has decreased marginally.

100% of the current first year engineering students who responded to the survey and had interacted with ESS reported that they'd received the support they required; this statistic is critical considering no department specific advising exists for these students. The lowest levels reporting adequate support came from students in year three, with approximately 63%.

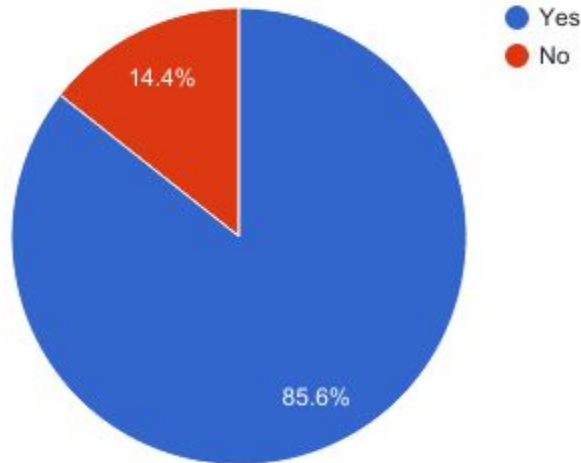
**Summary of Text-Response Question: Please add any comments you have regarding Engineering Student Services.**



The most frequently received comments were those commending Engineering Student Services for their services, after those which were not constructive or applicable. Examples of such comments include ‘they’re helpful!’ and ‘keep up the good work’. Other frequent responses including those regarding the conduct of the staff, the timeliness of responses and the feeling of being passed between ESS and other services on campus without a definitive conclusion. It is important to note some of the frequent comments go beyond the scope of ESS exclusively, such as issues with the Degree Navigator tool through UBC’s Student Service Centre (SSC).

## Views Toward Departmental Advising

Have you been able to get the support you need from your department's advising services?



Engineering students, by an approximately 6-to-1 margin, have been able to receive the support they need from their departmental advising services. There has also been significant improvement in this metric since the AMS Academic Experience Survey in the spring of 2015; the portion of students reporting adequate support has increased, while the number of those reporting inadequate support has decreased. The departments with the lowest levels of satisfaction are Civil and Chemical/Biological Engineering, each with about two-thirds of students able to get the support they require.



## *Recommendations*

Based upon data received in this survey, the EUS has three recommendations for the Faculty of Applied Science to implement with regard to Engineering Student Services. The EUS appreciates many of the issues identified by the survey in this report are complex, and likely to require a significant amount of time and, in some cases, money and staffing resources to be improved upon.

### **1. Engineering Student Services should reconsider the role of peer advisors**

Peer advisors drew significant negative feedback from students, and were one of the most frequently touched upon topics in the open-ended comments. The concerns can be divided into two main categories:

- A. the inability of peer advisors to meaningfully answer questions, and
- B. a perceived conflict-of-interest, as the individuals who occupy these positions are undergraduate students.

Engineering Student Services should seek to ensure peer advisors are providing accurate information and not deflecting students away from the office, as well as ensuring the advisers do not have access to the personal information of individual students to the greatest extent possible. In making this recommendation, the EUS understands Engineering Student Services has limited space available, and that certain advising activities require private facilities rather than open office space.

### **2. Engineering Student Services should regularly measure student satisfaction with its services**

In order to more regularly measure student satisfaction with advising services, Engineering Student Services should explore introducing a survey mechanism for the students with which it interacts. Taking advantage of the existing ticketing system, select students could be sent a link to a brief survey at the conclusion of an interaction with ESS. The survey could be targeted for specific types of interactions (i.e. applications for supplemental educational experiences - like the Minor in Commerce) or specific types of students (i.e. first year students). By taking this approach, and measuring student satisfaction regularly, Engineering Student Services will be able to better respond to evolving student needs.

**3. Engineering Student Services should collaborate with other advising units, the Engineering Undergraduate Society and the Alma Mater Society to reduce cases of students feeling ‘passed between’ services**

One of the most frequent comments received in the results of the EUS survey and similar surveys such as annual iterations of the AMS Academic Experience Survey, is that students feel like they are passed between a number of campus services without their problem being solved. One student commented that “it was really frustrating to be sent on a wild goose chase”. This problem is not unique to engineering, and so the EUS recommends that Engineering Student Services seek opportunities to work with other advising and administrative units within UBC to better inform students about what individual services do. Action in this area is likely to contribute to an environment more conducive to student mental health and wellbeing at UBC.

## *Concluding Remarks*

This survey has given the Faculty Applied Science and Engineering Student Services a number of recommendations to create a stronger advising system that meets student expectations and builds upon existing strengths. Given the critical nature of consultation, the Engineering Undergraduate Society would like to continue to play an active role in the implementation of these recommendations and any further revisions to the Faculty's advising services. The Engineering Undergraduate Society thanks its members who took the time to participate in this process.

The Engineering Undergraduate Society looks forward to working with the Faculty of Applied Science to build an improved student experience across the Faculty. The EUS thanks the Faculty of Applied Science for their ongoing willingness to engage and collaborate on addressing topics to interest of students as they come forward.

## References

- The University of British Columbia (2015). Enrollment Statistics 2015/16 [Report]. Retrieved from: <http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/Vancouver/>
- The Engineering Undergraduate Society of UBC (2015). Summary of AMS Academic Experience Survey 2016: Engineering [Report]. Retrieved from: <http://www.ubcengineers.ca/>
- The Alma Mater Society of UBC Vancouver (2016). 2016 Academic Experience Survey Report. Retrieved from: <http://ams.ubc.ca/>

## Appendix A: Original Text Responses

**Please add any comments you have regarding Engineering Student Services.**

*Note: Some responses have been edited to remove profanity and otherwise inadmissible text.*

#	Response
1.	N/A
2.	N/A
3.	<p>- Terrible turnaround rate with emails, often have to email and follow-up multiple times just to get a vague reply. 9/10 have to actually go down to the office myself to get anything resolved.</p> <p>- Some of the front desk staff/advisors are very poorly trained. (i.e. I had an appointment with * and she was very dismissive, unprofessional and condescending towards my concerns about my degree progress and transfer credits).</p>
4.	They are always rude and took 6 months to get back to me. They screwed me over completely with a course approval.
5.	N/A
6.	- Peer Advisors should not exist. They are definitely at a conflict of interest. More importantly, they lack in knowledge and training to effectively assist with the questions students bring the ESS. Three times I have been to ESS this past year all consisted of 2 follow-up emails due to failure on the PA's to respond and an escalation to an advisor, which added unnecessary stress and time.
7.	I do not use them frequently
8.	No comment
9.	Engineering student services has been a great part of the engineering program at UBC
10.	UBC Degree navigator is a joke, way too complicated. Had issues registering for my fourth year electives and my minor in commerce class. I would drop the minor if it meant I couldn't take my allocated 5 tech electives.

11.	mainly go there and ask for helps when I have questions related to my major and course selection
12.	Slow sometimes, but understandable.
13.	They're not the best! They mostly don't know much and can't help out enough!
14.	Have not used their services yet
15.	None
16.	Dismissive, hard to contact, usually direct me to other services despite questions being very relevant to engineering
17.	Too slow to respond.
18.	<p>I have not needed services from ESS. When I emailed once for a question, they replied quickly and told me to contact my department's advising services.</p> <p>Unrelated to ESS, the civil engineering department's student services have never replied to any if my emails or missed calls.</p>
19.	They're helpful!
20.	They are helpful and timely. :)
21.	i feel like there is a lack of clarity between departments. for example i ask ESS a question and they say to ask the civil dept and then civil dept ends up saying go ask ESS.
22.	None
23.	Typically has little sympathy for the student, tend to follow rules and books like robot with no emotion. The one time I had a positive experience with a helpful person she had to 'Clear it with her supervisor' who then took back everything the original person had offered.
24.	N/A

25.	<p>I think there needs to be more resources available to them. Half of their staff are student and the professional staff are a bit hesitant to offer one on one advising services. Contrasting this to my experience at Capilano university I was able to walk into the advising office and see an advisor right away that would help me with any questions I had in a private setting. I think this was due to the fact that they had more resources per student dedicated to the advising office. (their advising office had more advisors even though the school had a small portion of the students of UBC)</p>
26.	N/A
27.	<p>I'm missing a core course that I was unable to take as a transfer student and there has been no clear answer as to how this will be solved even though the department is aware of many students being in the same boat.</p> <p>The front desk staff seem to deflect questions so that students don't get to see a coordinator. They are trying to help which is good but if they're wrong then the student will have problems. It should be easier to get a hold of a coordinator.</p>
28.	<p>The only reason I have ever contacted ESS is to enquire about graduation requirements. I was given the run-around and told to contact the department which had originally referred me to the ESS (in this case, the Mech Student Services). I was also told that they were "pretty sure" I would graduate. That's not an appropriate answer. When I enquired in person at the ESS, a student volunteer (who is in my classes) attempted to help me. I ended up explaining how to use Degree Navigator to them. I hope they're not paid much for that kind of service.</p>
29.	<p>the advisors in ESS are not helpful. The front desk staff are kind and sometimes patient, but I once had an appointment and it was a great waste of time. The advisor tried to assure me that I did not need to worry about my concerns, but as it later turned out, they were very valid concerns and I paid the consequences.</p>
30.	<p>I have used ESS a couple times, but then I learned that it was better to go to other people instead.</p> <p>When I did go to ESS I would often be lead on a misleading pathway covered with rainbows and sunshine. ESS prefers to use misdirection in order to avoid answering questions honestly. Never say "No" is their motto I guess, even though the correct answer is no.</p> <p>Also the misinformation from the ESS is astounding. My program is recommended to not even bother with ESS because they will mess up our degrees or tell us that we messed up our degrees when we didnt.</p> <p>I only ever use my departments advising because they actually respond in a timely manner, actually care for the well being of students, and know what they are talking about.</p> <p>ESS is an over-glorified and overpayed yahoo service with none of the right answers just a bunch of people commenting and disagreeing on your question.</p>

	I cant believe that a while back ESS cut back on lots of employees, wasnt that a thing? Or did they fix that. I remember it was a big deal about how they were going to be more efficient and stream line which didnt make sense to us seeing as how they barely managed to do their job in the first place
31.	A sign or a bell at the front desk would be nice, because most times I have been there, there was no one at the front desk so I get to stand there stupidly untill someone appears from the back room.
32.	The ESS staff does not provide sufficient information regarding the process of switching departments. For scheduling issues, they divert to the individual department advising offices.
33.	They offer only generalized academic advising that is useless because most of the time our questions are department-specific or related to our personal degree goals and professional interests. Hence, our department directors, fellow students, and own common sense is more valuable. The ESS is basically just there to accept our course conflict forms and register us in APSC courses. The advisors have almost zero relatable experiences to help us deal with an overloaded timetable, academic-related stress, professional goals, and research interests.
34.	Nothing much, keep up the good work!
35.	Wait times very slow. Often misinformed and not helpful unless you know exactly what you need ESS to do for you and you can tell them yourself. Not helpful to students seeking guidance and support. Only practical as an administrative body, and even then, they are remarkably ineffective.
36.	I don't remember the last time that I've had to use ESS, so I don't have a strong opinion either way on those services.
37.	n/a
38.	Haven't had to talk to them since second year - but they definitely sent me to ECE student services who sent me back and it was really frustrating to be sent on a wild goose chase.
39.	From everything I've heard, if you want anything done you have to make sure you speak with an actual advisor and not a peer advisor.
40.	ESS requires you to do everything yourself. Some more hand on help would be nice. Less personal time and more engagement from the professionals.
41.	In regards to the Co-op office, not a chance... I was in the co-op program in my second year, but decided to drop out as I didn't see much benefit in the co-op program at all. Few job opportunities were provided through the co-op office, and only a small fraction of these were actually relevant to my



	<p>program, goals and desires. These same job postings that were of no relevance to me were used to create a quota which had to be reached to maintain enrolment in the program. Beyond this, the co-op agreement takes away your right to negotiate things like vacation and salary as well as your right to decline a job offer. In summary, Co-op students are essentially forced to apply to a number of jobs they may not want, and have to take what their given. For an institution that should be promoting qualities such as self worth, does this not seem a little backwards? Where do I get to have a say in what I'm worth? I understand why such a large program might decide to implement such restrictions, but at what point is the removal of fundamental freedoms and rights of passage doing more harm then good?</p>
42.	<p>Had issues enrolling in STT. Which should be very easy. But it took them almost 2 weeks to do it manually.</p> <p>Couldn't answer questions I had. Could only direct me to people that may be able to help.</p>
43.	<p>From my experience they couldn't help me much beyond what I could already find online. I had much better luck with my program coordinator.</p>
44.	<p>They assisted me in picking classes to take at another university while on co-op that I can get transfer credit for. Helped sort out paper work very quickly.</p>
45.	<p>They are generally friendly and helpful. Once, they provided me with incorrect information, but other than that, they have been pretty awesome.</p>
46.	<p>I sent an email in Sept 2016 regarding credits not transferring from my previous school but they never got back to me.</p>
47.	<p>I'm not actually sure who my Co-op Coordinator is. I've dealt with someone different for each of my site visits and every time I've had a question or some reason to contact ESS.</p>
48.	<p>More efficient</p>
49.	<p>Very helpful. Always responds within the time I need and provides individual support as needed.</p>
50.	<p>None</p>
51.	<p>Friendly service. Hours of operation are somewhat limiting.</p>
52.	<p>I personally feel like some staff are not helpful. I was only been told what I was doing wrong instead of how to make things right.</p>

53.	N/A
54.	n/a
55.	<p>In order to get help from ESS, you have to jump through a lot of hoops to reach an advisor who is actually capable of helping you.</p> <p>The lack of knowledge in employees at ESS is extremely problematic, especially for students who are reaching out for academic and non-academic support in times of high stress. I have known students to give up and leave UBC engineering because they were not able to get the support they needed and felt that they were alone in their attempt to find solutions.</p> <p>Advisors need to take student problems seriously, and listen to them. They should be able to work with students as well as department advising, so students don't need to run around trying to find answers. They should also help students come up with a long term action plan - if the student is going to the effort of reaching out to ESS then ESS should be providing better services.</p>
56.	Do not know what it is
57.	There has always been adequate Engineering Student Services available when one takes the initiative to search out such services.
58.	Generally, I feel ESS is not very helpful. The higher ups are better, but there is too much churn in the lower ranks. Lower ranks usually are fast to put the blame on the students.
59.	I have never had any problems when dealing with ESS. It would be nice for degree navigator to be updated when requirements change.
60.	I wasn't even aware this existed.
61.	The Engineering Student Services have been very helpful in assisting me through the degree navigator and making sure I am able to get into the classes I need.
62.	N/A
63.	I don't usually use it. I've only been once or twice for academic counselling. They're quick to respond, however, not too open for question or thorough with their service. I always leave with question still in my mind. It seems like they just want to get your visit over with quickly.

64.	They are wonderful people, always helpful and able to answer any of my questions and address concerns I am having. Don't know what I would do about them sometimes!
65.	- Very difficult to get in contact with the right person...took several phone calls and quite a bit of prying to get someone other than a student on the phone to discuss transfer credits (the students who I spoke to earlier gave me incorrect information)
66.	N/A
67.	Not helpful in all cases I have contacted them. Very slow.
68.	Response times are too long.
69.	Not so much with regards to coop, by I have used ESS and am moderately satisfied with how they operate
70.	They should reduce tuition for co-op, and post more relevant jobs.
71.	Most of the time I was referred to the website or another student service office on campus from ESS staff. For that reason I am not too sure what the ESS purpose is.
72.	I don't know what this is.
73.	They are not helpful at all and they should seriously re-select their staffs. First, they are so so slow and I try to avoid them as much as I can. They never have enough staff in the office even during the first week of school which is the busy time. When I have to go to ESS, some of them just keep telling you to go find other people. One time the staff dropped attitude on me and I was trying so hard to not lose my temper on her. I asked politely for a certificate to prove that I'm in engineering program and she said it'd take 2 weeks. Ok I understand, although it is ridiculous how printing out a piece of paper would take them two weeks, but sure I understand they are busy, and I did not complain at all, I was being nice and polite the whole time. So then I POLITELY asked her, if she can try to make it faster since I was leaving the country in a week. Then she said "The question is, why didn't you come earlier?" in a very rude way. Seriously, with that attitude, she would've been fired as a waitress. It is ridiculous how staff with that kind of attitude is still working at a university "helping" students. I'm very unsatisfied and disappointed at ESS and I avoid them at all cost.
74.	-
75.	It took me a month and multiple emails to get a meeting.

76.	Everything's great!
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