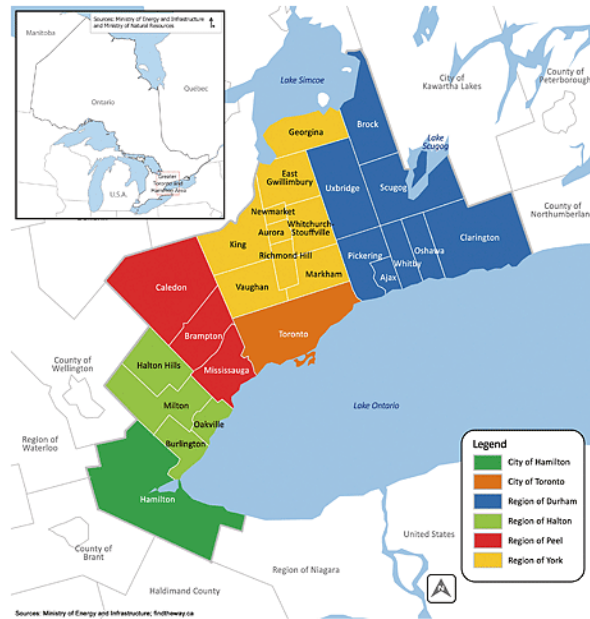UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

Where do YOU commute from?

The Big Idea

Based on the student needs identified by the Fostering Connectedness Domain team, Neighborhood Communities could be set up to virtually connect students who live in the same geographic area, so that they can self-organize activities such as ride sharing, social events, and study groups. A project like this can "leverage the students' urban location(s) more fully for the mutual benefit of University and City" to meet the third presidential priority.

Flip the Script

We design programs "for commuters"—but shouldn't we say "for students"? When we consider the numbers, 90% of students at the University of Toronto live off campus. Any program we design "for commuters" is truly designed for the majority of students.

The Need

We aim to provide opportunities for students to feel cared about both when they're on and off campus. Our two identified needs are:

- *Commute* — The need to move between home and campus in a safe and convenient manner
- *Connect* — The need to make meaningful connections with those along their path, i.e., others in the U of T community

Our Heuristic

We hypothesize that by living in a similar area and by going to school at the University of Toronto, students have a shared experience which connects them. Students want to "find their people on their path."

innovationhub

The Vision for our Prototype

In five years, we envision that all U of T students who call a similar geographic area (a "neighbourhood") home will have the opportunity to connect with one another. There will be many neighbourhoods, based on where students live and how they define their neighbourhood. The project may provide a digitalized portal which links to a different community page for each neighbourhood. Students may use the project in order to build a community with others in their neighbourhood, organizing themselves as they see fit.

Design Principles

Our research revealed design principles that can be used for a neighborhood communities pilot, but these principles also apply to designing general programs that respect the needs of students who commute.

- **Leveraging opportunities for off-campus connections:** The opportunity for students to connect begins with their commute in the morning and ends when they arrive home at the end of day. There are many chances for connection along the path of a student beyond their time on campus.

- **Respect for time:** students come from all areas of the GTA and beyond, and they have vastly different commutes. This project must respect the time commuters take to move on and off campus and must respect any free time they have.

- **Flexibility:** Accommodate different needs within and between different communities.

- **Identity**: Allow students to self-identify and declare their home area themselves, rather than be bound by already established neighbourhoods.

- **Cross-platform:** The design should leverage the benefits of digital platforms support physical community-building.

- **Moderators**: Students tend to hold one another accountable, and with support from Work Study or CCR student moderators, incidents which need attention will be responded to in a timely manner. Diverse communities are less tolerant of malicious intent.

Recommendations

There are some next steps U of T can take to reach our vision:

- The university can conduct a pilot of this program in order to test the heuristic. Choose two distinct areas (e.g., Burlington and Markham) and invite students who live in this area to partake in the pilot prior to the start of school. Monitor how students interact. After the initial meeting, the theory predicts that students will continue to organize themselves in a manner that meets their two needs—the need to commute and the need for connection.
- During Orientation, provide students with space on their nametags to write where they live in addition to their name and program. Students opt-in and define their community on their own terms.
- U of T can ask students, "Where do you commute from?" and "Which stop do you get off at?" to learn more about commuter patterns.