



Student Engagement with the Department of Student Life

Design Event: Themes and Insights Report

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introduction

The UTSC Department of Student Life and International Student Centre provide student life services, co-curricular opportunities, and international student support at the Scarborough campus. To improve their services for the 2019–2020 year, they partnered with the Innovation Hub in Spring 2019 to ask: **How do UTSC students view UTSC Student Life and International Experience? What are their needs regarding the support provided by Student Life and International Experience?**

Through activities and discussion groups, the Innovation Hub spoke with UTSC students and solicited their views on the student experience and the Department of Student Life. The findings are reported here, organized into three main streams of inquiry:

1. What do students value in programs?
2. What do students know about the Department of Student Life?
3. What do students think of the International Student Centre?

The student experience is also depicted through a Journey Map, which follows the ‘typical’ experiences, feelings, and preoccupations of a student through their years at UTSC. The data reveal areas where students seek support, gaps in current programming and communications, and opportunities for Student Life to improve its services.

theme one: What Do Students Value in Programs?

What content are students looking for in programs and services? They express a range of values, including building relationships, experiential learning, performing service, receiving value for money, and finding balance.

Insights

1) Building Relationships

- **Students value personal, face-to-face contact with Student Life staff.** They appreciate a proactive approach from the Department, which recognizes that students may be too busy or shy to initiate the connection.

“I feel like a lot of departments, or just the councils, should get out more. [...] Like similar to like the SCSU [...], they really get out; like if you were to ask a lot of people, they would know about the SCSU, but [...] something about the Department of Student Life, it’s not really out there.... Right?”

“Don’t always stay in your office. That’s a major thing. Especially with the staff that actually deals with students, have office hours, like table bookings for example. In the student centre. Be out. Be able to answer questions.”

“It’s not just a problem with [the Department of Student Life], but it’s like even with other parts of the university as well too, and student union, so like instead of just being in the office [...] all day closed up, you come to us kind of thing. Go out and engage with students who are—that are shy, or like they’re too busy, or things like that.”

- **Students also want to build relationships with other students.** They say that talking to student mentors and student staff is qualitatively different from talking to non-student staff; some feel more comfortable with peers than with older staff, whom they view as instructors. They want to hear diverse, genuine student voices at events and on panels.

“It’s the nicest to get advice and experience from a student themselves as opposed to like a professor or somebody else.”

“It’s kind of hard to like talk to [non-student staff], because as a student, they’re kind of an instructor, so [students] just talk to [student staff], and I think...[the Department of Student Life] could be—like have more student employees to talk to the students.”

“One thing I really liked about that [student leadership program] was that they had really diverse panellists, so it was all like I guess student leaders from departments and stuff like that, so we had one for management, there was [one] from comp sci and stats, there

was one from IDS [International Development Studies] as well too, and then one from psychology. [...] But that was like diverse backgrounds, and you could see upper years in all these places, so that was really great from them. [...] I noticed that for [this year], [the speakers] are all actually more people who work in [the Department]. I'm not saying that's a bad thing or anything, but umm, you would ideally want to get some student life, student unions, and stuff on campus, and get like different kinds of feedback from them."

2) Love of Learning

Students want opportunities for experiential learning. Many are looking for career-based experiential learning: experiences and skills that they can put on their resumes and use in the future workplace.

- **Students are eager for experiences that they can demonstrate for potential employers and put on their resumes.** Most express a lot of enthusiasm for the Co-Curricular Record, though a few voice skepticism about its actual utility when applying for jobs.

"You get a Co-Curricular Record as well [for Study Hub]. So it's something that I'm doing to try and build a resume."

"Prospectively, for an employer, [extracurricular activity] shows you can do multiple things, right?"

"I'm just trying to reach out, find more community knowledge, see how I can get involved [...] CCR, and it's not just that, it's any activities, so like an entrepreneurship start-up, they credit that to you. You can use the skills they taught you, right, and you can include that on your resume."

Participant A: "Is [CCR] actually helpful? Cause jobs just look at your resume and cover letter."

Participant B: "They don't even look at your transcript."

Participant C: "Sometimes for U of T jobs, they ask on your CLN, it [...] requests CCR validation."

- **Students are aware of structured opportunities for experiential learning, including Work Study, co-op, internships, and the Centre for Teaching and Learning.** They take advantage of such opportunities and find them both enjoyable and useful but are aware of gaps that prevent all students from accessing them.

"I really enjoy my on-campus job.... I learned a lot."

"For co-op, for example, there's a high GPA requirement and stuff that some students may not meet. [...] Work-Study program, you have to be a student taking those courses and maybe some students don't want to take courses in that time, and they want to just work. [...] And then CTL courses, they want to make money to like sustain themselves or whatever, and then CTL courses don't provide the money in that case."

- **When it comes to building professional skills, students are motivated by a narrative of ‘it is what you make of it.’** They speak of the importance of taking initiative and making their own opportunities.

“I had taken a lot of incentives to get involved on campus and outside campus, to model myself and to be a better individual, you know? A better professional and more communicating—a better leader in general. So, I definitely think it’s about taking the incentive. It’s about being involved. It’s about taking the first step, and the world will open up for you.”

“Even if you didn’t get into that program [you wanted], you can still find a way to take advantage of the opportunities, right? Like ask questions and stuff like that, right? Like you’re kind of in charge, if you want something, or if you want more of something, then you have to talk and find ways that it’s available to you, and if not, like try and create the opportunities, you know?”

3) Holistic Experiences

Though career development is very important to students, they also value holistic learning: they want to pursue passion projects and hobbies, and broaden their horizons while having fun.

“Sometimes people forget the bigger picture. It’s about having fun, it’s not just about, you know...gaining the most experience possible or [...] developing leadership skills, you know. So just have fun, meet people and communicate with them, learn about them, and grow as an individual. Have fun, play.”

““I met [...] members of the Mohawk First Nations, and I learned about the history. I learned how corn uhh, like why corn came from South America, right? From Central America. [...] I’m like...if I wasn’t a university student, I’ve spent all this time in Canada, I wouldn’t even know!”

“It was...very informative. Something very new. And I learned different things in terms of what food represents, food as—I always thought food was something to enjoy and savour. And it’s a pleasurable thing, a social thing. But the dimension of food as a healer, you know, food to heal, not just to nourish but to heal... Those concepts had me re-evaluating everything heretofore, you know, I imagined food represented. So, it’s just a different perspective, right?”

“You know, while they’re still getting their degree, getting good grades, that part of them [their hobby/passion] is not getting left out, right? Because my first year, I just felt like, well, I can’t really study [public speaking] in school, so, you know? But I still care about it.”

4) Paying it Forward

Students also volunteer as an act of service. They are motivated by the ideas of giving back and giving to those in need.

“I basically think [learning about the world outside campus] was like an eye-opener. So, when I went outside, I got insight into the reality of...that it’s not all great. There are, um ... You can help out, and you should help out, and it just opens your eyes [to] see that everything’s not perfect, but you can definitely try to make it perfect and contribute to the society in general.”

“What I enjoyed [about the First Year Experience Program] was just like leading first-year students and welcoming them to the university and also guiding them and sharing my experiences.”

“I was a first-year mentee. [...] I went on to become a first-year mentor to sort of return the favour.”

5) Bang for Their Buck

Students want to feel that they are getting value for their money. They are very aware of the cost of their tuition and sometimes feel that their money is allocated sub-optimally.

“I know that there’s some kinds of services and offices that they wanna bring to UTSC? And I...think they’re not that beneficial for all the students, for example the Family Care Office? Umm I don’t think that all the undergrads [...] need to pay for it.”

“Wait a minute, I’m paying all this tuition. You guys don’t have a shuttle from UTSC to St. George, or to UTM? That’s ridiculous. I have to pay on top of that?”

“We’re already paying so much money for tuition, so how come [transportation’s] not incorporated in there, right? And we have like radio included in our tuition. Who uses the radio? Like you know what I’m saying? [...] I mean, if that’s what benefits some people, that’s fine, but it’s like, things that are more of a priority to everyone should be included, such as like transportation, right?”

Participant A: “I bet you I paid tuition for that [that event].”

Participant B: “I know! Exactly!”

6) A Balancing Act

While balance is often regarded as an ideal by students, they note that it is difficult to find and maintain.

- **They must juggle many commitments and responsibilities:** academics, extracurricular activities, work, finances, nutrition, and sleep. Due to feeling pressured towards high academic performance, students often sacrifice other areas of their lives to prioritize academic success.

“You gotta like balance everything out, you know?”

“Manage my work-life balance, you know? And a social life, as well. At the same time, I have to manage my diet. [...] My outlay in terms of cash, as well.”

“This [retreat] would be so good for a lot of students, just to relax and get away, and the beautiful thing about it is, a lot of students, they didn’t have to do anything. They could just study, read, or not do anything at all. They can chill.”

Participant A: “Your health kind of is like taking a back seat when you’re trying to study.”

Participant B: “One hundred percent!”

Participant A: “You don’t eat anymore, you just—”

Participant C: “I eat, but not healthily. [...] Yeah, just running by the cafeteria, I’m like, just going to order McDonald’s.... [laughter] Hey, that’s my life.”

Participant A: “So tempting, cause the Marketplace and the Student Centre are just full of junk food. So yeeeeeeeah, so you just kind of lose your health compleeetely ...”

“I don’t have a sleep cycle anymore. I just sleep whenever. And I always wake up to finish assignments....”

- **Length of commute can maintain or threaten balance in students’ lives.**

Spending a lot of time in transit exacerbates already demanding work and study schedules. This stress is further compounded by students feeling that they deserve the same inter-campus shuttle option that students at UTM are given.

“I really enjoy my on-campus job. It’s really convenient.”

“I live [in area of Toronto] and [the commute]’s like an hour, two hours. And if you work part time... Having a shuttle would be useful. So much easier.”

“My biggest challenge was the fact that, other than my course, I had two part-time jobs. One was on—at U of T Scarborough; one was at UT St. George. So yeah, I was kind of worried about the commute that was going to happen between both of those campuses, but luckily, it turned out that I didn’t have to go to both locations on the same day, because that would have been really a hassle.”

- **Some find themselves overwhelmed by the stress of handling both a full course load and extracurriculars.** They may choose to lighten their course loads to make time to commit to out-of-classroom opportunities that they feel gave them a more holistic student experience.

“[Extracurriculars] drained me mentally, and I couldn’t be as uhh productive in my education as I was, but it doesn’t mean because I found it hard. I just didn’t go to classes because I kind of had other stuff that I had to deal with.”

“And I made plans this year, like I couldn’t deal with five courses, I had to work so hard, so I couldn’t be part of any student clubs because of those five courses. So I’ve planned everything over the last two weeks, and I know what I’m going to do for the next two years, I guess? I’m taking summer courses this year and next year. [...] So I can join a lot of clubs, part-time work, and stuff. I could get a lot of experience and stuff, so I’m in lighter courses every year. I’m taking like two courses/three courses every summer. And during the school year, I’m in like three courses each semester.”

Summary

Students value many different things and would like to see those values reflected in student life programming. They want to build relationships, especially with other students; they want opportunities for experiential learning, to practise resume- and employment-worthy skills, but also to pursue passions and broaden their horizons; they want to serve the community and get value for their money; and they want to find some way to balance all their roles and responsibilities.

theme two: What Do Students Know About the Department of Student Life?

Students express difficulty getting information about the Department of Student Life and university administration in general. While a few programs are widely known, many others are not. Students value visibility and responsive communication in interactions with the Department.

Insights

1) Limited Awareness

Overall, students demonstrated a limited amount of knowledge about the Department of Student Life, even when they recognized or were familiar with their offered services and programs.

- **First-year students, in particular, are unfamiliar with the Department.** While they are eager to find extracurricular opportunities and to volunteer, they have difficulty getting more information. Barriers to participation include problems navigating the Career & Co-Curricular Learning Network, confusion about which activities qualify for Co-Curricular Records, and learning about opportunities too late.

“Actually, I don’t even know what [the Department of Student Life] does. [...] I’m a first year, and I did not know about this.”

“I just knew about this office like one month ago, and [...] it’s kind of hidden, you know?”

“I think like there should have been more to help first-year students know about [Student Life programs], cause I had no idea what—how you—I don’t even know how to navigate CLN to find that place, so there needs to be way more to help....”

“When I was in first year [...], they barely sent advertisements for stuff they did. I didn’t even know about the whole CCR Record thing ‘til I like this year. I think one thing they need to do, is they need to like, really help first years hit the ground running when it comes to knowing....”

“When I tried to find something that’s like CCR-approved, it’s kind of like, when you try to find it, you don’t find volunteer stuff, and when you find volunteer stuff, you don’t know if it’s CCR-approved.”

- **Upper year students also express confusion about programs offered by the Department of Student Life.** When asked about ‘student life,’ they tend to draw associations to student clubs and unions rather than the Department. Compared to

first-year students, they recognize the names of more events and programs, but may not know the content or intended audience of these services.

- When asked to name services connected to the Department of Student Life, students were very unsure:

“Isn’t clubs kind of like Student Life?”

“I know it’s not part of [Student Life], or is it, though? SCSU itself?”

“Is Study Hub [part of Student Life]?”

“I’m not sure if [therapy dogs] are part of Student Life.”

“I don’t know if [financial help] is from the Department of Student Life. I don’t think so....”

“Like the Alternative Reading Week. I never saw it being promoted. Like I never heard about what happens during Alternative Reading Week.”

“LEAD Program. I had no idea what this is. No idea what LEAD is. [...] I heard the name, but I never knew what it does, like this program, and for who—who—who’s like the demographics that are targeted for this program, like who’s it for?”

“I know there’s Alternative Reading Week, but every time I want to do it, it’s just that I’m late for it, or there’s like a training that happens that I have to be there in order to be...to register, technically; I just miss it, right?”

2) Diffused Touchpoints

Students hear about events through a range of media: the news board, email, Facebook, the website, word of mouth, chance meetings and connections, and other clubs. Some programs achieve greater visibility than others; for example, students are widely familiar with the First Year Experience Program and (to a lesser extent) Summer Abroad. Students want more visibility and promotion of Student Life events.

“The news board [is] pretty useful.”

“I always get these emails about Co-Curricular activities, so those are really good, cause in my first year, I was like, ‘I don’t know how to get involved in school; there’s like so many things.’ [...] So when I get those emails and they’re like, ‘Oh, this event is happening. Do you want to volunteer?’, those are really helpful, cause if I actually like know what’s going on, then I can be a part of umm the things that’s going on.”

“[The event] was on the Events page. Yeah. And it was on Facebook; they were advertising it.”

“Actually, I was on the University of Toronto website. By chance, something popped up. I wasn’t specifically searching for anything; it just popped up, and I just looked into it at the Student Centre at uhh St. George, the Koffler. So I just went down there and they explained to me.”

"I know about the Imani Program. Cause I have [...] a couple of friends who are like mentors for that program."

"I've heard of the Study Abroad program, cause they were doing, I guess announcements, inside one of my events I was hosting."

"I'm going to fairs, and I'm going to events things, and meeting people, and like [...] asking people, 'Can I help with this?' [...] That's how you do it. [...] Just like questioning everyone I see. 'How do I get into this?'"

3) Communication is Key

Students value clarity and responsive communication from the Department of Student Life. They often interact with the Department for logistical issues concerning clubs and organizations, including funding, room booking, and Co-Curricular Record recognition. Figuring out the administrative procedures to access these resources is difficult. Students also appreciate responsive communication, especially regarding room booking, as clubs need time to plan and promote their events. They think there are untapped opportunities for collaboration between student groups and the Department of Student Life, especially for cross-promotion of events.

"I had to get CCR recognition. But that took forever to like follow up with someone."

"At least answer my email [about volunteering for an event]."

"To this day, I have difficulties understanding [the] DSL funding system. [...] It was always a bit complex and even like the room booking system, I feel like [...] it wasn't explained. [...] If like as first years or second years, you're the execs of a club, it's not clear where to go."

"The communication with the CCR team at UTSC wasn't that good, I feel like. [...] This year was the first year that I actually was responsible for submitting the CCR positions for one of my clubs, and eventually I managed to submit all of it on time; it made sense, but it took me some time to figure out what was happening. It wasn't very straightforward and clear. [...] If the CCR team could be more responsive to emails, that's helpful too."

"Say someone sent an email to [the Department], and they may not necessarily hear a response like within twenty-four hours even, so like, I do understand people are busy [...] but there should be some sort of protocol that like within twenty-four hours you should get a response back. [...] Forty-eight hours maximum [...] So that way students know what's going on, and even if it's not like, 'Oh we have a direct answer for you,' even something like, 'Hey, thank you for letting us know; we'll get back to you once we start getting more information.'"

"[My student group] would get the room booking very late for some reason, and umm that's a major issue. [...] If we want to do marketing and stuff for an event, we need the room booking confirmation, timely confirmation. [...] [In one instance, the Department] wasn't able to confirm the room, and even when they did confirm the room [...], within the same day they sent another email saying that the room was no longer available. [...] Our groups are like freaking out and stuff and trying to get this resolved. At the end it did

get resolved but the issue with that was we only had three days to market our event properly.”

“Perhaps even working with the Underground or some of the other—Minds Magazine, or some of the other publications to start getting their like—using those kind of places to get better output of stuff.”

4) Part of a Bigger Challenge

Students also struggle to acquire institutional knowledge about the University in general. First-year students, especially, take some time to adapt to the university’s administrative procedures and requirements.

- **First year students report difficulty finding information on websites and confusion about where to seek help.** The Department’s seminars and workshops on this topic are useful, but they wish there were more of them. When conceiving of the Department’s role in helping them with administrative structures, they use a lot of ‘pathfinding’ language, including words like ‘path,’ ‘navigate,’ ‘guide,’ and ‘support.’

“[I had difficulty] finding info through the website, cause there’s just like so much info, it’s just hard to like find, right?”

“ACORN and everything... Everything is just new to us, right? And it’s really important to like get the help we need, because like if we miss our course selection, it’s kinda like... I mean, you can still get, I guess like, some of them, but you’re not guaranteed, right? [...] Even to this year, I’m kind of confused as to like, for example, general course selection or whatnot, like what requirements to complete, or what breadth requirements to cover, or just navigating through the websites is kinda confusing as well, but ... I’ll figure my way [laughter] in the four years I’m here.”

“I feel like if the Department of Student Life gets more out there, I—I might get more help for other stuff. [...] Maybe if they told more about their services, maybe then I could navigate myself to the most...correct?...place where I need help.”

“They showed us around, kind of like an intro to...like an event that they hosted for one day thing? It was in the summer where they showed us like how to go to the website. Maybe more like seminars or whatnot, would be really helpful. Especially for first years, cause like it’s kind of like we’re just thrown in the jungle and we have to find our way out.”

“They have like some good events in terms of what they offer for students. So one of them was like the leadership program, or like the leadership uhh conference or something? [...] First-year students were able to get an opportunity to understand, I guess, perspectives and umm opinions and also like facts about the university from upper year students, so that they can get good feedback, suggestions, and plan out exactly like how they want to umm approach things.”

- **The First Year Experience Program helps first-year students acclimatize, and is one of the best-known Student Life programs.** In general, students find it helpful, but identify issues with both mentor and mentee retention: both mentors and mentees describe incidents of dropped communication from the other party.

“In my first year, I was a first-year mentee, and asked for a mentor. [...] They kind of like guide you with the do’s and don’t’s of first year and like, sort of what to continue on. So, that was helpful.”

“I used to get an email from this mentor that I was paired up with. [...] I think it stopped when I first started university. I haven’t heard from this person again.”

“At the beginning, we signed up or—I’m not sure how I even like got in, but there’s like a mentor student program, where we were paired with a third-year or upper year student, and where we received like weekly emails in the summer from them. Basically like telling us, ‘This is when course selection is,’ and like giving us heads-up to what we should expect, like deadlines and whatnot, but after school started, I don’t think we received anything.... I don’t know, but I felt like those emails were really helpful, and I think I’m pretty sure I signed up to receive emails like after the school year as well, but I don’t know.”

“The First Year Experience Program [...] was good, but not [...] all first years show up. Not only to events, but sometimes they don’t even respond to emails, or like methods of communication, so I think that there could be some way of accepting new first-year students when these students do not answer anymore.”

5) The Hidden Labour of Engagement

While students are interested in hearing about extracurricular opportunities, they do not always have the time and energy to expend in actively seeking out information. Having to balance academics and work as well, they may have limited time to commit even to opportunities that they are interested in. Thus they hope that Co-Curricular Record recognition can be extended to more students, with fewer restrictions, to acknowledge that students are doing what they can.

[Discussing how students hear about events] “I know they have like those tables in [building], but I’m going to class, so I don’t have time to stop.”

“This is something not just with [the Department of Student Life], but even other places at UTSC, like Student Union and whatnot, is that umm everything’s on the website, that’s kind of like what they say. It’s great it’s on the website and stuff for students to know, but even then, not all students are willing to go out of their way to check out the website and things like that....”

“The need [for advocacy for a shuttle] is there, right? Everyone wants it, but with being preoccupied [with] studies and all that, or even just being tired, ugh. Where do I go? Right? What do I do, who do I speak with? And they’re overwhelmed by that.”

“I believe that all mentors should get CCR recognition regardless of the hours they put in, cause all of them have, one way or another, dedicated their time, energy [...] When I was a mentor, it was very hard for me to be at like—and I think it was two or three events—cause I work on campus, I also volunteered on campus, I had other things to do on campus, so I couldn’t always be there on t—like at all. So it doesn’t make sense, just because someone can’t do it, they can’t get CCR. That’s like, that doesn’t make sense at all. So I think all mentors should get CCR regardless of—obviously, if they do nothing at

all, okay—but...like mostly they should—There should be no cap of hours, no cap of attending events.”

Summary

Student knowledge of the Department of Student Life is incomplete. The First Year Experience program is well known, but students are less familiar with many other programs and services; they would appreciate greater visibility, especially since they lack the time and energy to consistently and actively search through all of the information about extracurriculars. At the moment, they hear about the Department of Student Life through several different avenues, including the news board, emails, the website, and word of mouth. Besides promoting its own programs and services more heavily, students also conceive of a greater role for Student Life in helping them navigate the university structure, especially in their first year.

theme three: What Do Students Think of the International Student Centre?

Students readily recognize the International Student Centre, but mistakenly believe it serves only international students. They identify areas in which international students need additional support, which the Centre currently provides or is well poised to provide. When it comes to programs for non-international students, Study Abroad is the most widely known.

Insights

1) Name Misinterpretation

Students are surprised to learn that the International Student Centre provides services to domestic students. Based on the name, they assume that it is for international students only.

“Well...I’ll be honest, I thought it was just for international students. [...] It kind of gives it with the name, right? [...] My assumption with it is that they’re the ones that deal with international students.”

2) International Realities

International students encounter specific struggles in addition to those experienced by all students. They have more complex administrative procedures to deal with, for example study and work permit applications; these situations are high-stakes for them, as they impact their ability to continue their education. Current programming is very helpful in helping them make the right decisions at the right time. On the other hand, fewer opportunities are available to them, as many experiential learning positions are available only to permanent residents and Canadian citizens.

“I went to this ‘International Student something-something’ event with my friend. [...] And just the kind of like information they provided there regarding like study permits, and work permits, and like how you can only get it once...and like advising them on when’s the best time to do it. [...] That was really critical information, right, because if you’re without that support, sometimes when you just go and make decisions on your own, [you make] wrong choices, right? I feel like that kinds of things can have really like great impact on your education as well as your future.”

“[International students] go through a lot more things in terms of like even opportunities being available for them, cause sometimes umm in my program they would email like volunteer things we can do, and internships and stuff like that, and it’d be like only PRs or only citizens.”

3) Global Citizens

Students are familiar with the Summer Abroad and Student Exchange

Programs. They enjoy these opportunities, but think improvements could be made in their promotion. To be confident in their decision to participate, students want to hear about the experiences of many previous students. They also find it difficult to attend the information sessions, which are usually held on the St. George campus.

“I’d rather see the person, see other people, cause to be honest with you, like one student experience [from Summer Abroad], I still wasn’t like entirely convinced. Cause like, okay, you went, you had a great time, but like ... you know? I wanted to see maybe like a town hall or like something about old students who went to the country, and all of them come and share their experiences.”

“Two of my friends worked internationally for their one-year co-op program, so having, for example, let’s say a panel on that, and getting different student feedback on international—on their international experience, then it, it’d be great to have students be able to engage with them.”

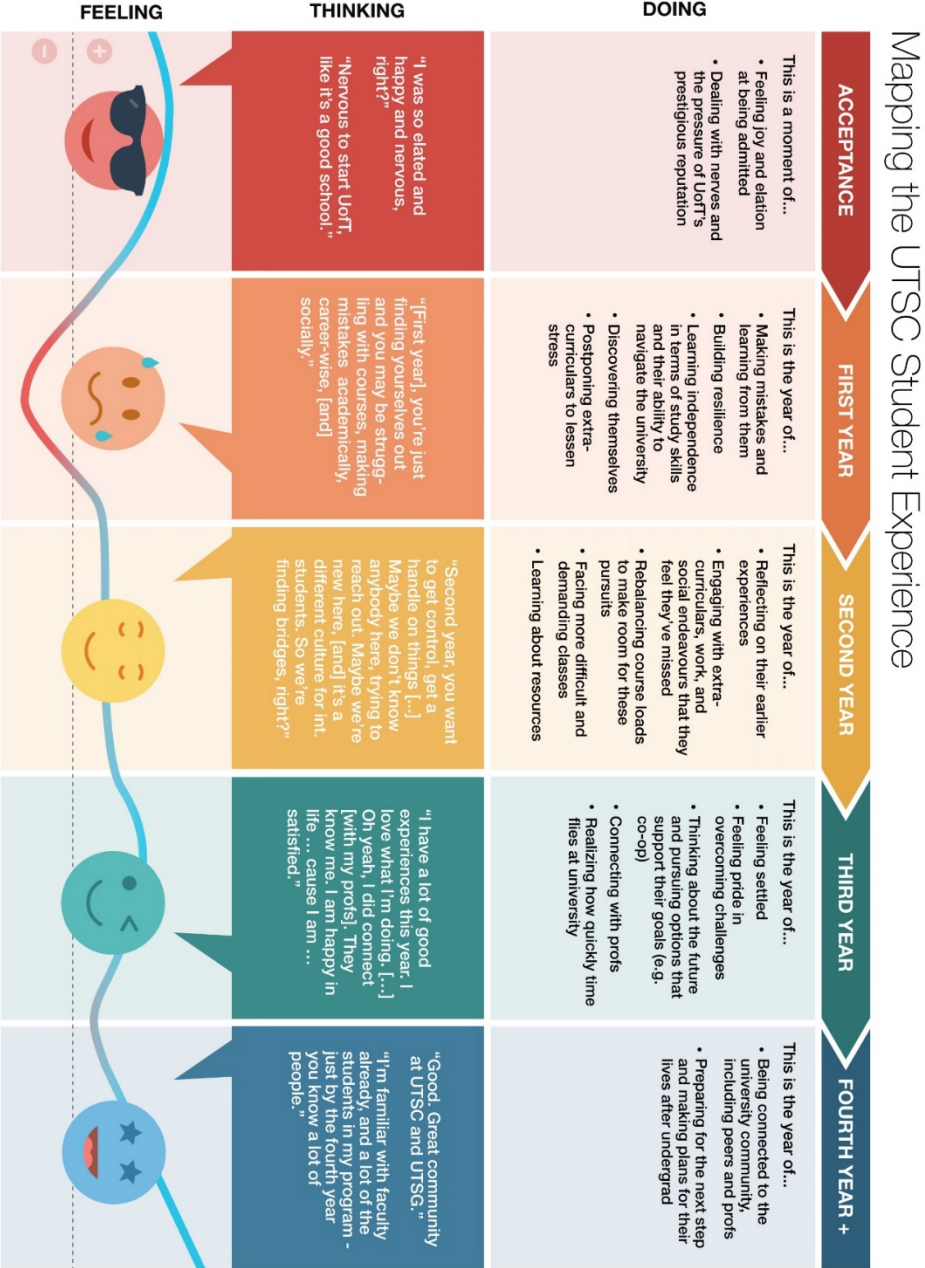
“For Summer Abroad, the information sessions are usually held downtown. That’s a bit ... not like ... it’s inaccessible for UTSC students to go, especially if like I have class just before that, I can’t be there like magic downtown. So something else to have maybe a couple of the Summer Abroad sessions [...] repeated or held at UTSC.”

Summary

Though students are surprised to discover the scope of the International Student Centre’s activities, they are familiar with some of the services provided by the Centre, namely advising for international students and Summer Abroad. They find both these services useful, but they also identify opportunities for improvement: finding more experiential learning opportunities for international students and including more student perspectives in the promotion of Summer Abroad.

journey map

How does a student's 'typical' journey through UTSC look? What are the highlights and challenges they identify; what narratives do they tell themselves about their experiences? On the following page, a Journey Map highlights students' thoughts and feelings throughout the years of their degree.



methods and limitations

The Innovation Hub collected the data for this report through activities and discussions with thirteen UTSC students. The discussions were recorded, transcribed, and anonymized, then coded separately by two to three analysts. The identified insights were assembled into themes, and quotes supporting each insight were provided for evidence and context.

As a small, self-selected sample, the group of participants was not necessarily representative of all UTSC students. All of the participants were undergraduate students, and the sample was skewed slightly towards first years. It is suspected that the upper year students skewed towards highly-involved students with many extracurriculars.

further questions

This report provides an overview of the trajectories, values, and needs of UTSC students—necessarily a broad overview, given the scope of the project and the size and composition of our participant sample. Yet there are outstanding questions that might be worthy of further study:

- How do experiences differ between undergraduate, graduate, and professional students?
- How do experiences differ for ‘non-traditional’ students, e.g., mature students, or students with families?
- How do students build community and engagement in student unions, clubs, and societies? Could those methods be adapted to university-run programs?
- The participant sample for this project was slightly skewed towards early year students. What different kinds of support do upper year students require?

conclusion

Through activities and discussions, UTSC students reveal how they learn about the services of the Department of Student Life and International Student Centre and the kind of content they seek. They value visibility, clarity, and responsive communication. Currently, especially among first years, knowledge of the Department of Student Life is limited, but students are curious and identify places where the Department could play a larger role: helping first-year students navigate course selection and other administrative hurdles, providing more experiential learning opportunities for international students, and collaborating with student clubs and societies.

Student participation in—and enjoyment of—student life programming depends upon how it meets their values. They are searching for experiential learning opportunities, both to build their resumes and to broaden their horizons; chances to network and develop relationships with other students; ways to provide service; and value for money. They also struggle for balance between academics, extracurriculars, work, and health.

The data reveal opportunities to improve student engagement: by increasing visibility, clarifying communications, and providing students with administrative support and activities that speak to their values. By meeting students where they are, with what they seek, the Department of Student Life and International Student Centre can build stronger, more productive relationships with its students.

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