

“Students are people.... Faculty are people.... When they’re humanized, perspectives of them change.”

— U of T Student

The Big Idea . . .

Based on the student needs identified by the Integrated Learning Experience Domain team, the Student-Faculty Exploration Café could repurpose an existing central space on campus to act as a hub for activities that support engagement between students, teaching assistants, and faculty.

The Need . . .

The opportunity for students, TAs, and faculty to connect in a non-academic setting on equal footing, so they can learn from each other in a relaxed environment.

Our Insights . . .

- **Student, TAs, and faculty tend to prefer casual environments where interactions are open.**

“I have nurtured particular students who appear outstanding.... Students need to know that profs aren’t good at everything. U of T always thinks in terms of excellence, but this isn’t always a reality.” — Professor

“Interacting with TAs and faculty in a non-stressful or stereotypical classroom would likely encourage more open discussion. It would ease interactions between students, TAs, and faculty. It would be more relaxed and more comfortable.” — Student

“After-class interactions are the most organic.” — Professor

- **Students, TAs, and faculty on campus would like to share ideas and meet others with similar interests from varying backgrounds.**

“I want to learn with, not just from students; it should be a learning together, a sharing of knowledge.” — TA

“This idea sounds most appealing to me as a TA. TAs and faculty have specific interests, and specifically having students who share similar interests ...would be most optimal.” — TA

“Flip the script.... Mix and match students and faculty from different areas to create a new sort of dynamic. You could consider mixing different fields, but also different levels of study.” — Professor

- **Classwork, teaching and research obligations are of paramount importance. Students, TAs, and faculty require both permission and incentives to participate in other opportunities beyond this work.**

“I’m over-extended as it is, and I would prefer an intentional invite, as I would know that I can contribute. Then I know that I’ve been selected for my contributions.” — Professor

“Make this fulfilling for student and faculty to return.” — Professor

“Taking the first step is hard.... I know that I won’t be able to improve on assignments and understand teachers’ comments if I don’t reach out.” — Student

Design Principles

These design principles suggest ways to facilitate meaningful interactions between students, TAs, and faculty. With these recommendations, future projects can meet the president's third priority for the University of Toronto, to "re-imagine and reinvent undergraduate education" by allowing students, TAs, and faculty to engage in new and exciting ways.

- **Interdisciplinary:** The interaction should be interdisciplinary to incorporate students, TAs, and faculty from a variety of programs at the university.
- **Commitment:** The interaction should respect the audience's time. For instance, opportunities for interaction should be communicated in advance and require minimal preparation to attend, due to the small amount of free time students, TAs, and faculty have.
- **Purpose:** The interaction should include an objective or purpose that is clearly communicated to all participants in advance. The project's coordinators should also have prompts to encourage conversation.
- **Structure:** The interaction requires structure in order to create a sense of familiarity. The project needs to define why people have come together to connect.
- **Consistency:** The interaction should have one quality which remains consistent. Whether this is the time of day, the location, or the format, one quality needs to be consistent to become recognizable.
- **Food that Builds Community:** The interaction should provide food for participants and a chance to eat together. Good food and drink is used as a community builder and should be easy to handle while making conversation.