

Multi-Faith Space

2013

A review, analysis and
recommendation of space at the
University of Toronto Mississauga

INTRODUCTION

A multi-faith society and multi-faith spaces present important challenges for understanding differences within and between faith traditions. It provides an opportunity for working beyond religious traditions to promote acceptance and interfaith – not just tolerance. This requires us to be more welcoming to students of different faiths and to allow and encourage the use of spaces on our campus for faith-based use of all kinds.

The University of Toronto Mississauga is an ideal campus to meet these challenges. It is a place where people of all faiths, or those who do not have a specific faith, gather to research, think and learn. UTM has a special role in shaping the environment in which learning and development unfolds, and this will often influence the attitudes and understandings of students, community and society in general in the years to come.

Currently, with a student body of over 12 000 students of various faiths, the limited number of small multi-faith spaces on our campus (CCT Building and Student Center) are not sufficient enough to accommodate the unique diversity and the students' needs on our campus. Uyt

The University of Toronto Mississauga Students' Union is requesting more multi-faith spaces on our campus in various buildings such as North Building, William G. Davis Building, the new Instructional Building, and the future Medical Sciences Building to meet the growing demand on our campus.

PURPOSE OF MULTI-FAITH

Equity and Diversity

Recent equity and equality frameworks as well the constitution make it illegal in this country and province to discriminate on grounds of 'religion or belief' (Constitution Act, SC 1982, c 11, s 2(a). Human Rights Code, RSO 1990, c H. 19). On a global scale, the UN states in its Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 18):

“Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

UTM should, as a diverse and welcoming campus, be concerned about the lack of multi-faith spaces as well as washrooms for ritual purification on our campus. According to the preamble of the University of Toronto Governing Council Policy on Scheduling of Classes and Examinations and Other Accommodations for Religious Observances,

“The University of Toronto welcomes and includes students, staff and faculty from a broadly diverse range of communities and backgrounds. The University community comprises one of the most diverse campus populations anywhere. Students, staff and faculty have a wide range of backgrounds, cultural traditions and spiritual beliefs. With reference to the University’s commitment to human rights as articulated in the Statement on Human Rights and in accordance with the accommodation principles of the Ontario Human Rights Code, this policy is concerned with accommodations for students with respect to observances of religious holy days”.

UTM is taking positive steps towards being open to different faiths and beliefs, but more can be done to reflect the great diversity of our campus. UTM is taking leaps in ensuring the campus is inclusive through initiatives like the CampUS Safety Project, accessibility audits, gender neutral washrooms, the hiring of a new Equity and Diversity Office at UTM as well as being awarded the Best Diversity employers of 2012. UTM needs to be prepared to engage with its students, staff and faculty, of faith in an informed and sensitive way and, above all, to generate a safe environment for discussion.

Widening Participation

Universities are places for students to meet new people who they can engage with in discussions and debates. As a result, they should be as welcoming as possible to people from a wide range of backgrounds, cultures and traditions. For some students, religious beliefs and traditions make it harder at times for them to take part in university life. By providing accessible and suitable spaces of worship, we remove the barrier student’s face from busy schedules, the timing of holy days, festivals, worship or traditional rites which often make it difficult for students to practice their faiths as they would like to on our campus. Universities need a sophisticated understanding of different faiths in order to encourage people to participate in university life to the fullest extent, and to feel as comfortable as possible while doing so. UTM students spend so much time on campus, and in order to encourage more participation in clubs and extra-curricular activities, the provision of more multi-faith spaces would allow students to participate more and to continue to practice their faiths comfortably.

A new committee by the name of the Multi-faith Steering Committee has been struck in the spring of 2012 by the Office of Student Life, UTM faith-based clubs on campus and UTMSU. This committee aims to engage students in discussions of faith on campus, creating a safe space for faith related discussions and an evaluation of spaces for worship at UTM, seeking additional spaces for such discussions as well as interfaith and faith-specific events.

Student Experience

UTM is a meeting place for people of many faiths, or even those who may not practice any specific faith. As faith becomes a more public issue, the challenge is for universities to build on and improve the services they provide to make the experience of students and staff alike as positive and comfortable as possible, regardless of their religious background. The University of Toronto has already taken steps forward in addressing Multi-faith concerns pertaining to scheduling and accommodation through the University of Toronto's Accommodation of Religious Observances Policy. This policy outlines the considered that should be taken when it comes to exams and timetabling, the provision of faith spaces, and of counselling services which take account of religious perspectives, practices and traditions. Getting these things right on our campus can contribute significantly to a feeling of well being in the wider community and society. The issue of space is another concern within the same field which we hope UTM, as a trailblazer and a leader in the community can solve and be once again exceptional in addressing this issue.

Positive Campus Relations

The introduction of more multi-faith spaces on our campus is likely to create an even more positive student, staff and faculty experience that is inclusive of people from a broad range of backgrounds and provides safer and comfortable spaces where we can thrive as learners, researchers and leaders. It contributes to a sense of justice, purpose, being valued and included which is the starting point for good campus relations, which depend on tolerance and understanding.

Faith-based clubs and groups on Campus

UTM is a campus that is home to over 95 clubs and academic societies. Clubs at UTM are an outlet for students who are looking to learn valuable skills and to network with other students around campus. Clubs and societies on our campus are essential in the lives of students, and many of these clubs are faith-based. There is a large number of faith-based clubs and groups at UTM, including:

- Baptist Student Ministries
- Christian Unity Association
- Erindale Christian Fellowship (ECF)
- Hindu Student Council
- Power to Change
- Sikh Student Association of UTM
- Thaqaalayn Muslim Association
- UTM Chinese Christian Fellowship
- UTM Muslim Students' Association
- UTM Catholic Students Club

Each club has anywhere from approximately 20-500 members, and as a result, current multi-faith space is insufficient and too small for such large memberships to host many successful, large-scale events on our campus.

UTM, with a large and ever-increasing number of faith-based groups, must acknowledge the widening participation of students of different faiths by creating more multi-faith spaces on our campus for students to utilize. Since the year 2009, UTMSU has seen an increase of 100% of registered faith-based clubs.

MULTI-FAITH SPACE AT UTM

Current Space

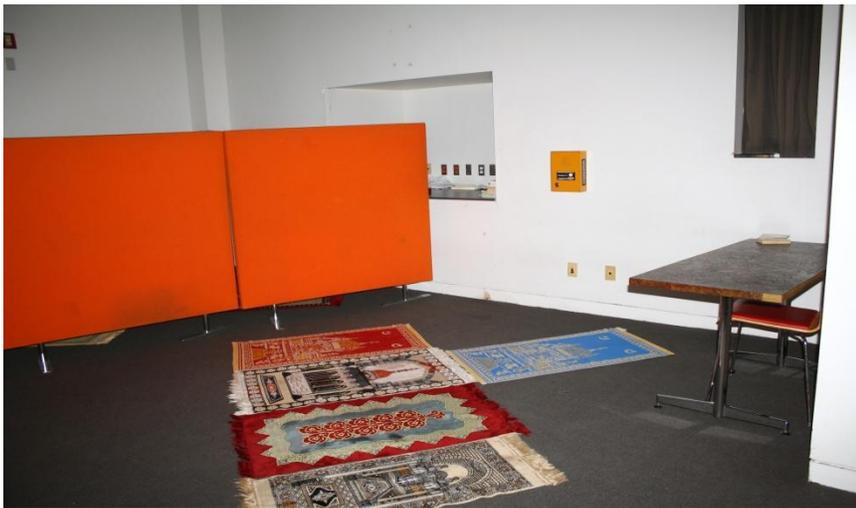
The only faith-based spaces allocated at UTM are located in CCT building and in the Student Center. We are currently in the process of auditing the space within the student centre to ensure that the space is being used equally by all groups. Unfortunately due to the lack of space, students are booking spaces in the student centre and other university buildings to pray and conduct their faith activities. Faith-based groups are frustrated by the lack of permanent space and sometimes have prayers and group worship off-campus or by staircases out of necessity. The current width of the main prayer room is 4 by 2 meters and the length is 9 by 6 meters. By creating space for multi-faith use, students will be able to access prayer space on campus to ease students' ability to practice faith and attend classes.

Use of Spaces

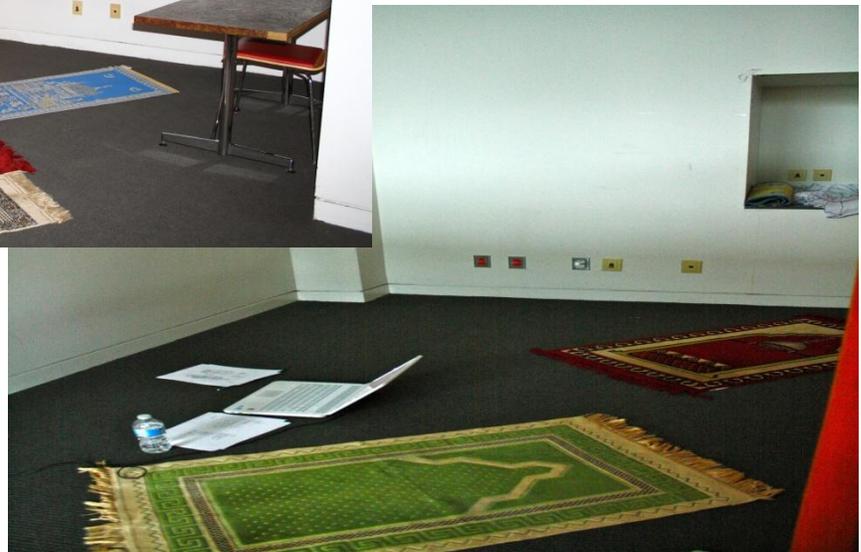
The multi-faith spaces on our campus are spaces for students, faith-based clubs, staff and faculty members of all faiths to utilize for prayer, worship, events, meetings, personal purposes, and socializing. Unfortunately, because the multi-faith spaces on our campus are

so small and so few, these groups are not able to utilize and take advantage of such spaces as needed.

In the winter of 2012, a survey of the two rooms located in CCT was made and the results demonstrated that there are on average 394 visits per. This signifies a high number of students who actively partake in faith-based activities on campus but are not afforded the appropriate facilities to do so while balancing their academics, religious beliefs and complex identities. We also know that there are more students who would like to use multi-faith spaces but are either unaware of them or are hindered due to the lack of suitable space. In the fall of 2013 we are planning in conducting a similar survey of the Multi-faith Centre (across from the Student Centre to see the number of students who visit it per week.



*Pictures of Multi-faith Centre
(across from the Student Centre)*



Another online survey was conducted in 2012-2013 where approximately 100 students participated and we received an overwhelming response by students asking for additional space due to the inadequacy of current spaces.

The following are only a few of the opinions shared by students:

“Spaces would not be the right term. We have a Multi-Faith closet. I think it's about time the UTM Administration realize the lack of space for students to practice their faith on campus. The current space is

managed by the Students' Union I believe, which would mean that UTM Admin have not even invested into having a single functional Multi Faith space on campus.

We need a space where anyone of any faith can come and be able to practice their faith without trouble. Not a small room that can barely accommodate one faith. If just a few Muslims went by the Multi Faith Centre at evening prayer and prayed then no one else could be able to stay there.

We need a CENTRE not a ROOM and it's about time administration realizes that.

Being a Muslim on campus we do have our prayer room, so I can only imagine how frustrating this is for students of other faith.”

“There is too little [Multi-faith space] and there is hardly room for everyone. It is awkward for multiple faiths to be praying simultaneously in the same room. Due to the many religious students at UTM, this leaves many without a quite space for prayer. There should be more space and the space should be regulated better. Perhaps there should be a booking policy with limitations on how much time can be booked in advance. Secondly, if UTM is going to reserve religious room for Muslim students it is only fair to provide set rooms for Christian students. Lastly, prayer room should be located within all the major buildings in campus so that students can conveniently access them when moving in between classes.”

“There is not a lot of availability. On many occasions, I have found myself not being able to use the Multi-faith space because it was preoccupied.”

REVIEW OF MULTI-FAITH SPACE ON OTHER UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES

The University of Toronto St. George campus offers a variety of multi-faith spaces around its campus for students to utilize for events and religious practices. In fact, there is a multi-faith centre, the Koffler House, at the St. George Campus that contains 8 rooms available to students for faith-based purposes (See Appendix A). This building is physically accessible and the rooms hold up to 200 students at a time. Unfortunately, the UTM campus does not even come close to this sort of accommodation for students. We do not have a multi-faith center, and our multi-faith room holds a maximum of 30 students according to the fire code standards.

Other Multi-faith Spaces within the St. George campus:

1. Sussex Club House Multi-faith Room

This small facility on the 5th floor of 21 Sussex Ave. (at Huron) can accommodate approximately 10 people, is carpeted and has no furnishings. When the room is not booked, it is open for individual or small group prayer or meditation.

2. Hart House

The Hart House chapel is open to all members for private prayer and meditation, and may also be booked for special functions. A maximum of 30 people can be seated.

3. OISE/UT

Room 8136 on the 8th floor of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at 252 Bloor St. W. is open during building hours for prayer, meditation and quiet reflection.

4. Other Spaces

Special arrangements can sometimes be made with specific departments for the use of locally-controlled space. Friday afternoon Jumu'ah prayers for Muslim students, for example, are held weekly in the Debates Room at Hart House.

Another similarly sized university, the U of T Scarborough campus has two spaces in the student centre dedicated to faith-based activities. One of the rooms accommodates approximately 50 people while the other accommodates 30 people. The U of T Scarborough administration has also committed to an additional multi-faith space in a new building opening in the fall of 2013.

Concerns and Recommendations

The vast amount of available spaces at the University of Toronto St. George campus provides students with more of an opportunity to practice their faith conveniently when needed without interfering with their busy schedules. Although there is always room for improvement, we believe the St. George and Scarborough campuses have taken more imitative and succeeding in providing more spaces for their students. These spaces are convenient and practical; they are large enough to hold many people during religious practices and also during events that require more space.

In the interest of equity on all three University of Toronto campuses, the University of Toronto Mississauga Students' Union requests that new spaces are made available on our campus in order to ensure that our students are able to practice their religions and faiths as comfortably as those on the St. George campus. The spaces currently allocated at UTM do not measure to those at the St. George campus, and we encourage the university administration to create spaces in order to ensure that our campuses are being treated equitably, a goal that has been stressed by the university's president, Dr. David Naylor.

UTMSU is concerned with the insufficient allocation of multi-faith spaces on a campus that continues to grow and become more and more diverse year after year. Various students and faith-based clubs have approached UTMSU conveying their concern that multi-faith spaces on our campus are inadequate and inconvenient for them, often leaving their membership with no appropriate spaces for faith-based meetings, worship and events. UTMSU recommends that due to traffic in the Student Centre prayer room, which only allows approximately ten people, the multi-faith spaces must be extended to almost thrice the size so at least thirty people can pray in the same space. In addition to this, we recommend a meeting room be created at the bottom of the multi-faith space in which all faiths can have discussions and plan events which would be ideal and an alternative to continuously booking rooms in the Student Center. This can take the same form as the Koffler Centre at the University of Toronto St. George where there is both a secluded and silent space for students wishing to pray quietly and alone, along with a large multipurpose room primarily utilized for faith-based activities, such as Bible studies, mass, Friday prayers and interfaith events, but it is also open to all other activities for clubs, staff and faculty to reserve when not in use.



Pictures of washroom in the Multi-faith Centre (across from the Student Centre)

Another concern is that both the CCT rooms and the Student Centre space are often located in areas that are inconvenient for students and their busy schedules. The allocation of more spaces in varying buildings across campus would make it easier for students to practice their faiths in a convenient manner in a way that best accommodates their busy school and work schedules.

Taking into consideration the traffic that is caused due to the line-up for the washroom, we recommend that there should be two bathrooms for easier accessibility for all. These washrooms should be gender equality based.

Moreover, UTMSU recommends that there should be an expansion in permanent storage space for religious materials, including mats and holy transcripts, in general to be stored away after being used, so that people of other faiths do not feel uncomfortable to practice their religion in the same space. Also, a space for hanging coats or jackets would be more useful and introducing a shoe rack would definitely make the space more organized and less cluttered.

The Multi-faith Steering Committee believes at least one additional room in each building would fulfill the needs of students as UTM expands and continues to grow physically; it becomes increasingly difficult for students to run back and forth between buildings. We recommend the allocation of more multi-faith spaces on our campus in the following specific buildings including North Building, the new Instructional Building, and the Medical Sciences Building.

ADDITIONAL SPACE

With at least 10 faith-based clubs on our campus that are open to all students, two small spaces are not large enough to efficiently accommodate our membership. UTMSU recommends that more spaces be created in order to continue to encourage diversity and clubs on our campus.

Upon conducting a campus walkabout audit to look for locations for additional space or space that can be transformed to serve the needs to faith-based groups, the Multi-faith Steering Committee has noted the following spaces appeared to have infrequent to no use and could be transformed to Multi-usage space:

North Building: NE 143

The committee noticed that there is no schedule of classes for this room, and due to its location in North Building which is further away from most other buildings at UTM, it would be ideal to use it as a multi-faith prayer space.



Instructional Building: Storage Room

The committee identified this room in IB, first floor (before room 140 on the left of the hallway leading into the garbage disposal room). This room would also be ideal due to its location in the IB building. We recommend that the materials in storage be moved to the garbage disposal room to make space for an additional multi-faith room.



CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the students' at the University of Toronto Mississauga hope these recommendations will be taken into account and enacted upon in the coming years. There is clearly a need as demonstrated by this report, and which we as students, staff and faculty believe will enable UTM to be a trailblazer and leader in all aspects of academia, equity and accessibility, including Multi-faith space.

APPENDIX A

The Steering Committee took a tour of the Koffler House and spoke to the director, Richard Chambers. The structure of the room bookings and space allocation is maintained by Chambers, the following are the guidelines used by Chambers and his committee to allocate and maintain room bookings. We hope to use this as a reference guide when assessing how to maintain and operate any Multi-faith Spaces allocated at UTM.

Room Use (DRAFT 4.1) Multi-Faith Centre Guidelines¹

The mission of the Multi-Faith Centre is to support the spiritual well-being of students, staff and faculty at the University of Toronto and to increase our understanding of and respect for religious beliefs and practices. It does so by providing opportunities for members of the University to reflect, worship, contemplate, teach, learn, read and study, celebrate, mourn, engage in dialogue, and interact on a daily basis.

A. Scheduling Priority by Groups

Priority of room reservations reflects the mission of the Centre. All events are scheduled by the Office Co-ordinator at the discretion of the Director of the Multi-Faith Centre in order to ensure religious diversity. At the end of the academic year the directors of the Multi-Faith Centre and the Centre of Community Partnerships will review the process. Scheduling priority for events in descending order:

1. The Multi-Faith Centre, the Centre for Community Partnerships, and co-sponsored events by either Centre. The co-sponsors will include colleges, departments, schools, institutions, faculties, and associations, which form the constituency of the University of Toronto, and also outside organizations.
2. Recognized University of Toronto faith-based student organizations, including the Campus Chaplains Association:
 - normally to a maximum of 3 hours a week, Monday to Friday, one semester ahead;
 - booking for a single day religious festival observance, one semester ahead;
 - co-booking an event by a student organization and Campus Chaplains Assoc, one semester ahead.

Should a conflict arise about the use of a given room on the same date by two different student groups, the final decision will be at the discretion of the Director, following consultation and/or negotiation with both organizations. Factors to be considered will be: size of the event, ensuring religious diversity, worship practice i.e. the use of particular facilities to accommodate fire, drumming etc.

¹ The Multi-Faith Centre Guidelines are for internal use by the Director and Advisory Council of the Multi-Faith Centre and subject to the University of Toronto Governing Council Policy for the Allocation of Rooms – Extracurricular Bookings, June 1, 1988. See Appendix A.

As a criteria for securing a reservation for an entire semester a faith-based student organization must either commit to a representative serving on the Multi-Faith Advisory Council or planning/ participating in at least one multi-faith program on campus that term.

3. Recognized University of Toronto departments, schools, institutions and associations, which form the constituency of the University of Toronto, one semester ahead.
4. External bookings for which there will be a deposit and subsequent charge – will be at the Centre’s discretion. These would include weddings and other faith based ceremonies.

B. Scheduling Priority by Time

1. Requests for regular meetings and worship will be accepted one semester in advance for faith-based recognized student organizations. June 30 is the deadline for room reservations for the fall semester. November 30 is the deadline for room reservations for the winter semester. External bookings will be confirmed after student groups have been scheduled.
2. Groups can reserve unscheduled rooms anytime they are available by contacting the Office Co-ordinator with a completed Room Reservation form. See Appendix B.
3. Emerging weekend events must be requested with a completed Room Reservation form by the end of the day of the preceding Wednesday in order to ensure adequate notice to ensure the building is open and secured at the end of the event.
4. Other special events, such as invited speakers or conferences, may be scheduled a year ahead, providing the event does not conflict with worship, holy days, and weddings.

C. General Scheduling Guidelines

1. Groups should identify one contact person to schedule space usage.
2. A description for each program must be completed on the Room Reservation form.
3. For groups with catered meals, the kitchen on the second floor can be reserved by indicating the appropriate box on the Room Reservation form. The key must be signed out during regular business hours and returned as soon as possible after the event.
4. The group that has made the reservation is responsible for the physical space, conduct, and moral content of the event.

D. Scheduling Times

1. Rooms may be reserved seven days a week during fall and winter semesters.
2. Summer schedules may vary.
3. Rooms are available for the confirmed reservation time periods only. It is essential that all meetings begin and end at the appointed times.
4. The Resource Centre is a study area for students 8:45 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Normally this is a non-reservable space.
5. The Meditation Room is available from 8:30 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. for individual and small group prayer/reflection/meditation. Normally this is a non-reservable space.

E. Space Regulations

1. Groups are responsible for their own setting up and returning to storage of all chairs, tables, prayer rugs, yoga mats etc. Normally rooms are unfurnished and reserved space should be returned to this condition. All food and drink must be removed or placed into trash containers. Failure to do so will result in clean-up charges.

2. Storage is only available for recognized campus groups in lockers on the 3rd floor assigned by the Office Co-ordinator. Materials, food, or equipment cannot be brought/delivered in advance or left for pick-up at a later date.
3. Two public bulletin boards are located in the 1st floor lobby for posting general information. Nothing should be posted on the walls of the Multi-Faith Centre.

F. Rooms Fees

1. Room reservation fees are waived for University faith-based organizations, Student Life offices, and Simcoe Hall offices. Other University associated offices and organizations are charged an internal rate. External rates apply to those who are not formally associated or affiliated with the University. Fees vary according to room capacity. See Room Reservation form in Appendix B. External bookings require an immediate nonrefundable deposit of one half of the fee.
2. Weekend events involving a major meal may be charged a custodial fee regardless of the status of the group.

G. Cancellations/Changes

1. In case of a room cancellation, contact the Office Co-ordinator immediately.
2. Any accepted booking must be understood on the basis of a commitment between the Centre and the organization making the booking. The booking is accepted without liability although the Centre will make all efforts to ensure the availability of the space, the bookers may be offered alternative space, or asked to make changes. Those making a booking are expected to fulfill the booking in using the space for the purposes as approved, and to be careful, and respectful of the space given that the Centre is primarily for spiritual and faith-based practices. This will include awareness of activities in adjacent rooms especially meditation space.

An emergency or crisis requiring a spiritual/faith community response must take precedence regarding room occupancy. Also unforeseen university or building closures do not constitute liability.

H. Ethical Standards

Content of the programs must support the Centre's mission.

Individuals and groups using space within the Centre should understand the space as unique to many buildings on campus. We might use the word special, sacred, or holy in concept of set aside for non-mundane usage. The investment both monetarily and the energies which led to its existence, require recognition. Therefore the Centre has the right to expect appropriate behaviour and responsibility together with a right to cancel or refuse further bookings where these are contravened. The provision of space remains at the discretion of the Director. All events should be conducted in such a manner as not to produce excessive noise that are considered disruptive to others. Groups need to exhibit respect and sensitivity toward others.

I. Food and Beverages

Organizations are free to book vegetarian caterers of their choice. Please note that the 2nd and 3rd floors are normally alcohol and meat free. Exceptions will be considered on a case by case basis. Weekend events involving a major meal may be charged a custodial fee regardless of the status of the group.

J. Childcare

Groups that require childcare at their events must provide responsible adult supervision and may use the Family Room on the 3rd floor.