



March 2023

# The Arts & Science Identity:

Design Research to Support the Sidney Smith Hall Redevelopment

# Introduction

Home to many classrooms, laboratories, and offices, Sidney Smith Hall at the University of Toronto (U of T) has served students as the heart of the Faculty of Arts & Science for over six decades. Built in 1961 and housing the largest division at the University of Toronto with over 30,000 students<sup>1</sup>, the Arts & Science community has continued to grow rapidly. Recognizing the importance of providing students, faculty, and staff with a transformative space for innovative learning, teaching, and research, the redevelopment is a remarkable opportunity to meet the needs of the growing and evolving community more strongly. We hope this report will inform the redevelopment of the new Faculty of Arts & Science landmark to a state-of-the-art facility focused on principles such as inclusion, diversity, and sustainability.

## Methods



At the Innovation Hub, **we strive to understand the university communities' experiences, as told to us through their stories, and allow that understanding to inspire design.** In conversations with students, staff, and faculty, we explore the 'problem space' in all its textures—moving beyond the *what* questions to the underlying *whys* and *hows*—rather than jumping to solutions. To understand holistic experiences, we encourage students, staff, and faculty to describe their experiences to us in their own words. We want our understanding to be authentic and comprehensive. Thus, we seek diverse participants, focus on meeting community members as equals, and encourage them to speak in depth about their experiences.

In the summer of 2022, we **conducted stakeholder interviews**, speaking to **19 student staff and leaders, faculty members, and staff members** about their experiences in Sidney Smith Hall and perspectives about being part of the Faculty of Arts & Science. In the fall of 2022, we initiated a widespread call for participants for an event titled “Tell Us About Your Experiences at Sidney Smith Hall” across various communication channels. We received interest from **194 students, staff, faculty, and alumni.**

The Innovation Hub then hosted **five open dialogue and interactive feedback sessions using empathetic and story-based methods for data collection** to learn about student, staff, and faculty experiences at Sidney Smith Hall. We invited community members from various levels of study, disciplines, and divisions within the Faculty. A total of **32 students and 4 staff and faculty members** attended the sessions.

In the winter of 2023, we collaborated with community members and subject matter experts to host topic-focus sessions. We first hosted **two topic-focused sessions**, “Designing with Accessibility in Mind.” We spoke to **20 students who identify as having a disability** to hear about experiences in Sidney Smith Hall, campus spaces, and their desires for accessible spaces. Next, we hosted **1 topic-focused session** called “Indigenous Spaces at Sidney Smith” and heard from **4 Indigenous students and staff** to hear their perspectives about Indigenous spaces and Indigenous values in spaces on campus and beyond campus.

Our data set was transcribed and de-identified and included the interview and feedback session transcripts and short answer question responses.

We examined the data using grounded analytical techniques to gain a deeper understanding of the core needs of students, staff, and faculty and developed a vision based on our insights. We synthesized stories participants shared into personas to bring their needs to life. We also developed detailed design principles to guide the future steps in the redevelopment of Sidney Smith Hall.

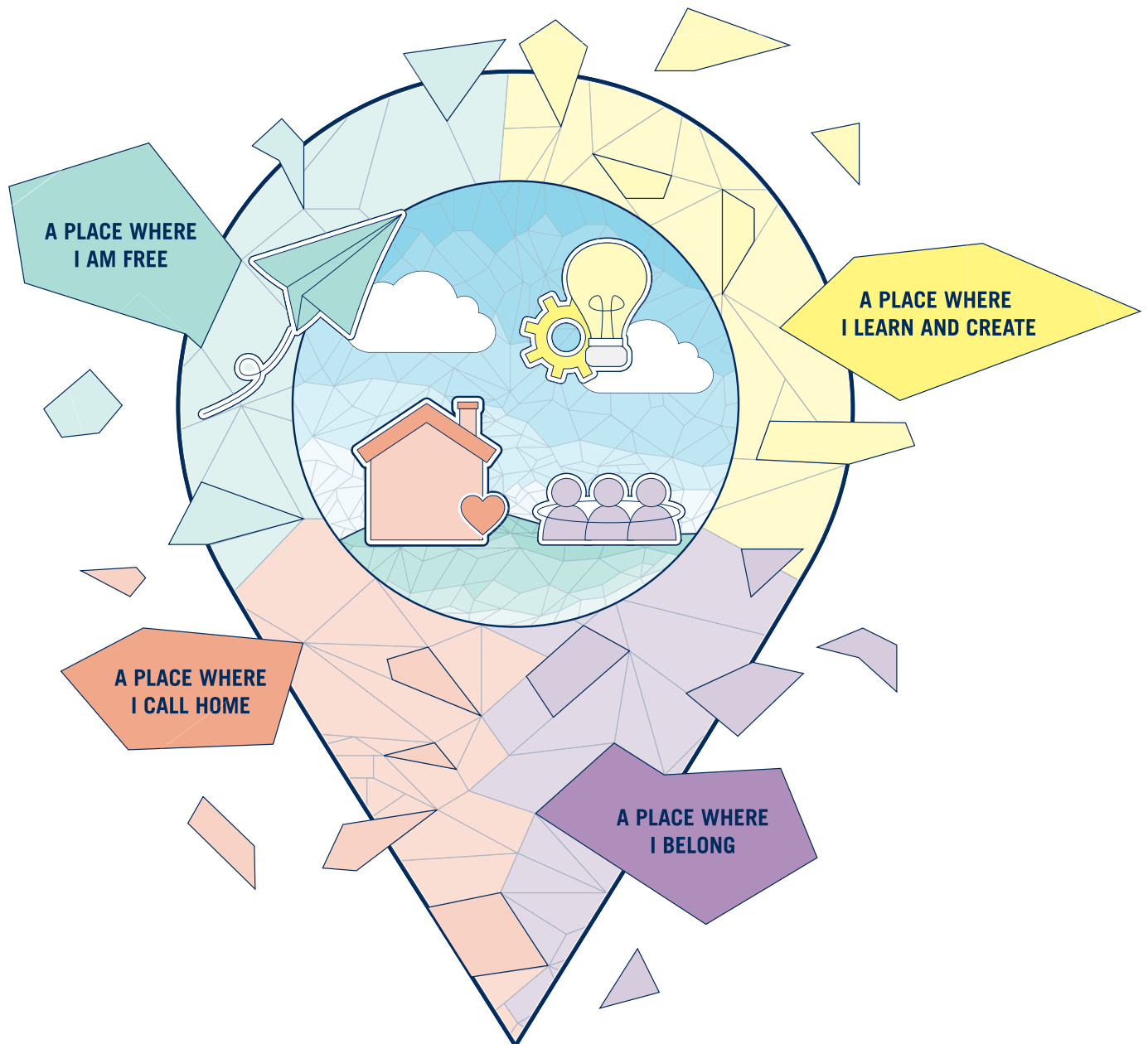
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[1] University of Toronto Faculty of Arts & Science. (n.d.). *By the Numbers*. <https://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/about/glance/numbers>

# Our Findings

## **Vision:** Sidney Smith is the embodied identity of the Faculty of Arts and Science.

We found that each student, staff, and faculty member wants to find a home in a large university system. Each individual appreciates being part of a multidisciplinary and lively community at the Faculty of Arts & Science but also wants their unique identity recognized. Students, staff, and faculty referenced Sidney Smith Hall's potential to be more accessible to welcome and celebrate the entire community. Students, staff, and faculty expressed eagerness to connect with peers in the building to learn from each other and feel inspired in their own lives. Sidney Smith Hall is well positioned to be a place that is home to community members and an iconic landmark for the Faculty of Arts & Science.



# A Place Where I Call Home



## Freedom to be Me

Students' experiences in the building reveal a desire for **self-expression and for their surroundings to reflect their beliefs and cultural heritage**. When there are spaces that welcome religious and cultural diversity, students feel included, respected, and represented. Students want to feel like their individuality is celebrated and welcomed in a large community like Sidney Smith Hall and the Faculty of Arts & Science.

- Several students reported that the cultural artwork in the Sidney Smith Student Commons and the Pride decorations on the Huron patios made them feel welcomed in Sidney Smith Hall and represented in the Faculty of Arts & Science.
- A student shared that they appreciated having physical spaces for individual religious practices in colleges and wished to have them in Sidney Smith Hall and other high-traffic, non-college spaces.

## Finding My Home Base

Students, staff, and faculty expressed a desire to feel like they have a **home base on campus that can serve as a reliable starting point** to rest and recharge or connect with peers. Students, staff, and faculty shared that they tend to feel lost within a large and decentralized university system and want to feel supported and connected with their peers while navigating the university campus during their day-to-day activities.

- Students shared that they appreciate having a go-to space on campus as it allows them to gain a sense of belonging through space, and it improves their on-campus experiences. A student mentioned that having a space on campus like the Sidney Smith Student Commons makes the university experience feel “less daunting” to them as the space feels familiar and like a “home base” on campus.
- Several students shared positive sentiments about belonging to a faculty home to various disciplines and communities. They also shared that they sometimes struggle to find a sense of community within the Faculty. Students feel that the Faculty is quite large and wish for a sense of community they perceive faculties with fewer disciplines to have, like Rotman or engineering.
- A faculty member recounted their undergraduate experience as they reflected on student spaces in the building and voiced their appreciation for spaces they had when they were a student that allowed them to connect with friends, eat, and relax in a central place. The faculty member acknowledged that most students do not have access to such a space but wished for more spaces to provide students with a sense of familiarity and belonging.

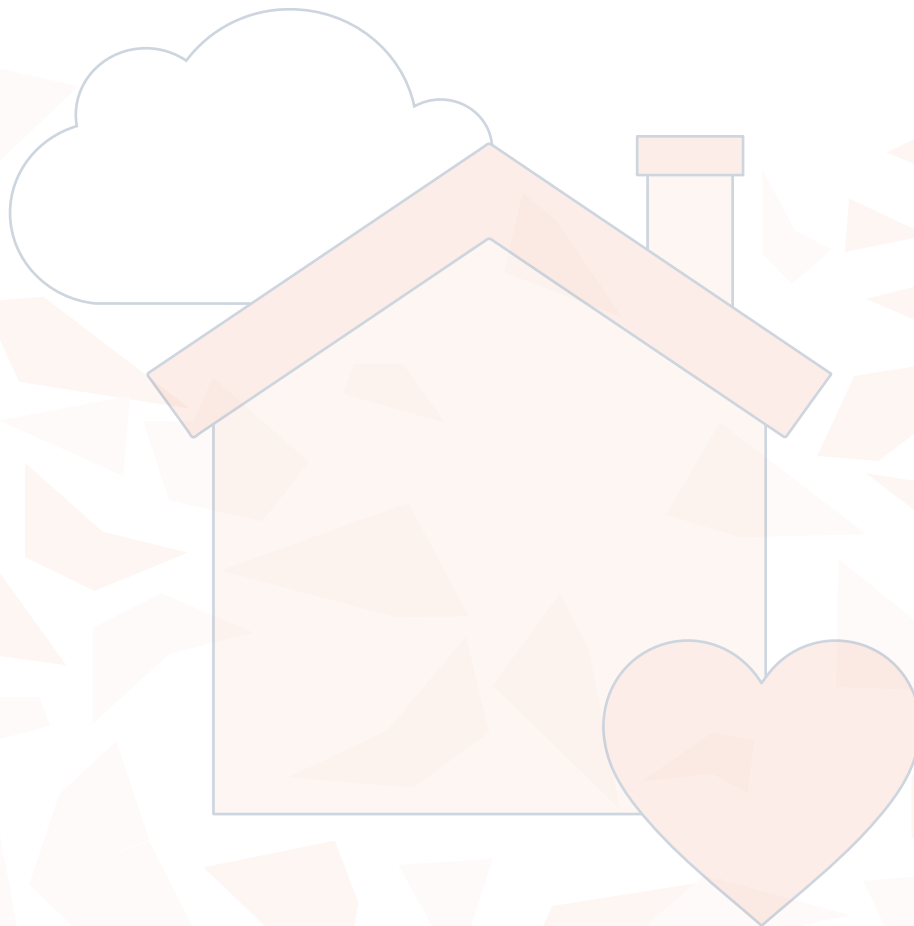
# A Place Where I Call Home



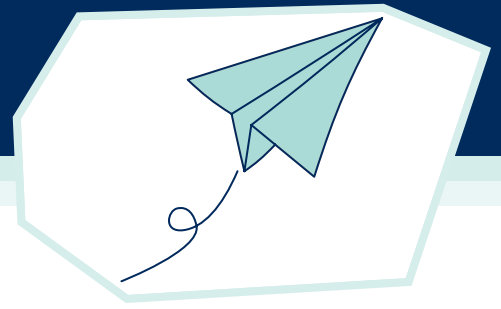
## The Space to be Vulnerable

Students expressed the desire to **show vulnerability and share their uncertainties while finding the support they need**. Students shared their insecurities about asking for guidance from faculty and staff in their upper years. Students felt that because they had been at the university for several years, there was now an expectation for them to understand the workings of the university.

- Students often felt overwhelmed and confused while navigating the university's complex system for advice and resources. One student shared that they felt embarrassed attending events that they felt were directed to younger academic years. The student expressed that as an upper year student, they felt like they were expected to already know about these resources and expected to find the resources themselves. The student mentioned how nice it would be for a space to welcome them and provide guidance no matter how long they have been at the university.
- Another student said they wished more events would be hosted at Sidney Smith, so students could continue to be engaged with the space beyond orientation week. The students also suggested events would be an effective way to learn about the resources available at Sidney Smith.



# A Place Where I Am Free



## Safety in Familiarity

Student and staff stories consistently demonstrate the importance of feeling **safe and confident within a space**. Students expressed that they have sometimes felt fear, frustration, and confusion when navigating Sidney Smith Hall. Students and staff shared a desire for a consistent and predictable environment to feel comfortable. When feeling safe and comfortable, students, staff, and faculty can concentrate all their energy on their work and academic responsibilities.

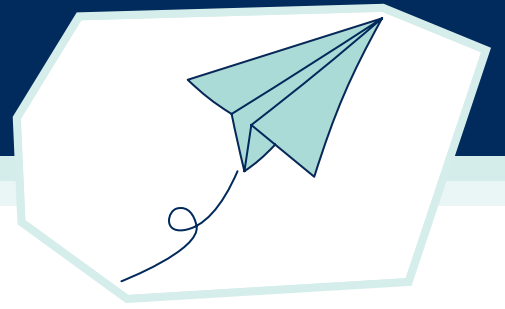
- A student shared an experience of getting lost in the basement inside Sidney Smith for 10 minutes. The student felt scared and confused because they could not find the way out, as they could not find orienting points, and no natural light was coming in. The student shared a desire for a more intuitive layout that would help them feel safe and confident in all spaces.
- Students shared that they appreciate Sidney Smith Hall for its central location on campus. Students spoke highly of campus buildings that they felt were centrally located as they could spend time there in between their classes or other responsibilities. Students also shared that centrally located buildings that housed amenities like ample sitting spaces, spots for food, and accessible washrooms enhanced their experiences in the space because they could confidently rely on having access to the spaces and features they needed to be productive.
- One staff member talked about feeling overloaded by the sounds, posters, and crowded spaces when entering the Sidney Smith Hall lobby. The staff member shared their strategy of relying on “tunnel vision” to leave the lobby quickly and focus on finding their destination in the building. The staff member wanted to feel calm and focused in the space to benefit from everything it offers.

## Finding My Agency

Student stories expressed a desire to be more **self-sufficient and in control of their day-to-day activities**. Students shared that they feel overly dependent on and intrusive to staff around Sidney Smith Hall when trying to find their way through the building. Students want to have a sense of self-efficacy when navigating Sidney Smith Hall to feel more confident and independent while in the building.

- Students shared that they tend to stay in the spaces in Sidney Smith Hall they are already familiar with in the building and said that if they become lost, they must go back through the entire building to find their way again or memorize a specific path to find one of their classrooms without bothering staff members. Becoming lost in the building and memorizing specific pathways creates a feeling of frustration and embarrassment for students.
- A staff member said that while they enjoy assisting students who need help finding their way around the building, it can be difficult to do this when they have other responsibilities that must be completed before their scheduled meetings.

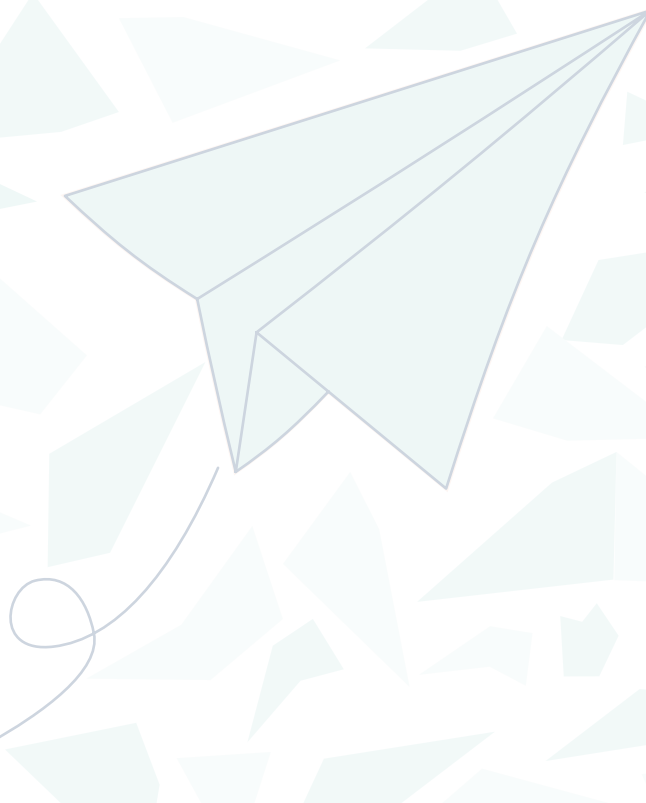
# A Place Where I Am Free



## I Can Access What I Need

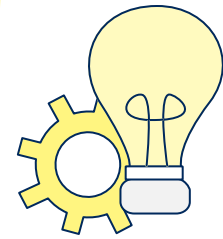
Students and staff members emphasized the importance of **accessibility in the university's physical and online infrastructure**. Both students and staff expressed frustration in finding and gaining access to spaces and resources that support their activities in Sidney Smith Hall. Student and staff stories demonstrated that challenges in finding what they need can lead to a sense of being overlooked and a loss of confidence in their ability to exist in Sidney Smith comfortably. Students and staff desire to feel that their needs are considered and respected.

- Students expressed wanting to see more reliable means of entering the building. Students shared experiences of having trouble accessing the building because the ramp is far from the main entrance and reported that the automatic door openers do not work consistently. Students expressed wanting Sidney Smith to be accessible like other new U of T buildings so they can feel confident using spaces on campus.
- Some students wished for more physical accessibility within Sidney Smith Hall to feel more independent and confident during their time in the building. Students' stories expressed a desire for more accessible ways of entering and exiting classrooms, like wider aisles between tables and desks.
- Students expressed feeling confused when navigating resources in the Faculty while also being part of a college. Students' stories showed that being part of multiple communities can cause uncertainty about whom to turn to and what resources they can access. One student shared that while trying to get support, they felt like they were stuck going back and forth between the Faculty and their college and wished for more clarity about who could best support them.





# A Place Where I Can Learn & Create



## Levelling the Playing Field for Exploration

Students and faculty members expressed their desire to feel they **belong in spaces by having their perspectives equally valued**, regardless of discipline or department. Students and faculty feel that supporting equality between all building members could foster new interactions that stimulate exploration and cooperation. Fostering new interactions can open the potential for new cross-disciplinary relationships and reduce system hierarchies.

- Several students shared that more opportunities to connect with other members of the Faculty can lead to establishing peer connections and building their sense of community. Students shared that they feel like there are lots of events happening in Sidney Smith Hall and feel like they are great opportunities to meet people but are only sometimes aware of them after they occur or when they happen to come across them while in the building. Students wish to know more ways to connect with others and establish strong peer connections.
- Students who belong to multiple programs of study shared with us that they feel the access to resources and overall experience in the Faculty depended on their program. Students appreciate the different supports and services they can access but wish to feel like they can succeed no matter the community they belong to in the Faculty.
- A faculty member shared that they felt like they formed important connections as a student in central campus spaces like a dining hall. The faculty member shared that the space brought together people from across different disciplines and hoped that this form of exploration and enrichment of cross-disciplinary interactions could be encouraged by the Faculty of Arts & Science to create new knowledge.

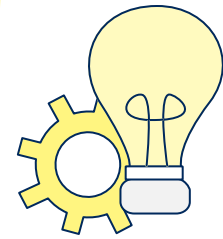
## Relationships That Shape My Future Identity

Students, staff, and faculty expressed the desire to **learn and grow from the diverse perspectives around them** to build meaningful relationships that they can carry forward in their lives. Connecting with peers and colleagues with diverse backgrounds can be a source of inspiration for learning and creating in their own lives. Students, staff, and faculty shared that learning more from those around them are experiences that can support positive change within themselves.

- Students, staff, and faculty working in Sidney Smith Hall told us that they could form better relationships with their colleagues when they work in person than when they work online. Individuals in the Faculty spend more time getting to know each other and eventually evolve their work relationships into friendships.
- A student shared that they feel like the Faculty encourages them to bring their perspective and grow by learning from the environment around them. The student shared that while the Faculty brings together many different programs, they are similar in that all disciplines are creative and have the possibility for lively and diverse connections.
- A student shared how they conducted research and expressed a sense of pride from being a part of the Faculty of Arts & Science, enabling them to create positive changes around them. The student shared their appreciation for the opportunities to engage in meaningful research in collaboration with supportive professors. The student felt inspired by how the Faculty builds on the diversity of ideas to innovate.



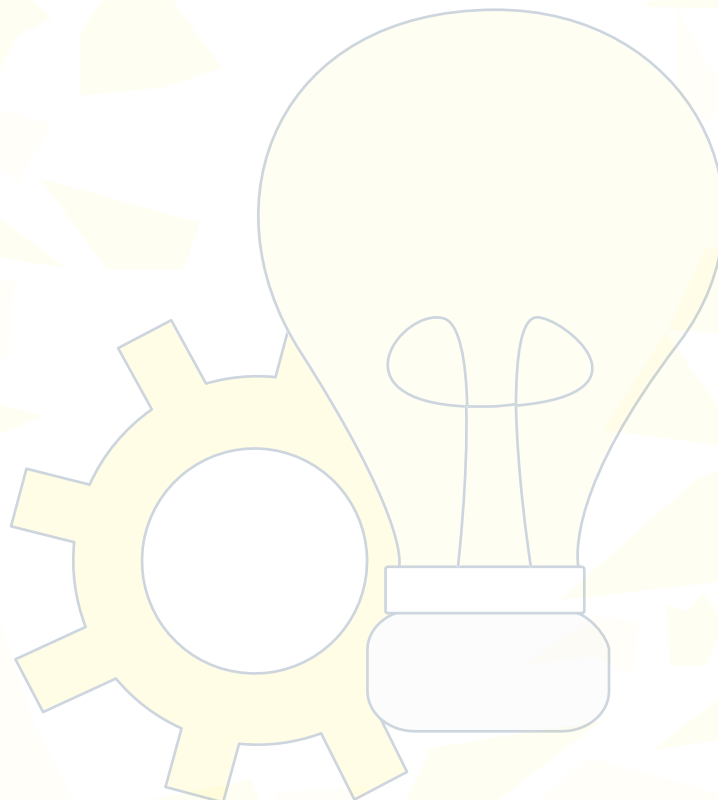
# A Place Where I Can Learn & Create



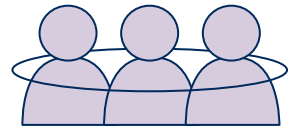
## Inspiration Empowers

Students expressed a common desire for **campus spaces to promote positive feelings of independence and self-assurance**. Students reported feelings of frustration and disappointment related to the inconveniences of spaces and amenities within Sidney Smith Hall. Students desire a barrier-free learning environment so they can confidently take the lead to make purposeful decisions about their learning paths.

- Students shared that they look for spaces on campus that allow them to comfortably exist according to their varied schedules, as they have the freedom to work towards their academic goals in a way that works for them. A commuter student shared that they preferred studying in other buildings over Sidney Smith that can supply better access to technology and allows for studying late into the evening hours.
- Another student highlighted the positive impact of the Myhal Centre for Engineering Innovation and Entrepreneurship's design on setting the mood for an environment designed to promote academic success. The student shared how a well-engineered space for learning promotes an atmosphere of focus and seriousness that is shared among all the users and encourages them to work.
- A staff member reported observing students using hallways and sitting on the ground in between classes. In their interpretation, they were being forced to use that space due to the lack of access to dedicated spaces.



# A Place Where I Belong



## Individuality is Celebrated

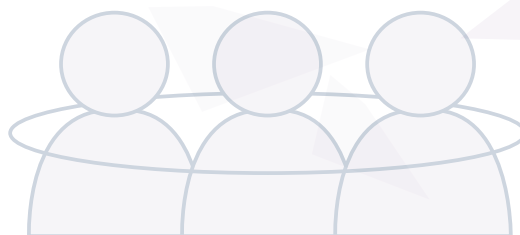
Student stories showed that they wish **to be seen as a valuable and distinctive part of a larger mosaic** in the community. Students want to embrace their unique backgrounds and perspectives within the community. Students shared that seeing their individuality being celebrated and embraced makes them feel welcome, included, and represented in Sidney Smith Hall and the Faculty of Arts & Science.

- Several students shared their appreciation for how the Faculty of Arts & Science encompasses a diversity of interests. A student highlighted interdisciplinarity as something that unifies the students of the community and makes them strongly identify with their respective programs and the broader Faculty. Students appreciate that innovative and exciting work is being done across all disciplines in their own way and that everyone can be their unique selves without needing to fit in under one label.
- Students expressed how finding small and specialized communities that aligned with their program of study or interests helped them feel seen in a large faculty and campus. One student mentioned how they like to join various student groups to connect with others over similar interests but reported feeling disconnected from the Arts & Science Student Union (ASSU) because they find it broad and challenging to find more information about how it relates to them.

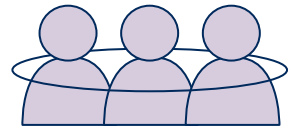
## Serendipitous Connections

Students, faculty, and staff highlighted their **appreciation for spontaneous encounters** within Sidney Smith Hall. These unexpected encounters with people from diverse backgrounds spark the journey of self-discovery that is not often found in classrooms and inspires meaning in everyday life. Students, staff, and faculty discover a connection to the community by creating new friendships through these meaningful chance encounters.

- A faculty member mentioned that since the pandemic, they appreciated the importance of spontaneous conversations with others in the corridors and expressed a desire for a communal hangout gathering area, whether in the stairwells or the corridor, where they can have more opportunities to connect and reconnect with others in the building.
- A student shared that they valued small daily moments, such as waiting for their coffee at the Second Cup on the main floor and suddenly striking up a conversation with a fellow student whom they had never spoken to before about their course lecture.



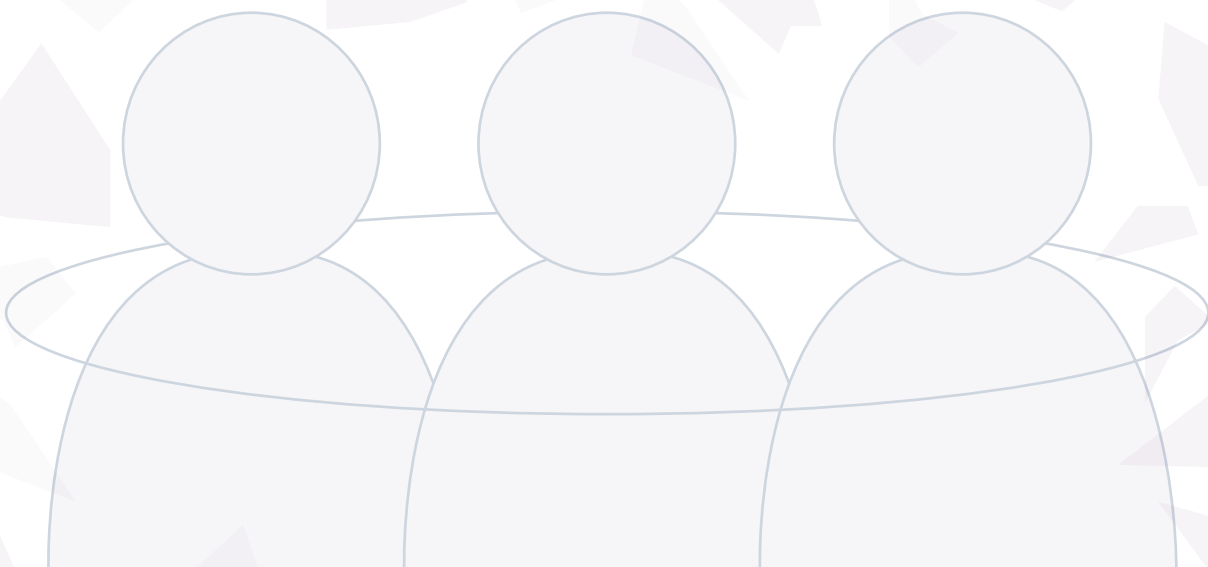
# A Place Where I Belong



## Meaning is Co-Created

Students and faculty expressed the need to **enrich their experiences in everyday routine through moments that spark possibilities for the future**. Both students and faculty appreciate the opportunity to form lasting memories in various locations throughout the building through shared activities and bonding experiences. Despite its central location on campus, student stories demonstrated that the Arts & Science building is often seen as a pass-through area by many students who casually use it for classes or points of reference on campus. The students wish to use the building as a central hub that strengthens connections within the Arts & Science community.

- Students shared with us the challenges of finding connections to a large community. Students appreciate being part of a faculty with a diverse community and would like to find the sense of connection they have to other small communities they are part of.
- Student stories showed that when students have meaningful uses for spaces on campus, they establish a connection to spaces that invites them to return to the space. For example, a student shared how they gravitate towards buildings such as OISE (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education) because they liked that all their classes, library, and a cafe are in the same building. The student also shared that frequently using the space led them to interact with familiar faces, creating a sense of community.
- A faculty member expressed that the current building feels like a busy train station rather than a place where people want to stay, and this impacts students' ability to feel "grounded" in space and feel a sense of belonging.



# Insights from Students with Disabilities



## Living Unapologetically

Students expressed a desire to be able to **prioritize their physical and emotional well-being freely in physical spaces**. Students shared that they often worry about being bothersome to others for using building features or accommodations that allow them to use building spaces comfortably. Students explained how they feel like taking certain steps to accommodate their use of space can draw attention or judgement from those around them. Which students shared leaves them feeling pressured to disclose their disability, explain their need for accommodation, or feel discouraged from using accommodations.

- Several students talked about how using building features or accessing accommodations can draw attention to themselves, discouraging them from using it entirely, even though it may make their use of space more accommodating. One student shared that they have an accommodation to leave the classroom during class to take breaks, but they find it difficult to use in some Sidney Smith classrooms because they need to navigate through narrow rows of tables and chairs. The student expressed that they feel like they are disrupting every person in the row they need to pass by, making them feel like they do not want to leave the classroom.
- Another student shared that before they arrive at a building, they think about how they will navigate the space and the path to their destination. They consider things like proximity to the elevators, the functioning of automatic doors, and if the space will be congested. The student explained how their disability is not visible, so they feel judged by others when they use accommodations. It sometimes leaves them feeling stigmatized and discouraged from using building features that can make their time in the building more comfortable.
- One student shared that they were shocked about the number of doors in Sidney Smith Hall. They expressed feeling “in the way” when using the door buttons, as they sometimes opened slowly and felt like they were making other people wait.

## Being a part of, not apart from

Students shared that it was important for them to feel **fully integrated into the student community around them when using physical spaces**. Students reported having access to accommodations or accessible spaces in Sidney Smith Hall is helpful, but using accommodations in the building sometimes made them feel singled out from their peers. Students reported that when only certain areas of physical spaces accommodate them, they expressed feeling uncomfortable as they felt like they were being separated from their peers based on their disability.

- Students shared that they do not want to feel singled out from their peers for having to use spaces in a way that can accommodate their use. For example, one student spoke about how the linked chairs found in some classrooms were not accessible to them. The student explained that in these classrooms, they must sit at the front of the room, away from their friends and peers.
- One student shared that they are left-handed, and the small tables attached to chairs is inaccessible for them to use. The student shared that classroom features like this contribute to how inaccessible classroom spaces can be for them, and they feel pressured to disclose their disability to group mates and instructors because it might interfere with how they participate.
- Students expressed that the Sidney Smith building feels closed off to people who may not fit the “standard” body. Students spoke about how building design can consider how people with various abilities may use space to ensure everyone can feel seen when navigating physical spaces. For example, students mentioned that the first-floor classrooms are not accessible for individuals using wheelchairs or other accessible vehicles due to the narrow doors.

# Insights from Students with Disabilities

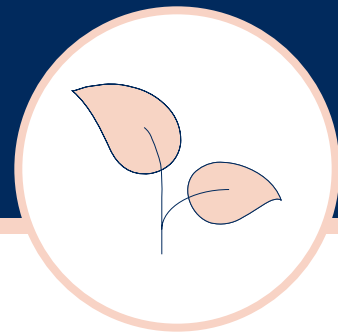


## Beyond the Checklist

Students shared that they want to feel **like their needs are recognized and valued throughout the design process of physical spaces**. Students emphasized that the current approach to accessibility often relies on a checklist of requirements, which they explained is not enough to address their needs fully. Students expressed disappointment that their needs are sometimes considered an afterthought and highlighted the importance of a more inclusive space design approach that values their unique experiences and perspectives.

- Students spoke about how there can sometimes be a clash between features of spaces designed to accommodate various users and other values when designing, like safety. For example, students shared that although there is a ramp leading to the entrance of Sidney Smith, they find the fire doors very heavy and difficult to open, which makes the entrance to the building inaccessible for many students.
- Several students commonly expressed feeling like the building was designed with only non-disabled individuals in mind. A student shared how they feel frustrated and confused by the layout of the building, particularly the lack of accessibility around the main entrances of Sidney Smith due to the multiple sets of stairs surrounding the building and the distances between stairs and elevators within the building.
- Other students spoke about appreciating the accessible bathrooms on the first floor of the building but noticed the lack of accessible bathrooms on the second floor and expressed that it made them feel like users that may need accessible washrooms were not considered when designing this area of the building.
- Students spoke about experiencing challenges when locating certain spaces in the building, like quieter areas or washrooms. Students explained that they tried to use maps, but the unclear signage and lack of information to navigate the building left them feeling disoriented, and like the building layout was too difficult to find what they needed.

# Insights from Indigenous Community Members



## Intentionality is Inclusive

Indigenous students and staff expressed the desire to see **Indigenous culture and values intentionally incorporated into the design of physical spaces**. Students and staff shared that they feel disconnected from buildings that only implement elements of Indigenous culture after awareness has been raised about highlighting Indigenous culture. The students and staff explained that they sometimes feel left out of the decision-making process and that including Indigenous culture was an afterthought involving limited consultation with Indigenous community members on campus. Students and staff shared the need for Indigenous culture to be acknowledged in campus spaces and recognized at the conception of spaces.

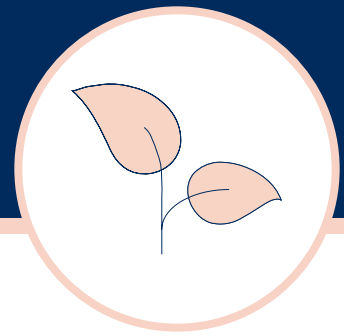
- Students and staff expressed that they sometimes did not feel acknowledged in spaces on campus, even if Indigenous culture was highlighted in those spaces. Students and staff explained that while spaces can add artworks and symbols later upon feedback, designs like low ceilings and overly sensitive smoke detectors preventing cultural activities like smudging are harder to add afterwards. Students and staff shared that they wished for considerations like this and ongoing consultations with Indigenous community members on campus to be recognized in the design process so they can comfortably use spaces that meet their needs.
- Students shared the importance of having dedicated spaces for Indigenous students to use on campus. Students described how creating a space or having dedicated times for only Indigenous people can allow them to feel comfortable accessing the space whenever they need, see familiar faces, and engage in cultural activities like smudging without worry. A student highlighted how in these dedicated spaces it would be important to clearly communicate times when spaces are meant for the exclusive use of Indigenous community members so that Indigenous people do not have to constantly explain the protocols to potential non-Indigenous users of the space.
- Students said they would like to see more Indigenous artwork in campus spaces. Students explained that displaying artwork created by Indigenous artists, and not necessarily strictly Indigenous-styled artwork, around the building can highlight Indigenous culture and encourage learning from the broader campus community.

## Seen But Not Isolated

Student and staff stories demonstrated a desire for **Indigenous culture and values to be more visible within the Sidney Smith building and the broader U of T community**. Some stories highlighted feelings of uncertainty when navigating the university and having trouble finding community and a sense of belonging in campus spaces. Students expressed their wish to see the central location of Sidney Smith utilized to help amplify Indigenous culture and values to help increase the visibility of Indigenous culture and allow Indigenous community members to have more spaces where they can feel a sense of belonging.

- Students shared that public displays of Indigenous culture in central locations can increase the visibility of Indigenous communities and encourage dialogue around Indigenous history and culture on campus. For example, one student suggested that campus spaces consider investing in art and public murals from Indigenous artists in the community and including them in campus spaces.
- Students shared that including plaques near Indigenous art or information plaques that include different Indigenous languages in campus spaces to help promote learning about Indigenous culture would be valuable to enhance representation and awareness.

# Insights from Indigenous Community Members



## Active Exploration

Indigenous students expressed a desire to **prioritize their personal growth and emotional well-being, both academically and emotionally**. Students shared that they feel the university is not built to support and acknowledge their presence in campus spaces fully. Students shared that they sometimes feel obligated to answer questions and explain their culture to non-Indigenous people, which can lead to feelings of exhaustion and discomfort. Students emphasized that fully considering Indigenous values when building space and promoting their culture through self-guided learning can help alleviate this burden. Students' stories show that considering Indigenous values when designing spaces can help them feel respected from the start in a space and help them focus on their own growth and development.

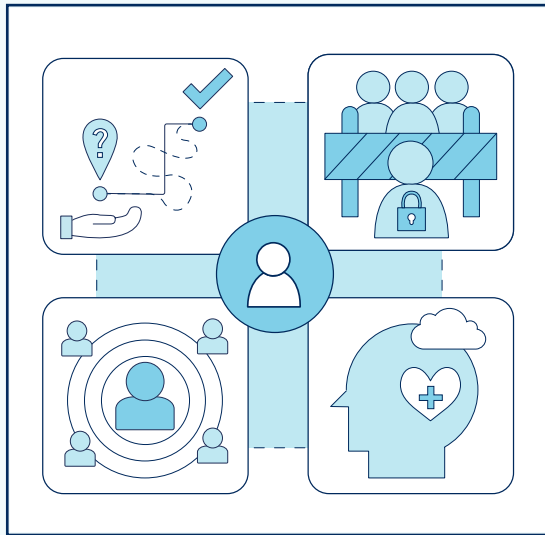
- Students shared that spaces that promote Indigenous culture and knowledge can be valuable for increasing the visibility of Indigenous culture and representation. Students explained how it could promote opportunities for the broader community to engage in self-exploration while also possibly encouraging Indigenous community members to embrace their culture.
- A student spoke to the potential value of including a library with books on Indigenous history and culture by serving as an opportunity to encourage students to educate themselves and become more aware of Indigenous culture. Students explained that this could alleviate some of the pressure from Indigenous students having to explain themselves to others. The student elaborated that there would be potential for specific theme book days that could bring about a spontaneous engaging learning experience.
- A student mentioned that the emotional labour for students to educate the student community on their culture can be daunting. The student shared that murals, such as the one in the John Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape, and Design building, can help start conversations and potential learning journeys amongst non-Indigenous students without placing the onus on Indigenous students to educate others constantly. The students stated that they wished campus spaces included more pieces like this when designing university spaces.



# Personas

Personas bring stories to life by presenting narratives based on peoples' experiences. Each story is assembled from several interviews, which allows us to offer a collective view of the data, highlighting recurring themes, and to personalize the insights, encouraging designers to take community members' perspectives, while maintaining anonymity.

## Pranlal, a second-year student registered with Accessibility Services



**I am a student registered with Accessibility Services. I guess I always lead with that information because it's mentally exhausting to always have to explain my disability and my individual accessibility needs to everyone.** I have a mobility issue which means I need buildings to be barrier-free and easy to navigate.

My home faculty is Arts & Science and most of my classes are at Sidney Smith. It's not always the easiest building to navigate and sometimes I feel like I am not a part of the community because I feel like it was not designed for students with accessibility needs in mind.

While the rest of my friends can easily and quickly walk up the stairs to the main entrance, I have to go all around from the ramp and then exit out of the main building

from the side to access the same area. The distance makes me feel like I'm separated from the rest of the Arts & Science community. With my mobility issue, It's really hard to have to go all that extra way to get to the same place.

I have classes and tutorials in many different parts of the building, and while there are accessible entrances, there are several sets of doors that are extremely heavy and hard to open. I am really proud to be part of the Faculty, because I have the freedom to explore a wide range of classes. But it can be difficult, I often feel like the building and the classrooms are only accessible for non-disabled students. It is very tedious and a hassle trying to find a seat, and I feel like I'm disrupting the rest of my classmates. This makes me feel like a burden to everyone else.

My home faculty is at Sidney Smith, and I hope I can feel comfortable being there. At the moment, I just feel like it was not designed for students with accessibility needs in mind. I want to be able to use the building like everyone else without the expense of my mental and physical well-being. I hope Sidney Smith can become more universally accessible in the future.

# Personas

## Amina, an undergraduate Arts & Science commuter student



**My day-to-day school routine changed dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic.** During virtual learning, I struggled to maintain my connections to peers and balance school responsibilities and my personal life. Before the pandemic, I cherished the short breaks I could take between classes, where I could wander the building and catch up with my friends over hot chocolate or connect with other students through events and activities in the lobby.

With classes happening in person again, I am glad to connect with classmates again, but I also want to prioritize self-care and take more mindful breaks during my day. Sometimes my friends and I just want to be in a calm and quiet space to relax after a long day or casually meet fellow students. As a commuter student, I spend

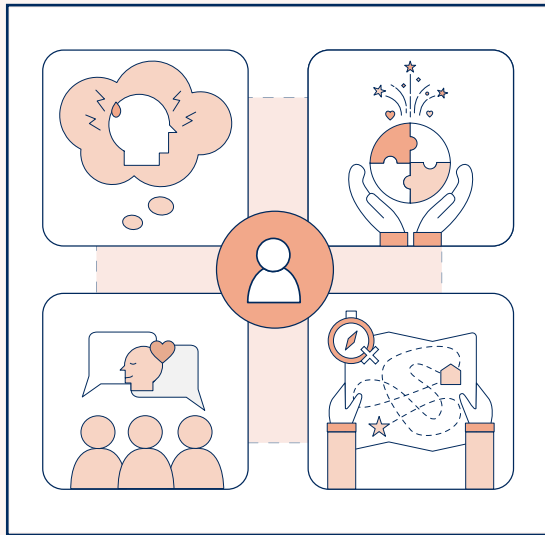
long hours on campus, so taking a step back from school responsibilities, even for a short time between classes, is important to help me feel present in my school life.

I love spaces like the Sidney Smith Student Commons because I can access different furniture and space setups in one location. There are options to sit at a table if I want to remain focused or sit in one of the comfy individual couches with dividers if I want some quiet time alone. Although, during the mid-term season, the space has gotten quite busy, and it's hard to find available spots to sit. Sometimes my friends and I sit in a hallway along the wall if we really need a space to sit together. I've tried to find a new spot in the building, but it's huge, and I feel intimidated entering areas of the building I've never been to before. Sometimes I feel like there are unwritten rules of what you can do in a space.

I like that Sidney Smith Hall has spaces to buy food and eat, casually sit around with friends, or quiet spots to study. I just wish I could have more flexible spaces for when I need to quickly rest between classes or stay in the evening before my commute, and I can do what I need to do in one building comfortably.

# Personas

## Cherie, a first generation Anishinaabe



### **I'm a first generation student at Arts & Science from the Anishinaabe First Nation.**

As an Indigenous person attending university, I often feel like I'm navigating an unfamiliar terrain. Though I am excited to learn and grow in this new environment, it can be frustrating when my culture and values are not properly represented or acknowledged in the spaces where I find myself in every day. I think it's why it doesn't feel like home.

Sure, there are some nods to Indigenous presence on campus – artwork and the occasional event, but it often feels like an afterthought, particularly if there was no consultation with members of the Indigenous community. I often find myself serving as the sole educator about my culture and values to others. I don't mind sharing, but sometimes it's exhausting and feels more like an obligation

rather than a choice.

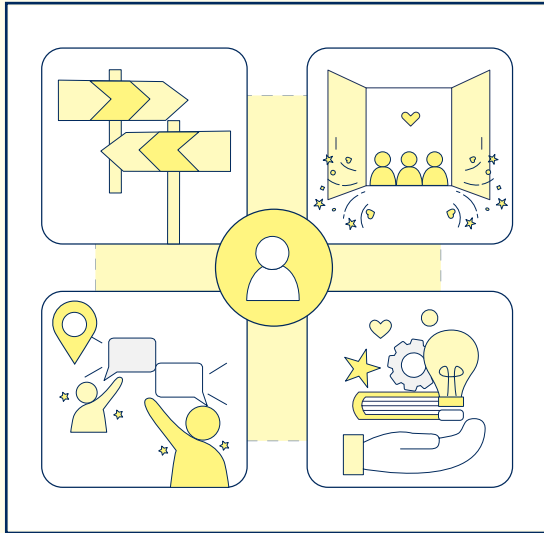
I love the process of smudging – it's a communal gathering where there's an Elder and other Indigenous people, where we take specific medicinal herbs and place them into a holder of our choice to create smoke. The medicines and the container speak to specific values in my spiritual culture. I feel the negative emotions clearing away as I pull the smoke towards me. Positive energy comes and helps me get in touch with the Earth.

Smudging is something that I feel is vital to get in touch with my spiritual heritage and to promote a sense of community with other First Nations people. However, since attending U of T, I haven't been able to participate in smudging for a long time. I wish I could find a space nearby where I can properly do so. It seems like there's such a tedious process to smudge at U of T – I have to go to a building on the other side of campus. It would go a long way for the university to address this issue if they had more spaces for Indigenous students, staff, and faculty to build community and places where I can be myself.

The university always says that it wants to welcome Indigenous students and promote Indigenous culture, but it lacks spaces for us to meet one another and share our traditions.

# Personas

## Amelia, a faculty member at the Faculty of Arts & Science



**One of my favourite parts about working in Sidney Smith Hall is the endless possibilities to meet people from different academic disciplines and backgrounds.**

When I first started working here, I was overwhelmed by the complexity of the building and the number of people coming and going from the building. The atmosphere of the building was a new experience for me. I've never worked in a building home to many different communities and activities throughout the year. However, as time went by, I started to appreciate being surrounded by a large and lively community.

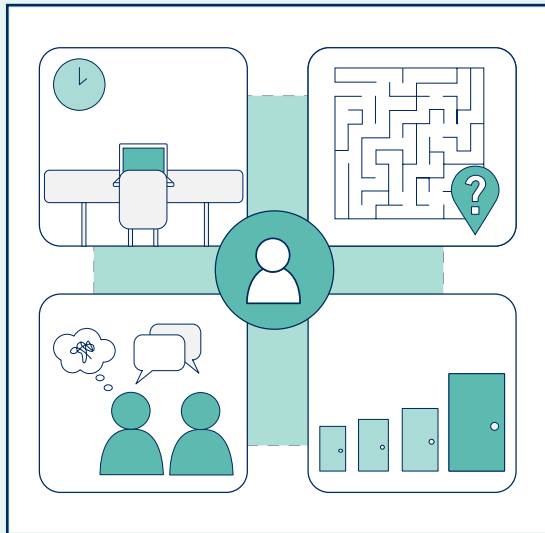
Before working in the building, I only interacted with people in my department. Now, I have friends and colleagues from different departments working in all parts of the building. One of my favourite parts of the day is

my spontaneous encounters with peers and colleagues working in the building. I've encountered many colleagues in common areas such as the stairwell, and we end up having wonderful conversations that I don't think would have happened otherwise, especially when we work in different departments or have very different schedules. Although, I wish we had more spaces in the building that allow us to take a break from the busyness of the building and meaningfully connect with people in the building.

While I enjoy spontaneous encounters with peers, I wish there were spaces I could go to in the building where I know there will be people congregating to socialize and take a break. It can allow us to check in on each other and learn about what new and exciting things are happening in other departments in a social environment. The rarity of campus spaces housing such a dynamic community means you never know whom you might talk to and what you might learn each day in Sidney Smith. I enjoy working around many disciplines and meeting new people in the building; they bring a meaningful spark to my day-to-day work life. These little moments and the relationships I've formed at Sidney Smith Hall make the building feel like home.

# Personas

## Cassandra, a first-year Arts & Science student



### **As a first-year student, I'm exploring all the different buildings on campus to find my go-to spot to study.**

Although I love exploring the campus, I would love to find a location I can rely on to have enough space and a calm environment to settle in for hours while I study comfortably. At first, I was excited and curious to explore Sidney Smith Hall because I have a couple of classes and tutorials in the building. However, I always have trouble finding my classroom or small things such as water fountains. Trying to find my way through the building feels frustrating because I feel like I am in a maze.

My classes and tutorials are in various parts of the building, and it is nerve-wracking to be on time while navigating the building. Often, I have to step in to classrooms or stop a fellow student walking in the hallway

to ask for help. I feel self-conscious and embarrassed asking for directions because everyone seems so busy, and I don't want to disturb them. I've tried to memorize specific routes to my classrooms to avoid stopping people in the building to ask them for help.

I think there is more to Sidney Smith beyond the classrooms I go to for tutorials, and I would love to explore the building further. However, it feels too daunting trying to find my way around. I find it difficult to work comfortably in the building because I spend a lot of time trying to find the spaces I need. Sometimes I think it might be easier to go to a different building on campus where I know I can expect to find empty spots to sit or designated study spaces. I would like to feel confident that I can find the spaces I need and find spaces that allow me to be productive in Sidney Smith Hall. I do think the building has a lot to offer. I just wish I could feel more comfortable being in the building.

# Personas

## Hung, a staff member at the Faculty of Arts & Science



**Sidney Smith holds many fond memories for me, both as a former U of T student and now as a current staff member.**

I feel like something exciting is always happening in the building, and it's wonderful to see students studying or connecting with peers around the building. One of the recent events I particularly enjoyed seeing was the visit from therapy dogs. It was nice seeing students having fun and enjoying themselves, especially during exam week!

I think it's great that we have such a multi-purpose building that can host these events. As a staff member, I appreciate that the building can be a place for both learning and community building for students. Although, I have noticed that sometimes the atmosphere of the building can be overstimulating to me from all the

posters, multiple events happening in one location, and students congregating in high-traffic areas. While I appreciate the different events and people that come together in the building, it can be stressful to navigate on busy days.

I would like to know more about the purpose of spaces so I know where ideal locations are to work with colleagues and carry out my programming or direct students to if they would like a comfortable place to go between classes. I feel like having a better sense of what is happening in the building can allow me to prioritize my well-being. Although I may come and go through many different parts of the building in a day, I want to feel comfortable in the spaces I use and create memories in, no matter how short my time in a space may be.

# Identity Stories

The **glue bonds and bridges** between the **individual** and **collective identity** within the Faculty of Arts & Science

GLUE

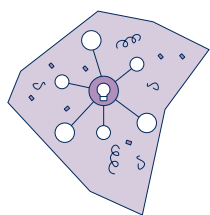
Here are the journeys of Pranalal, Amina, Cherie, Amelia, Cassandra and Hung, as they navigate Sidney Smith Hall in their academic and personal journeys.



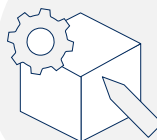
**Pranalal** has had challenges accessing and navigating the physical spaces at Sidney Smith Hall but hopes to feel included and more involved in university life.



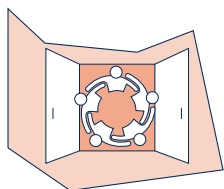
Designing a building that prioritizes students with accessible needs by mitigating barriers, and meeting accessibility standards will foster a culture of inclusion and belonging.



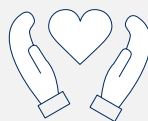
**Amina's** commute to campus makes it challenging for them to find a space that meets their evolving needs, but hopes to find a space that allows them to do different tasks.



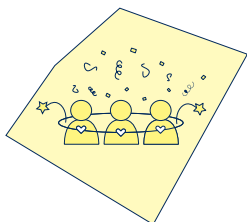
Flexible and versatile spaces provide opportunities for personal and academic growth. Students can feel in control of their day-to-day when a spaces can meet their evolving needs.



**Cherie** wants to feel connected to her Indigenous heritage outside of her home and hopes to see her identity represented and celebrated in the campus buildings.



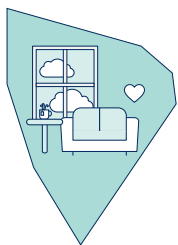
Spaces designed intentionally with Indigenous values encourage expression and individuality by creating a safe atmosphere that celebrates the Indigenous community.



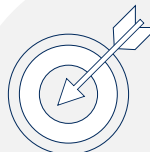
**Amelia** recognizes that the Faculty has many unique disciplines, colleagues, and students and hopes to meet and connect with more community members outside of her department.



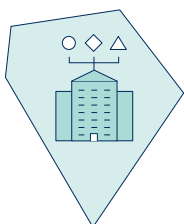
The building facilitates opportunities for community members to reach across disciplines to connect with each other and learn from one another.



**Cassandra** struggles to find a suitable space on campus but feels hopeful to find a space where they can focus and study without surprises.



Providing clarity and consistency within spaces fosters familiarity and allows students, staff, and faculty to feel confident in the spaces that they occupy in the building.



**Hung** enjoys attending events at Sidney Smith Hall but struggles to find a calm and quiet space to recharge after work.

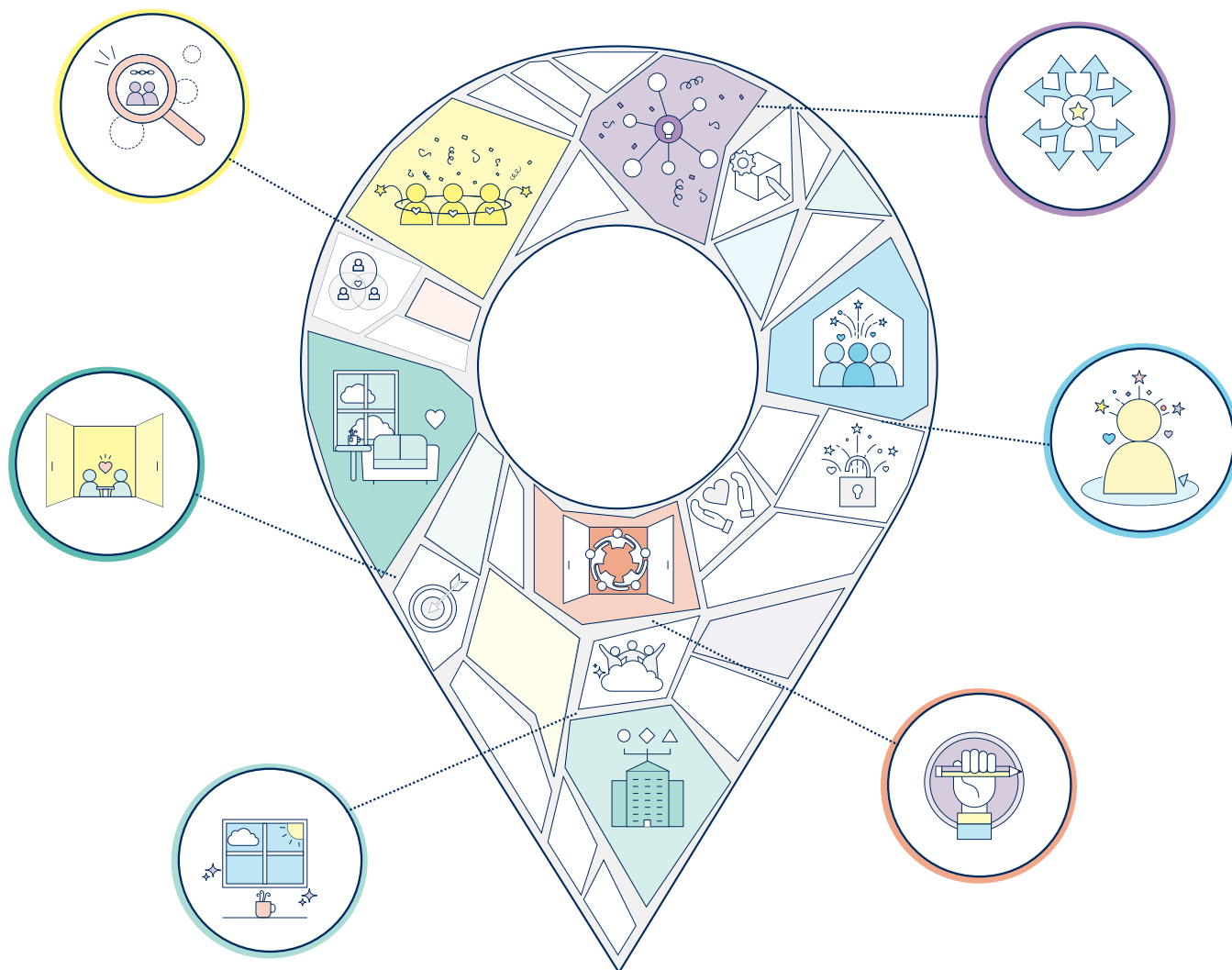


The building fosters a culture of mindfulness and support, by providing peaceful and calming environments for community members.



# Identity Stories

Here we show the journeys of six U of T community members and their experiences at Sidney Smith Hall. Stories are based on real data, fictionalized to protect anonymity of the participants.



**Pranlal** feels like the new Sidney Smith building was designed with accessibility in mind because they can access the spaces through the same entry points and feel like a valued member of the community.

**Amina** has access to flexible spaces and now feels like they have a home base as a commuter student where they can study, engage in activities, and have more control over their day-to-day activities.

**Cherie** has access to spaces with hours dedicated for exclusive use by Indigenous students and feels grateful that the Faculty is devoting spaces and resources to welcome and celebrate Indigenous traditions and students.

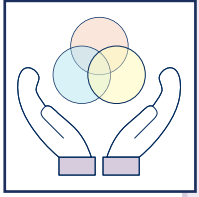
**Amelia** is excited that the building offers many opportunities to explore and connect beyond her department by bringing students, staff, and faculty together from all disciplines.

**Cassandra** feels confident that they can find the spaces they are looking for and when they need it in the building with the improved clarity around when spaces are available for use and the type of use.

**Hung** is grateful to see multiple spaces in the building that promote relaxation and comfort and feels invited to go and recharge during lunch or casually hang out with fellow community members after a long day.

# Design Principles

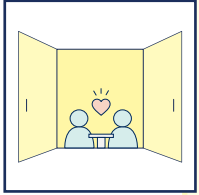
The principles presented here are guidelines for designing to meet people's needs. They suggest issues to keep in mind while prototyping solutions and offer criteria for refining and prioritizing design ideas.



## Individuality within Community

Recognize the diversity of the community by celebrating individual cultures, beliefs, and identities. Ensure spaces empower self-expression and reflect the uniqueness of everyone.

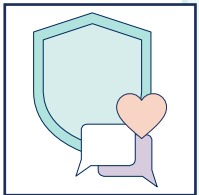
For example, display artwork from diverse cultures and offer prayer spaces.



## Stable Spaces

Ensure all community members feel continuously welcomed in the building by having consistency in the spaces everyone can use in the building. It is important to feel a sense of familiarity in spaces in order to feel comfortable returning.

For example, ensure spaces in the building clearly indicate the purpose of a space and when it can be used by community members.



## Guidance For All

Foster an atmosphere that normalizes students asking for guidance when they need it. Clearly communicate resources each student has access to students from all disciplines and levels of study feel reassured to access the right resources for them.

For example, host programming in the building for students in all disciplines and levels of study that connects them to resources offered by the building or Faculty.



## A Calming Retreat

Foster spaces that allow students, staff, and faculty to take a break from the flurry of activity from the rest of the building or campus when feeling overwhelmed.

For example, provide clear indications of the purpose and noise level of various parts of the building for community members to thrive while in different spaces.



## Effortless Wayfinding

Design spaces that are easy to navigate by all. Ensure community members and new users in the building feel confident to find the spaces they need.

For example, place clearly recognizable maps and signage that consider access needs in central locations throughout the building.

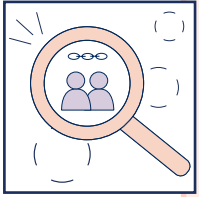


## Individual Needs Matter

Acknowledge and recognize the evolving practical needs of students, staff, and faculty in the building. Empower community members to feel comfortable and capable of working in the building by accommodating everyone's needs.

For example, continuously consult with users in the building to work towards meeting the needs of current and future users.

# Design Principles



## Inspire Exploration

Promote exploration of the different communities in the building by hosting events that highlight the various disciplines in the Faculty. Programming that encourage cross-discipline interactions can provide opportunities for building members to foster new connections with fellow students, staff, and faculty outside of their department.

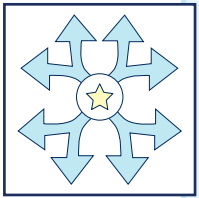
For example, host events that amplify various communities in the building and introduces current users of the building to each other.



## Harmony Through Diversity

Create opportunities for students, staff, and faculty to collaborate across disciplines. Community members want to learn from the diverse backgrounds of their peers to be inspired when learning and innovating.

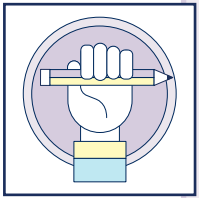
For example, host programming and workshop opportunities that bring together individuals with different backgrounds and areas of expertise.



## Versatility is Vital

Spaces built with flexible elements accommodate a wide range of needs and ensures the space can serve many functions. Consider how to incorporate zones for different purposes and ensure affordances are selected for their versatility.

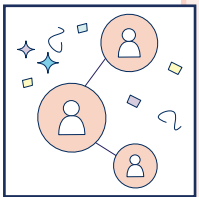
For example, design spaces equipped with flexible furniture, access to technology, and create zones for quiet and others for community gatherings.



## Embrace Uniqueness

Celebrate interdisciplinary learning and engagement to create a building culture that values the unique identity of it community members. Providing opportunities for community members to express their unique backgrounds, perspectives, and interests.

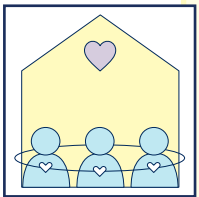
For example, provide opportunities for students across different disciplines to have their academic or creative work featured in the building.



## Spark Spontaneity

Enrich the everyday routine experience of building users by creating opportunities for spontaneous and positive interactions.

For example, have spots like coffee or food stands that allow community members from all areas of the Faculty to slow down and talk to others.



## Cultivate Community

Create opportunities for university community members to build memories and connections with each other at Sidney Smith that extend beyond academic work and interests.

For example, host events like workshops, community discussions, or networking opportunities for students, staff, and faculty to share individual perspectives and bond over shared interests.

# Conclusion

**The Sidney Smith redevelopment will need to accommodate the evolving needs of the growing community to meet the needs of present and future students, staff, and faculty in the building.** Building a space that acknowledges the diverse needs of its community will allow all students, staff, and faculty to find their home in a large university. This redevelopment will foster a collaborative and dynamic environment where all community members can feel at home and find a common place where they can collaborate and celebrate their uniqueness. **Sidney Smith is the embodied identity of the Faculty of Arts & Science.**

The data and insights discussed in this report will support the redevelopment of the Sidney Smith Hall building to be a Faculty of Arts & Science landmark. Our findings will strengthen the Faculty of Arts & Science's understanding of the needs of current and future users of the building.





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