

Innovation Hub Annual Report

2023-24

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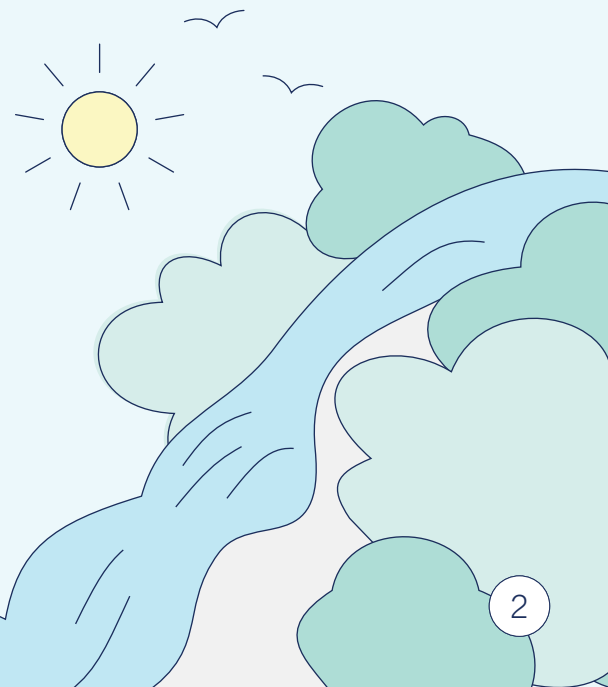
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Land Acknowledgement

“I (we) wish to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.”¹

Learn about the land that you reside on and the relationship you have with the land at <https://native-land.ca/>

[1] University of Toronto. (2022, September 14). Land acknowledgement. Indigenous University of Toronto. <https://indigenous.utoronto.ca/about/land-acknowledgement/>

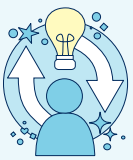


Welcome



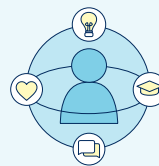
What is the Innovation Hub?

The Innovation Hub is a student-driven research collective that uses a peer-to-peer approach to understand the needs of U of T students. Campus partners provide us with real design challenges, and we hire teams of interdisciplinary students to work on each project using a consulting model. Student team members are empowered to understand their peers' needs using human-centered design and learning as they go, building confidence through practical work experience. Our projects range in scope from designing campus spaces and services, policy evaluation, listening to the needs of students from equity-deserving groups, ideating for the future, and more.



Our Mission

To improve campus life through student-centric design.



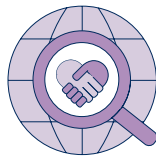
Our Vision

A campus experience designed for every student to flourish academically, socially, and personally.

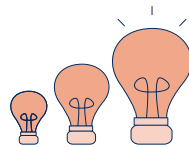
Our Values



Accessibility by Design



Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion



Inspire with Meaningful Data



Listen to Student Experiences



Learn Together

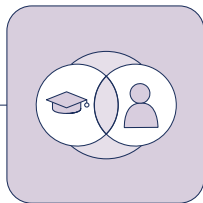
Domains of Innovation

Five domains underlie our projects. No matter what issue we're working on, at least one of these areas drives student flourishing.



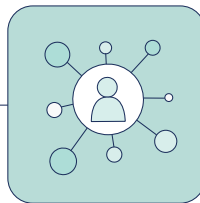
Access for Every Student

All students have equitable access to programs, services, resources, and spaces.



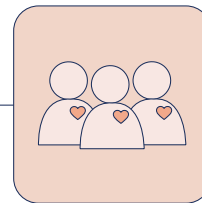
Integrated Learning Experience

Students engage fully in learning experiences both within and outside of the classroom.



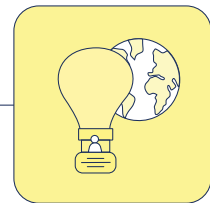
Whole Student Development

Students receive the support they need for their holistic well-being



Fostering Connectedness

Students experience a sense of belonging and connection within the UofT community.



Future-Ready Students

Students have opportunities to develop their skills and build their confidence beyond academics.



Message from Julia Allworth, Manager of Innovation Projects

The Innovation Hub has seen an incredible amount of growth this year as we employed about 100 students to work on many projects to improve campus life at U of T. We are so grateful to our team of leaders, all students and recent graduates, who have worked tirelessly to improve operational efficiencies, create new processes and workflows, and support inclusive and equitable hiring.

We are very grateful to be recognized this year with a U of T Excellence Through Innovation award for our work by collaboratively designing university spaces, services and programs and fostering community and student engagement on campus.

Our team has become larger and more diverse this year, and we remain committed to working in ways that are more inclusive and welcome everyone. The community at the Innovation Hub is so vibrant and our team works hard, but also has fun – we had so many great social events and opportunities for team members to connect and build community during their work.

Our work would not be possible without the support of our incredible partners who provide meaningful work to our students, and our leaders in Student Life and the Vice-Provost Students who continue to encourage the university community to partner with the Innovation Hub to better understand students. We hope this year's report offers a snapshot of some of the great work our student teams have done this year.

To date we have:

Since our inception in 2016, we've had the pleasure to connect with people in all areas of U of T to learn more about campus experiences through our design research projects.



Our Team of Student Employees



The students at the Innovation Hub are diverse and come from all programs and degree levels. Students are placed on project teams that provide real-world experiential learning to build skills in four areas: personal development, interpersonal relations, workplace skills and technical skills in design thinking.

This year we had:

104

Students
Employed

94

Work Study
Opportunities

10

Leadership
Roles

19

Project
Teams



Messages From Our Students



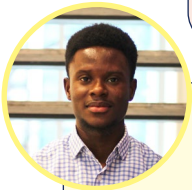
We had an amazing team of students this year. Let's hear what some of our excellent student employees had to share about their experiences working at the Innovation Hub.

Diana Radenko, Honours Bachelor of Arts, Book and Media Studies



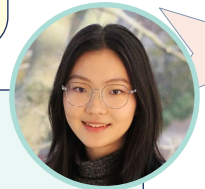
The Innovation Hub's continued support of my personal growth has been invaluable to me. Throughout my time here, I've come to really appreciate one-on-one conversations with my supervisors and other leaders within the space. I always felt encouraged and supported when I outlined the way I wanted to pursue professional goals, and I appreciated how my supervisors would make room for me to work in areas of strength as well as of improvement.

Larry Afun, Honours Bachelor of Science, Physiology & Immunology



My biggest learning moment was when I realized the impact of effective storytelling. Up until my experience working at the Innovation Hub, my modus operandi was to simply think and communicate things in the world as just a list of facts to be pieced together. However, through my time at the Innovation Hub, I have come to really appreciate the power of telling an impactful story especially since the work we do is directed towards enacting change.

Melissa Cui, Honours Bachelor of Science, Economics & Psychology



As an international student, working at the Innovation Hub marks my first professional experience both in Canada and at U of T, bringing me new perspectives and significant values. Having begun my studies during the pandemic, I regretted missing many opportunities to engage with the beautiful campus; however my role at the Innovation Hub – contributing to enhance the international student experience – perfectly aligns with my needs and what I have to offer.

Maxine Ramos, Bachelor of Information



My time as a work study student at the Innovation Hub has reshaped the way I learn and grow as a professional. I definitely made a lot of mistakes along the way, but the supportive community provided me with a safe space to learn from them through constructive feedback and encouragement, ensuring that I was taking away valuable insights from this experience.

Work Experience at Scale: Future Leaders at iHub



At the Innovation Hub, we encourage our student team to explore their interests and become future leaders at iHub and beyond. We have a philosophy to support students in their growth through fostering an environment that:

Builds a culture of care that emphasizes collaboration and support

Trusts the potential of students



Champions individual learning and growth

Shares the collective purpose for our work

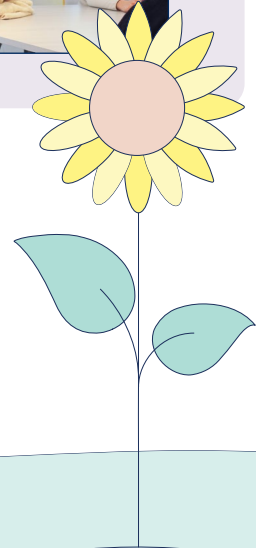
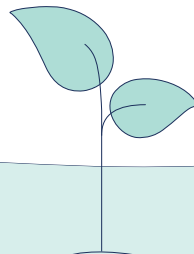
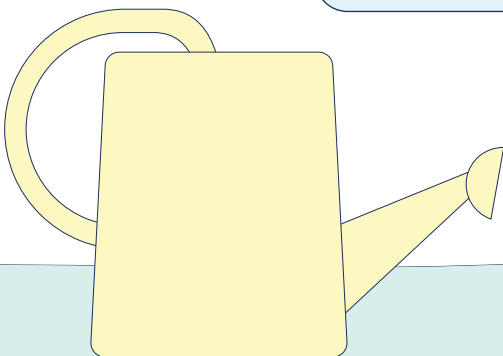


Believes in a strength-based approach to professional development

Creates structure that fosters creativity



Prioritizes equity and access



Growth Through Work-Integrated Learning



Support for a valuable work-integrated learning experience is built into the Innovation Hub. We believe that when meaningful training and coaching is provided to all team members, they can do their best work and have a great learning experience. Our goal is to ensure that all student employees gain valuable work experience and learn transferable skills that will help them in their future careers.

How we Support our Student Employees

Design Thinking Workshops

Each week, our teams come together as a large group to participate in full team workshops and training that includes topics such as equity-centered design thinking, data collection, storytelling, presentation skills and more.



Learning Journey Coaching

Each team member participates in our Your Learning Journey coaching program where they identify competencies they'd like to work on in 1:1 coaching sessions with their Team Lead in areas of personal development, interpersonal, workplace, and technical skills related to their job.



Team Meetings & Co-Works

Each team meets several times per week in-person over their work term. Our Community Engagement Team facilitates large group events designed to augment the Your Learning Journey program through activities such as escape rooms, mystery simulations, shark tank pitches, and more! Individual teams also plan regular low-cost social events for team members to get to know each other and have fun.





Supporting Growth at the Innovation Hub



Tiffany's Story: From Mixed Methods Research to Practice: Changemaking

Tiffany came to the Innovation Hub with enthusiasm for the academic work she had done in interdisciplinary research using a variety of research methods, and a passion for involving impacted communities in changemaking. She spent her 2-year-gap-year at the iHub first as Research Lead & Program Coordinator for our partnership with A&S to support their units in their U of T Quality Assurance Process. Having the opportunity to apply her academic work in this role, Tiffany decided to stay on for another year and was promoted to the Research Lead role, overseeing all design research projects. Having grown tremendously as a leader, Tiffany decided to pursue a Masters degree at Toronto Metropolitan University starting in the fall of 2024. Tiffany feels strongly that her place in changemaking is to bridge the gap between research and impacted communities by ensuring change is driven by the voices of individuals within the community.

“The Innovation Hub has fostered my growth through technical and interpersonal. As Research Lead, I was positively challenged to transform stories and data in different ways ultimately making it more accessible.”

- Tiffany Cao, Research Lead (2023-24), Honours Bachelor of Science, Human Geography & Environmental Science



Paul's Story: Finding Confidence & Leading Others to Learn about Themselves

Paul joined the Innovation Hub in February 2022 as Senior Project Assistant while completing his Master of Education at OISE. In this role, Paul led all operations and communications for our work, bringing his talents in visual design and experience in student engagement to create supportive spaces for students to learn and grow together. During his time at the Innovation Hub, Paul created an environment where people can collaborate and feel comfortable and safe to discover their passions and get to know themselves. Leading his team of students and helping them develop confidence and become comfortable learning from failure, Paul also learned more about himself. After over two years at the Innovation Hub, Paul has completed his degree and accepted a role supporting university students in an exchange program at Oxford University. Paul will no doubt have a successful career leading change within student affairs, and bringing out the best in everyone who is fortunate enough to work with him.

“I learned what it means to be a leader and what leader I want to be to support people around me. A leader to me brings their whole self with all their quirks, abilities, and skill sets that celebrate the uniqueness of all.”

- Paul Kaita, Senior Project Assistant (2022-24), Master of Education, Higher Education

Our Approach to Design Research



We are grateful for our partners across the university's three campuses who provide meaningful design research challenges for our student teams. Our design-thinking research seeks to gather deep insight on the people impacted by programs, services, spaces, and other challenges at the university to better understand their needs. We take an equity-centered approach to research, taking strides to elevate the voices of equity-deserving students.

Background Research

At the beginning of any new design project, our teams conduct a thorough environmental scan and academic literature review to educate themselves about the topic and the project partner.



Understanding Bias

We work as a team and on an individual level to become aware of our biases that will impact the outcomes of our design research. Each team engages regularly with reflection questions to help them notice their biases and reflect on the impact they have on the research process.



Empathy-Based Data Collection

We use long-form ethnographic interviews techniques to conduct 1-on-1 or group feedback sessions. These sessions allow participants to share their stories and experiences. Depending on the goal of the projects, we incorporate interactive reflective activities within these sessions to better understand participant experiences and perspectives.

Co-Creation & User Experience Design

We host group brainstorming and co-creation events to involve and encourage participants to give feedback and ideate suggestions based on collected data about the U of T community's experiences and perspectives. For some projects, we employ user experience data collection methods such as observation and immersive experiences to gather data about participant journeys and processes.



Insight-Driven Data Analysis

Grounded analytic techniques are the predominant approach to data analysis which allow new information to emerge from the data. Our teams are trained to look for insights in the data, particularly in the form of themes that speak to people's values and un-met needs.



Bringing the Data to Life

When sharing our data with project partners and the community, our goal is inspiration for design. We seek to honour the stories told to us, and present them in a visionary way that gives hope for future possibilities. We create a data-driven vision and design principles for each final report, and share stories using personas, journey maps, and story moments to humanize the data.



Peer-to-Peer Research Model



Our design research relies on a peer-to-peer feedback model. Everything in the Innovation Hub has been designed intentionally to ensure students (both those who work at the Innovation Hub and those who share their stories with us as data), have a great experience. Our goal is to design with rather than for students, and we are proud of the trust that we've built with students over the years in our commitment to have ethical research practices.

Our Peer Research Guidelines:

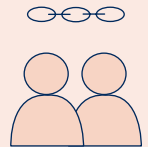
Informed Consent

We honour gathering informed consent and we ensure that we protect our participants at all costs — we pay very close attention to anonymizing and de-identifying our data before it is shared.



Only Students in the Space

We also avoid having any faculty and/or staff in the room while we are meeting with students. This is a practice that we started during our work gathering feedback in support of the Presidential and Provostial Task Force on Student Mental Health, and have carried it forward in all our work.



Well-Documented Research Process

Over the years, we have compiled a well-documented research process guide and provide extensive training for students on our process which we refine each year for continuous improvement and based on both student and partner feedback.



This year, we listened to in-depth stories & experiences of **290 students** and **33 faculty & staff**



Innovation Hub Projects 2023-24

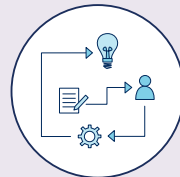


This year, we saw demand for our design thinking research grow as our teams had the opportunity to work on a wide range of meaningful projects.



What Matters to U of T Students?

Looking at student stories and data collected over the last three years (2020-2023), we sought to explore the question: what matters to U of T students now? Our team reviewed research reports and over 380 pieces of qualitative data. We found that, when students feel secure exploring their identities, they feel more connected to the university community. Our aim is to bring expertise, empathy, and in-depth understanding of what matters most to U of T students towards co-creating a university that works for everyone.



University of Toronto Quality Assurance Process

The Innovation Hub supported departments at the Faculty of Arts & Science in the student consultation for reviews of their academic programs based on the University of Toronto Quality Assurance Process (UTQAP) criteria. Ensuring students receive the best experience in their academic programs, sharing their experience of their programs is an important aspect of this review process. The teams worked in partnership with 10 departments to support their student consultation, with a focus on introducing equity-related topics into the feedback process.



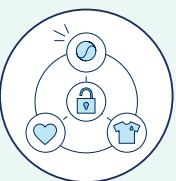
Trans & Nonbinary Student Experience

In partnership with the Sexual & Gender Diversity Office, the Innovation Hub built on previous project findings to understand the experiences of trans and non-binary students (TNB). The data collected will amplify TNB student voices in an accessible way while bridging the gap to student-facing staff and faculty who wish to better understand their experiences.



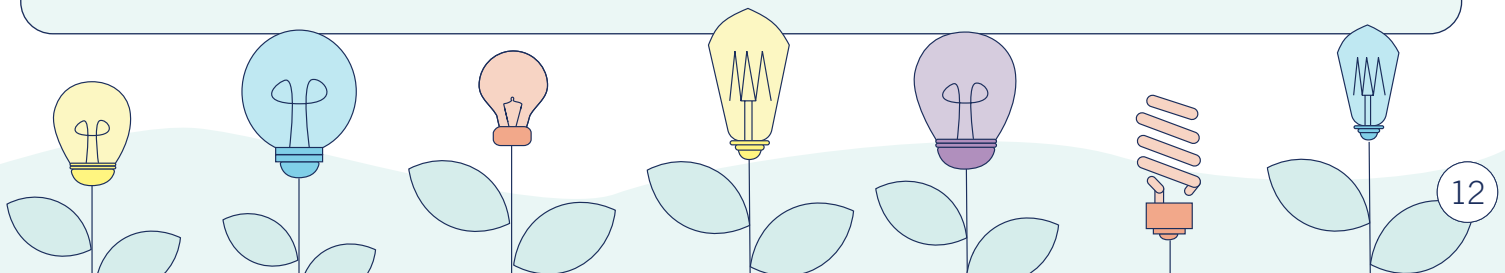
Experiences of Students Who Are Also Parents

In partnership with Family Care Office, the Innovation Hub explored the needs of students who are also parents as they navigate their multiple roles and responsibilities while studying. The data collected will inform future programs and services for student parents at the University of Toronto.



Sport & Rec: Expanding Access

In partnership with Sport & Rec, the Innovation Hub continued last year's collaboration to re-imagine programs, services, and spaces through co-creation and student feedback with a particular focus on beginner programming. The data collected will inform the future of Sport & Rec offerings, prioritizing greater inclusion of students from equity-deserving populations.

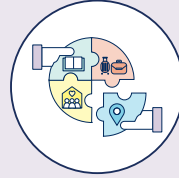


Innovation Hub Projects 2023-24



International Foundation Program – Quick Student Consultation

In partnership with the International Foundation Program (IFP) at New College, the Innovation Hub investigated IFP students' perception on equity, diversity, inclusion, and social justice over two sessions. The focus of the project of the inclusion of equity-deserving groups in IFP course materials impacts students' learning.



International Students First 48 Hours in Canada

International students enrich the University of Toronto with their diverse perspectives and experiences. In partnership with the Office of the Vice-Provost, International, the Innovation Hub's Design Research team identified 8 diverse international students to document their first 48 hours in Canada. Using video diaries, the students documented their experiences in real time. Data collected will help build a better understanding of what it is like for international students when they first arrive in Canada.



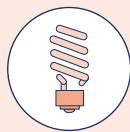
Re-imagining Commuter Students Spaces

Creating welcoming spaces for commuter students is crucial for fostering a sense of belonging on the St. George Campus. In partnership with Spaces & Experiences, the Innovation Hub's Design Research team explored the needs of commuter students, particularly students from equity-deserving populations to make design decisions for future spaces and modifications to existing spaces.



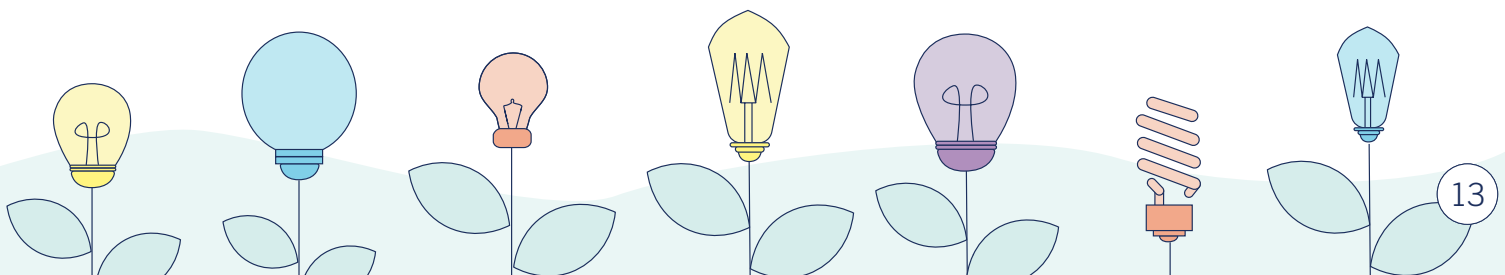
Faculty of Information – Quick Student Consultation

In partnership with the Faculty of Information (iSchool) Office of the Registrar and Student Services, the Innovation Hub sought direct input about programs, initiatives, and services at the iSchool. The aim of the consultation focused on areas of strength and improvement in the faculty for future quality improvement of students' experiences.



Centre for Entrepreneurship – Quick Student Consultation

In partnership with the Faculty of Arts & Science Centre for Entrepreneurship, the Innovation Hub explored students' understanding of what entrepreneurship means to them and the entrepreneurial mindset.



Innovation Hub Projects Come to Life



Our work aims to humanize and drive change. This past year, we saw some of our projects enact changes in their departments, divisions, and broad U of T community to improve student experiences.

First 48 Hours

The Innovation Hub worked closely with the Office of the Vice-President International and Centre for International Experience to create a documentary titled *International Students: First 48 Hours in Canada*. The documentary shares the stories of seven international students as they reflect on their earliest experiences arriving and adapting to life in Canada to embark on their studies. We welcomed Senior Leaders and staff to our co-working space to pre-screen the documentary to immerse themselves in the stories of our students.

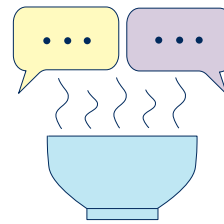


Sport & Rec

Our findings from the Diversity in Movement: Expanding Access at Sport & Rec (2023) enabled Sport & Rec to embed some of the Innovation Hub's recommendations into their strategic goals for Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging.

For Example:

- Aquatic and Instructed Sport was re-designed to include shorter sessions and drop-in lesson programs such as Trans Swim Lessons
- More program offers for "Swim to Survive" and Family Inclusive Aquatics Program were implemented to better support student parents
- New intramural and drop-in sport collaborations on entry-level pathways and recreational sports were implemented to support beginners
- A new dedicated and expanded Outdoor Recreation portfolio was created to support student mental health



Food Services - Access Meal Plan

In Winter 2022, the Innovation Hub partnered with Spaces & Experiences to support meaningful student consultations that help co-design the future of Food Services operations as Chestnut. The dining hall operational model has changed to meet student needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Coming in Fall 2024, Food Services is implementing the Access Meal Plans to provide students with convenience and flexibility that meets individual's own unique meal needs.



Connecting with the Community



This year, we collaborated with groups across campus, in Toronto, and beyond, to introduce students and others to design thinking and our work.

Alternative Reading Week

In partnership with the Centre for Community Partnerships, the Innovation Hub invited students to participate in 3-days of design activities to understand the question: what makes an inclusive workplace?

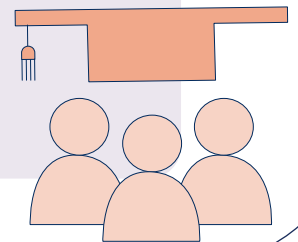


Therapy Dogs

In August 2023, the Innovation Hub invited Sunshine Therapy Dogs to help students to de-stress and connect with each other at exam time.

SGS Fall & Winter Orientation

In September 2023 and January 2024, our team participated in the School of Graduate Studies Orientation, introducing graduate students to ways to get involved in the Innovation Hub.



Black History Month Documentary Screening: Nothing for us Without

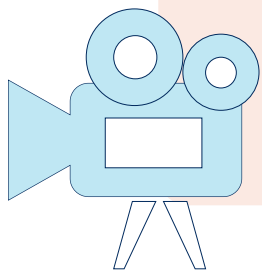
We viewed a documentary screening at Innis College, thinking about our shared responsibility in advocacy and equitable consultation.

Positive Space Logo Launch

We attended the unveiling of the Positive Space Logo at University College, reflecting upon the new progress pride flag in a new kaleidoscope inspired logo.



U of T Community Events



#DisplayYourPride & U of T Pride Flag raising

We celebrated Pride Month together, creating a shared craft together to hang in our co-working space.

Looking Ahead to the Future



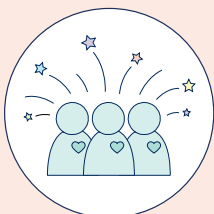
The Innovation Hub has a variety of impactful design research projects slated for the 2023-24 academic year. We are grateful to continue working across campus with partners who care deeply about student experiences.

Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Access at the School of the Environment



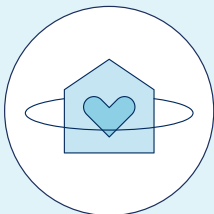
In partnership with the School of the Environment (the School) at the Faculty of Arts & Science, the Innovation Hub's design research team seeks to learn how equity, diversity, inclusion, and access (EDIA) is embedded in the School's curriculum, programming, communications, hiring, events, spaces, processes, and culture, and to understand where gaps exist. The goal of this project is to gain meaningful student perspectives to identify tangible ideas for steps to take to better champion EDIA at the School, focusing on supporting enhanced student experiences.

Engagement & Belonging for Students with Disabilities



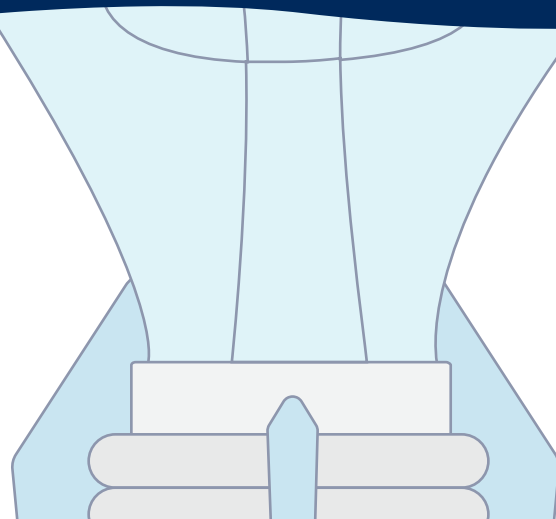
In partnership with Accessibility Services, the Innovation Hub's design research team seeks to understand factors that enable students with disabilities to fully engage in campus life outside of the classroom and to learn where gaps exist. The goal of the project is to gain a meaningful understanding of student perspectives and tangible ideas of steps to take to better champion access and inclusion so that students with disabilities can fully engage with events, activities, programming, social activities, and other aspects of campus life.

Reception Experiences at Health & Wellness



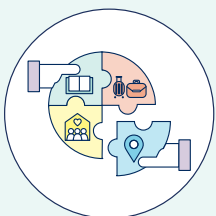
In partnership with Health & Wellness (H&W), the Innovation Hub will look at all possible interactions including virtual and in person at various points in time to uncover opportunities to improve reception experiences. The goal of this project is to create consistent student experiences with H&W's reception, whether it be a first encounter as a new patient or repeat encounter as a returning patient.

Looking Ahead to the Future



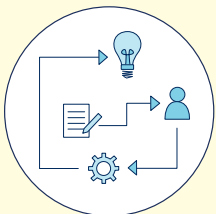
Family Friendly U of T

The Innovation Hub continues its partnership with the and Family Care Office to synthesize learnings from several years of design research to explore how to create a more family-friendly university. This year, we aim to create a 'mini-site' of resources embedded with the Family Care Office website that focuses on helping staff, faculty, and student leaders at U of T to become more family-friendly in their day-to-day practices.



International Students: Life After Graduation

In partnership with the Office of the Associate Vice-President, International Student Experience and Centre for International Experience, the Innovation Hub seeks to identify a diverse group of 6 international alumni willing to share their recent experiences after graduation using video diaries, voiceovers, and vlogs. The goal of this project is to discover the diverse pathways and opportunities that international students pursue after graduation from the University of Toronto and to highlight recent graduates' perspectives.



Faculty of Arts & Science Partnership to support the University of Toronto Quality Assurance Project

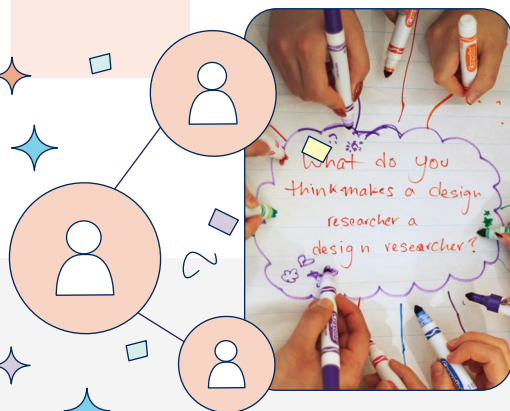
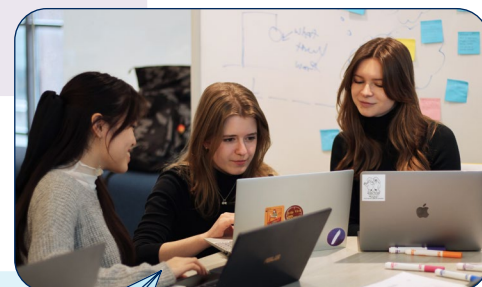
The Innovation Hub will support 9 units at the Faculty of Arts & Science in the student consultation for reviews of their academic programs based on the University of Toronto Quality Assurance Process (UTQAP).

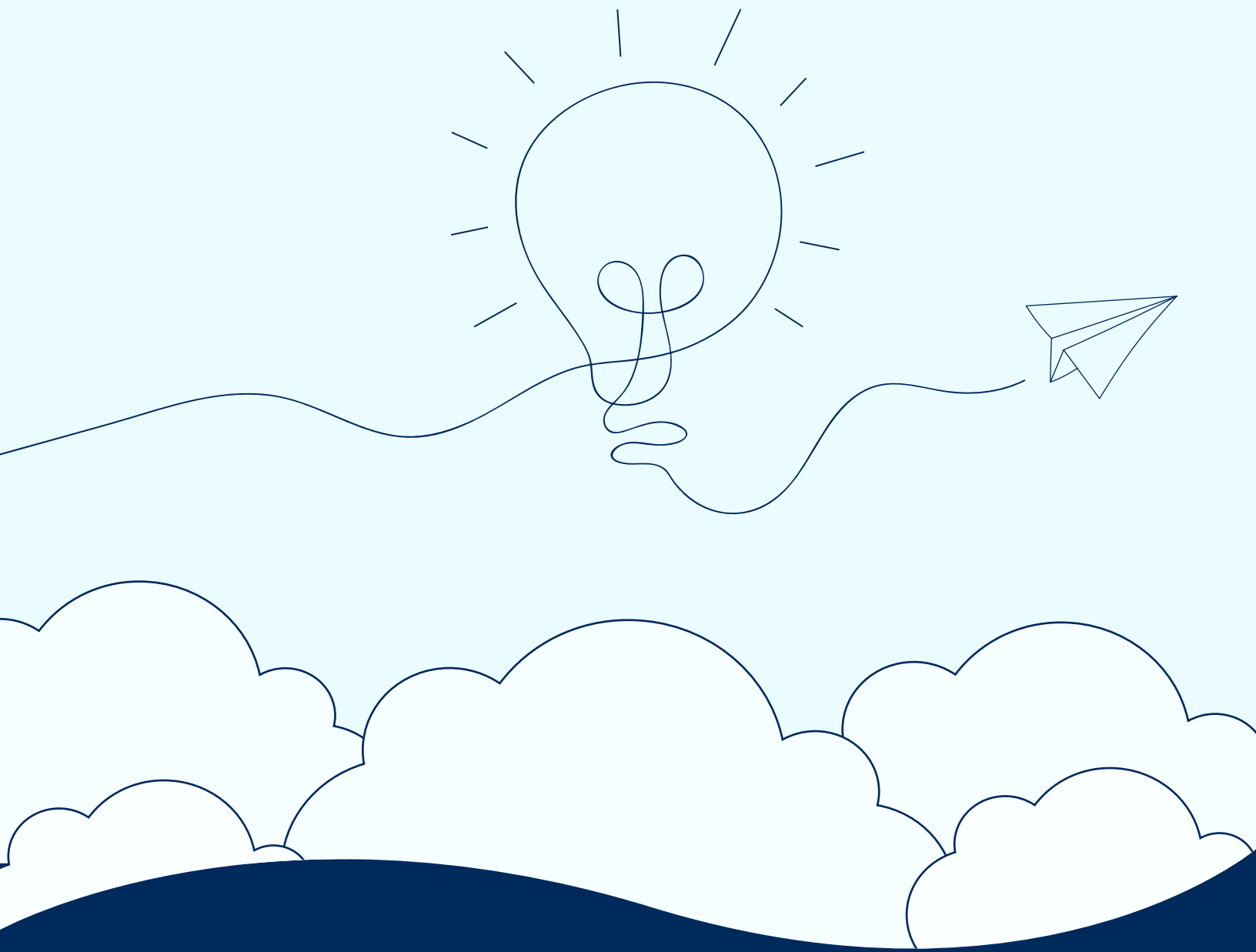
Get Involved in Our Work



Hire a Student Design Team

If you have a project that might benefit from a student design thinking team at the Innovation Hub, we'd love to talk to you! If you have any questions about the Innovation Hub or how to get involved, contact innovationhub@utoronto.ca for more information. Check us out on our website at uoft.me/innovationhub.





This report was written and designed by members of the Innovation Hub Team. To learn more about our work, check us out at uoft.me/innovationhub.