

2023

UTM Student Centre

Expansion Report

1999

UTM Students' Union
UTMSU

Overview

The existing UTM Student Centre was constructed in 1999, as an expansion of the Crossroads Building to meet the needs of the campus' roughly 6,000 students. This commendable achievement and the benefits derived from it have long ago plateaued, offering drastically diminished utility to a campus that now boasts in excess of 15,000 undergraduate students.



Crossroads Building prior to renovations in 1999.



UTM Student Centre post 1999 expansion.

In the past decade, facilities and resources at the University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM) have certainly increased, but disproportionately. Capital expansion projects over the years have included the Maanjiwe nendamowinan building, Deerfield Hall, Innovation Complex, William G. Davis expansion, and the new Science Building. Conversely, the UTM Students Centre has remained untouched, while providing more resources and services for student life since its last expansion.



Aerial view of UTM campus as of 2021.

Both the University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM) administration and UTM Students' Union (UTMSU) are cognizant of the resource needs that accompany enrollment growth as a matter of urgency. This report serves to address the needs of UTM students and re-affirm the space needs of a once neglected priority. This report will communicate the space needs of students within an expanded UTM Student Centre. This comprehensive report sits on years of outreach to students, clubs, and academic societies, via open meetings, one-on-one consultations, townhalls and surveys.



Space Utilization

The functionality of the UTM Student Centre prioritizes the needs of students, which have drastically changed over the years. The original purposes of the UTM Student Centre were successfully achieved in its last expansion, however, the constraints of limited space are now being witnessed far greater than ever before. This section will outline some of the major uses of the building over the past 24 years and highlight our recommended changes.

Clubs and Academic Society Offices

Clubs and Academic Societies are the backbone of student life here at UTM. They drive innovation, social networking, and skill development. The cultures and diversity represented by these groups bring richness to the campus experience. For this reason, this section of the report is of utmost priority.



UTMSU Clubs & Societies host various tabling events throughout the academic year.

The UTM Student Centre is home to over 85 highly active student clubs, and 18 academic societies. These groups have approximately five to seven executives each and many times over a hundred members. Clubs and societies utilize the UTM Student Centre for office and storage space, to host events and meetings, and sometimes just to relax as they connect with their members during office hours.

The main concern that clubs and societies have raised over the years, is the lack of office space provided to them in the UTM Student Centre. Currently, there are only 11 office spaces for all affiliated groups location on the second floor of the UTM Student Center, with each measuring approximately 100 square feet.



Club offices tend to resemble storage rooms instead of actual working environments.

As of now, many clubs and academic societies are completely without offices. The best accommodation that could be made with the given space is to have two clubs share a single office, and the remaining clubs be allocated a UTMSU locker. On average it works out to be about 14 executives sharing one very small room, making it difficult to hold meetings efficiently. Moreover, clubs and executives are expected to accommodate members who visit, exasperating the space limitation.

Recommendation:

- The creation of 17 new office spaces for UTMSU clubs and societies with larger square footage. Realistically, we are looking to maintain the 2:1 ratio of groups per room.
- Designated storage units for groups, similar to building apartment storage rooms. This designated location for storage will increase the usable space in the existing offices.

Bookable Rooms

Presently, the UTM Student Centre offers three bookable rooms: Presentation Room, Board Room and Meeting Room. These spaces are used for meetings, events, social gatherings, workshops, and seminars.

The Presentation Room is one of the most frequently used rooms in the UTM Student Centre because of its size, AV capabilities, sound and multifunctionality. This room is approximately 2,215 square feet. This space is the most desirable amongst campus groups, UTMSU staff and various UTM departments, given its size and location.

The Board & Meeting Room's within the UTM Student Centre are roughly 1,769 square feet in size and are used for meetings, Grad Photography sessions, socials and educational gatherings. Rooms like these are essential for clubs and societies since they accommodate a decent number of members, located away from noise and other distractions.

With limited rooms for clubs and societies to use, there are always excessive complaints that bookable rooms are rarely available. As a result, many students, clubs and societies, miss out on opportunities to host important events and meetings.



The Presentation Room is used for various meetings and social events throughout the year.

These rooms are available for booking during the academic year, September - April only on weekdays, 10AM - 6PM (or later depending on the event). On average, these rooms are booked 60% of the year for UTMSU designated events and services, leaving infrequent availability for our 85 clubs and 18 societies.

Recommendation:

- Expand the current Presentation Room to increase space capacity. Renovate existing space to be noise cancelling.
- Create a second "Presentation Room", which will be dedicated solely to UTMSU affiliated groups. This will alleviate the pressure on the original Presentation Room.

Study Spaces

We have received many requests from countless students for the UTM Student Centre to allocate a space where students can study in a comfortable and academically stimulating area, those which are quiet as well as collaborative in nature. The vision for the UTM Student Centre is not only to create a fun environment but also an environment where students are encouraged to prioritize their education through learning communities.

Considering the expansion of our campus, current study spaces cannot accommodate the inevitable growth of students. As an academic institution, each building should incorporate an element of study space, which is why study spaces should be a priority in the UTM Student Centre.

Currently, the only space in the UTM Student Centre utilized as a study area is the Fireplace Lounge. This lounge accommodates 30 people at a time. Unfortunately, this space is not considered a quiet zone, given its proximity to the Blind Duck Pub.



Formally referred to as the Red Room, the Fireplace Lounge was renovated to reflect a more modern and functional space.

Recommendation:

- Expand the Fireplace Lounge to incorporate silent study cubicles and group study rooms. This will provide quiet as well as collaborative study areas.
- Create a secure computer lab for student use, which will include the UTMSU Printing Services.

Multi-faith Space

The multi-faith space in the UTM Student Centre is a space for students and faculty members of all faiths and beliefs to utilize for prayer, worship, meditation, events, meetings, and personal purposes. Unfortunately, multi-faith spaces on our campus are very limited, which has created an unexpected strain on the daily usage of the UTM Student Centre's multi-faith space.



The multi-faith space in the UTM Student Centre is located in an inaccessible location and is severely undersized.

It is important that a multi-faith space is large enough to account for all its users. The UTM Student Centre multi-faith space measures roughly 399 square feet – a woefully inadequate space. This space is in the exterior wing of the UTM Student Centre, on the second floor accessible via stairs or lift. Included in this space is a single-use washroom.

Recommendation:

- Create a secondary multi-faith space on the main level of the UTM Student Centre, preferably attached to the exterior wing.
- Renovate the original multi-faith space based on the needs of its users.

UTM Students' Union Offices

UTM Students' Union (UTMSU) offices are where students go to ensure that their issues are placed at the forefront. It is where students come to act on an idea, to voice a concern, to get involved, and to drive positive change. Often, the UTMSU office is where those important conversation starts.

The UTMSU has a vibrant and highly skilled staff inclusive of six elected members of the Executive Committee, seven full-time staff members, 22 Board of Directors, 26 part-time coordinators, 40 part-time positions for operations of our member services & Blind Duck Pub, and hundreds of seasonal staff and volunteers.

A main problem to date is the displacement of all UTMSU part-time student coordinators & associates. These employees are without working stations or computers, often having to work from home or in the library. This is not reflective of a unified working environment that UTMSU would like to encourage.



The only office space for part-time staff, which is often misused as an extend storage space.

UTMSU office space must be expanded to provide a comfortable and productive work environment for our many staff members, the great majority of which are current undergraduate students. Furthermore, UTMSU must be able to provide comfortable organizing space for our countless student volunteers.

Recommendation:

- Expand the existing Green Room to provide individual cubicles that can be shared between UTMSU employees.
- Retrofit the Green Room to incorporate a kitchenette.

The Blind Duck Pub

The Blind Duck Pub has become a cornerstone in the UTMSU's vision of serving the needs of all UTM students. It has been a place to eat, to hold surprise birthdays, conduct study sessions, a place to watch our favorite sports teams duke it out, or just simply a place to hangout; the Blind Duck Pub has created a home for all. Moreover, the Blind Duck Pub provides a safe and secure location on campus to facilitate the responsible consumption of alcohol, so as not to encourage irresponsible drinking on campus.

Many students, campus groups, UTMSU staff, UTM departments and outside organizations use the facilities and services offered by the Blind Duck Pub. For years, the Blind Duck Pub has been operating at full capacity and struggling with the overflowing demand as UTM grows. On average, the pub serves over 300 students per day. This results in long lines and congestion in this popular and vital space. This adversely affects the customer experience, despite the best efforts of Blind Duck management, bearing in mind the short periods between lectures.

The operational facilities of the Blind Duck Pub have reached its peak. The kitchen of the Blind Duck has been operating at full capacity for many years. The optimal level of productivity has been achieved, and in this plateaued state, any additional activity within this limited space will diminish returns. As it stands, the kitchen space is currently measured at 750 square feet. The little kitchen cannot accommodate the growing wishes of its users and thus has limited the operational scope of the menu and the operations provision of food services. The kitchen has become an uncomfortable space to work in due to its limited space.



With its affordable menu and functional event space, the Blind Duck Pub is the busiest location in the UTM Student Centre.

Students on campus are asking for a safe space where they can enjoy great food, a relaxing atmosphere, and the responsible consumption of alcohol during late hours of the week. This is especially important to the residence community. The limited space of the Blind Duck Pub's kitchen and seating arrangement, greatly influence the fiscal health of the restaurant and its ability to extend its hours in a sustainable way. The Blind Duck Pub has reduced its hours of operations slightly on some weekdays to due to kitchen limitation, but would like to be operational much longer, should that provision be made possible by an expanded facility.

Recommendation:

- Expand the Blind Duck Pub kitchen to increase efficiency in food preparation.
- Extend the front of house to accommodate 2 cashiers.
- Expand the seating area to double its capacity and create a designated line-up section.



Accessibility

As we plan for the UTM Student Centre expansion, we would like to propose that the following oversights in the design of the current building be considered and remedied in order to ensure that physical accessibility is henceforth prioritized on campus. The following issues have been raised by members on campus, and other concerned individuals, as well as from the UTMSU Accessibility Audit from previous years.

Problems

- The inaccessibility of the second floor of the UTM Student Centre to those with mobility or other disabilities due to the absence of a proper elevator, which disrespects the independence of those who may wish to use it.
- The absence of some form of accessible or integrative seating arrangements in the lobby of the UTM Student Centre.
- The inaccessibility of the multi-faith room due to lack of a proper elevator, again disrespecting the independence of those who may wish to use it.
- The lack of automated doors for all doors of the UTM Student Centre, especially bookable rooms and club offices, fails to respect the independence of individuals with mobility disabilities and may prevent them from partaking in campus activities.
- Ensuring that all corridors and club office spaces are wide and open enough to accommodate wheelchairs and other personal assistive devices in order to ensure easy maneuverability.
- It is highly important that adequate fire exits be located throughout the building for safety purposes.

Final Thoughts

It is our hope that in reading this comprehensive report an acknowledgement is made for an urgent UTM Student Centre expansion. This report provides a solid foundation on which to discuss concrete plans for an expansion, under the directive of the student body.

Nonetheless, acknowledging mutual interests in this project is imperative. The first and foremost beneficiary of this project is the University of Toronto, which thereby would be fulfilling its commitments to students currently registered and those to come. Furthermore, the City of Mississauga stands to benefit tremendously from this project. An enhanced student experience at the UTM campus will attract top students to the municipality, who will stay or remain in strong ties with the City of Mississauga.

The UTM Students' Union looks forward to fruitful discussions as we move forward in the development of an action plan to bring to fruition an expanded UTM Student Centre. It is only then that we can leave as a matter of the past the reality that a building constructed in 1999 for a population of 6,000 students is failing to serve a student population that is in excess of 15,000, and which will soon approach 17,000.

