

The Big Idea. . .

Based on the student needs identified by the Fostering Connectedness Domain team, the U of T Concierge could act as an initial contact point for wayfinding and referrals. The concierge could also have an online component.

Needs . . .

- Need for a space/location where one feels welcomed/connected to the university directly
- Need for information/guidance with a human face
- Need for a centralized repository of information that is directly accessible while on campus

Insights . . .

- **Wayfinding and knowledge management are incredibly challenging in a large, decentralized institution**

“I feel lost. I think I don’t know what I’m doing. I feel that I wasn’t going to do well.... I doubt myself and am not sure I can do it. I seek a lot of help from the Internet and YouTube.” – 1st year International Student (Refugee)

“The Information at U of T is everywhere.... I was overloaded with all the information at U of T. I got emails from different departments” – Graduate Student

- **Students express a deep need to find community and connection at the university**

“Regardless of the topic area, the biggest need of students is to belong to a community. Not a good question, because I interact with highly involved students who are already engaged in help-seeking. A better question would be: What are the needs of students who are not coming to us? The answer is still community.” - Staff Member

- **Communications at U of T can be confusing for students and are perceived by students as one-sided**

“The communication between U of T and students is rather one way than two ways. The university always [sent] us some information and that was it. They do not know how we felt about it or what we did about it.” – Graduate Student

“We offer more resources at U of T than any other university, but we don’t communicate it well” – Staff Member

- **When students find a helpful person, they usually find a next step**

“With [staff member], she is really great, and she always pointed me to the right direction. Nevertheless, without her help, I could hardly find information that I needed.” – Graduate Student

Comprehensive Database of Information

We spent a lot of time discussing, both amongst our team and with stakeholders, the value of a comprehensive database as the knowledge engine behind a U of T Concierge. Our research concluded that:

- Wayfinding and navigation of U of T's services, as well as answers to questions, are a challenge for both students and staff members alike. Everyone is struggling to find the right information.
- Google is the top resource used to find information, yet the Internet often contains broken links and incorrect information.
- Developing and maintaining a database of all of this information is a huge undertaking and would require collaboration and resources across many areas in a large, complex, and decentralized university.
- Even if a database was to be successfully built and populated, information would be outdated within minutes.

Conclusion: U of T students, staff and faculty will benefit if a comprehensive knowledge management system is built to support referrals for student needs in all areas. However, the information should not be so granular that it requires constant updating, and a system alone does not replace the need for human interaction. Whether or not the university decides to move forward with a comprehensive centralized knowledge management system, there is a cost to incorrect information (or broken links) on the website. We suggest that U of T launch a usability study on wayfinding specifically as it relates to online information and develop a feedback loop whereby users can report wrong information and/or broken links for correction.

Recommendation - A Helpful Person

We found that an important area of focus for U of T Concierge is to create ways for students to access a helpful person at any time.

This starts by creating a culture of service at the University of Toronto.

More research is needed to explore how students can consistently access a helpful person at any time to help them find a next step for their problem. Once established, this support can help not only current students, but also prospective students and community members. We recommend the following next steps:

- The university should allocate resources to complete a more in-depth analysis of the following areas:
 - a) Explore existing U of T wayfinding programs (e.g., ASKme, UTSU's help desk, ASK a Librarian, the Hart House Hub). What is working about these programs, and where are the gaps/opportunities?
 - b) Explore what allows a front-line staff member to go above and beyond to help a student. How can this be encouraged? What are some of the barriers?
 - c) How can U of T foster a culture of service that ensures that any student has access to a helpful person at any time?
- The university should explore models such as the City of Toronto's 311 model and @ttchelps for inspiration