UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

INNOVATION HUB

STUDENT LIFE

Innovation Hub Annual Report

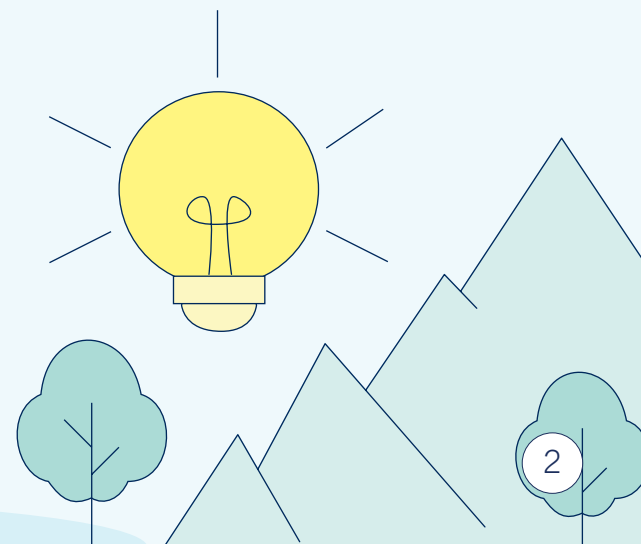## 2022-23

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

INNOVATION HUB

STUDENT LIFE

Table of Contents

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.
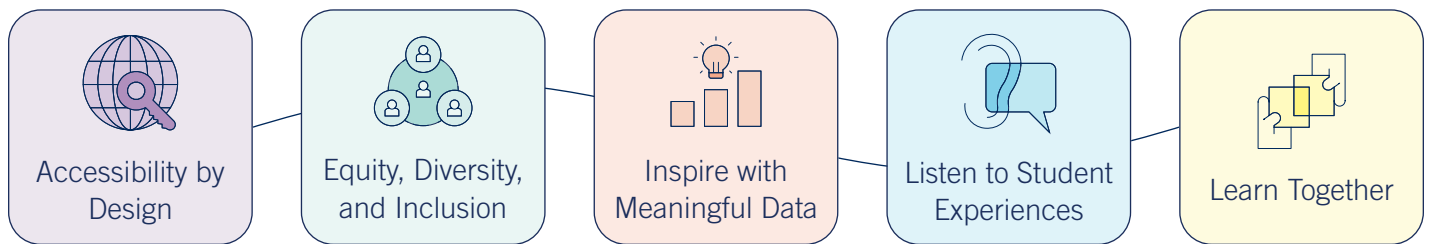
Our Mission
To improve campus life through student-centric design.

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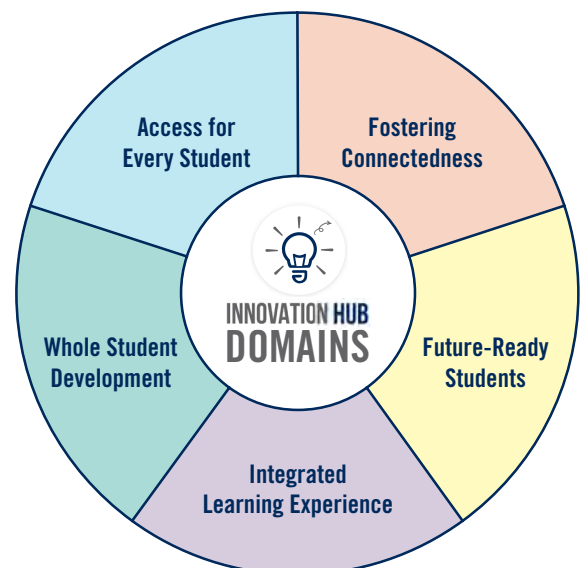A campus experience designed for every student to flourish academically, socially, and personally.

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.

- **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.

- **Intergrated 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 (physical, psychological, social, and emotional).

INNOVATION HUB DOMAINS

Access for Every Student

Fostering Connectedness

Future-Ready Students

Integrated Learning Experience
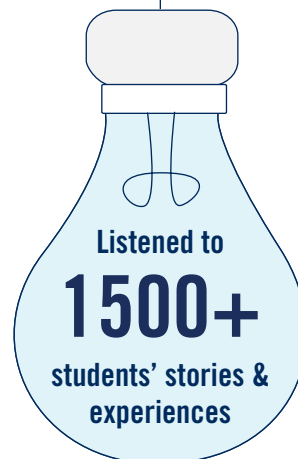
Whole Student Development

Welcome

Message from Julia Allworth, Manager of Innovation Projects

It's been 7 years since the Innovation Hub first launched in 2016, and we never would have imagined that in this time, the work would have grown so much. I'm so grateful to the hundreds of students who have shaped this work over the past year by participating as team members. This past year we were so grateful to our many partners, detailed in this report, for providing our students with meaningful projects. The best part of our work is taking a human-centered approach to understanding how the university works, and we hope this report offers a little glimpse into what we've been up to in the last 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.

Completed
40
design research projects

Listened to
1500+
students' stories & experiences

Listened to
90+
staff & faculty stories & experiences

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:

96 Students Employed

84 Work Study Opportunities

12 Leadership Roles

23 Project Teams

"I've learned so many skills that will no doubt be used later on in my professional career." **- Delphine Ji, Design Research Team Lead, PhD Candidate, Neuroscience**

"Working at the Innovation Hub has strengthened my leadership and interpersonal skills." **- Eli Rose, Design Research Team Lead, HBA, Political Science**

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.
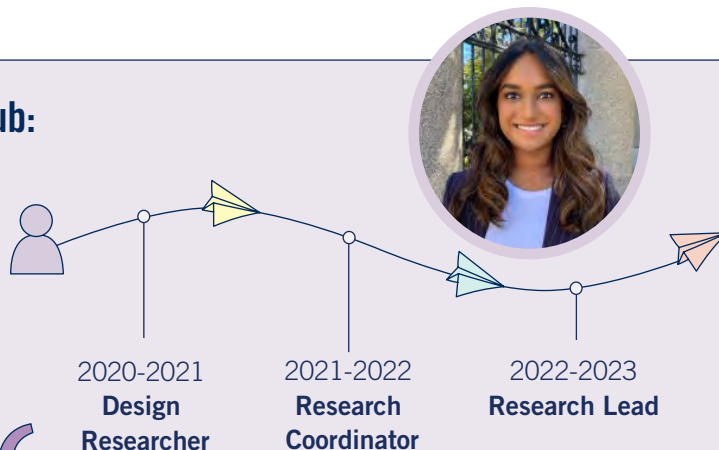
Learning Journey Coaching

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 Animation Team facilitates large group events designed to augment the Your Learning Journey program through activities such as escape rooms, presentation karaoke, 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: Shankeri's Story

Employment opportunities at the Innovation Hub are designed with advancement in mind. Shankeri started her journey with us as a work-study student in her third year completing design research for various projects, she then became a Research Coordinator for our partnership with the Faculty of Arts & Science to support the UTQAP. Upon graduation, Shankeri spent her gap year leading all teams in their design research as the Innovation Hub Research Lead. We're pleased to share that Shankeri has now moved on to pursue her graduate studies in Public Health at Yale.

2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Design Researcher	**Research Coordinator**	**Research Lead**

"*I'm grateful and fortunate to connect with students and make a difference at U of T through empathetic research and storytelling … and now lead student researchers at the Innovation Hub to do the same.*"
– Shankeri Vijayakumar, HBA, Health Studies & Sociology

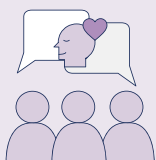# Our Approach to Design Research

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.
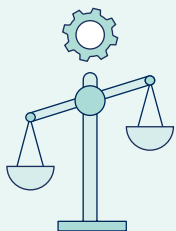
Aspects of our Research:

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. Our teams also consult any available quantitative data related to the subject matter.

Empathy-Based Data Collection & Co-Creation Events

We collect data in many ways, from long-form ethnographic interviews to group interviews and feedback sessions, and group brainstorming and co-creation events. For some projects, we conduct observations and use immersive experiences to gather data. Each project has a unique goal, and we work together with our project partners to decide on the best approach to gathering data.
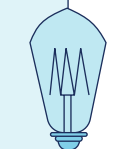
Understanding Bias

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

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.
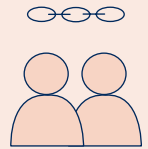
Our Peer Research Guidelines:

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 do not allow any faculty and/or staff to be in the room while we are meeting with students. We find this pure peer-to-peer approach ensures students can be completely honest about their experiences.
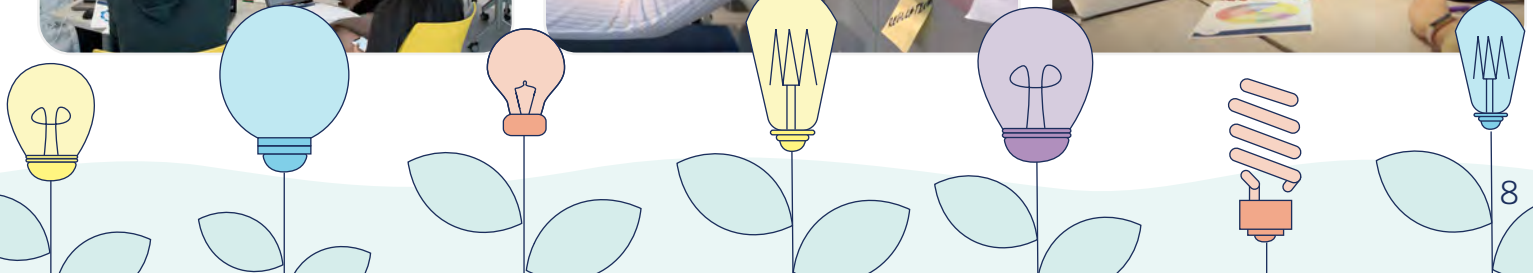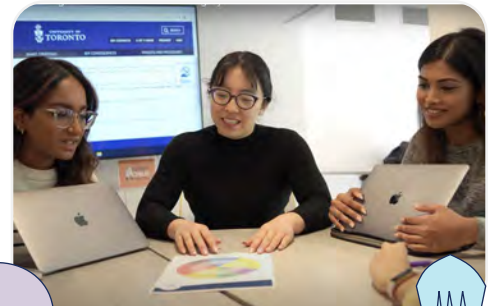
Well-Documented Research Process

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 **349 students** and **79 faculty & staff**

Innovation Hub Projects 2022-23

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 detailed below.
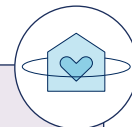
Academic Integrity Video Series

Issues around academic integrity is an institutional priority and U of T seeks to continue supporting students in this regard. We worked with Academic Integrity to create the *It's OK to ask For Help* student-friendly video campaign to encourage students to reach out and seek help to learn with integrity.

Food Services at Chestnut Residence

Residence halls are home to many students at U of T and the dining hall experience is an important part of how students feel at home. We partnered with Food Services at Chestnut Residence to hear from students about their eating experiences and build reciprocity between staff and students.

Health & Wellness

Student mental health is a major priority at U of T and we were proud to continue our partnership with Health & Wellness with a focus on how students take care of their mental health outside of clinical services. We explored student perspectives on the topic of mental health to inform future program and service design.

Robarts Library 5th Floor

The digital humanities is an emerging field in higher education, and the libraries have plans to upgrade the Robarts Library 5th floor to meet the needs of a growing community of digital scholars. In partnership with U of T Libraries, we explored how students and staff use and experience library spaces for digital scholarship, generating insights to inform the design process of the new library space.
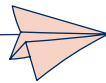
Sidney Smith Hall Redevelopment

The Faculty of Arts & Science plans to redevelop Sidney Smith as an iconic building integrating accessibility, sustainability, and inclusivity. The Innovation Hub partnered with A&S to explore student, faculty and staff experiences to support visioning for the future Sidney Smith and our design research will serve as a resource during the design process.

Sport & Rec

In partnership with Sport & Rec at the Faculty of Kinesiology & Physical Education, we conducted design research to understand perspectives of students who are not currently engaged in movement, particularly equity-deserving populations. Insights from this work will enable Sport & Rec to better support all students to engage in movement.

Innovation Hub Projects 2022-23

Transforming the Instructional Landscape

We are grateful to continue our partnership with Transforming the Instructional Landscape (TIL), an initiative that seeks to draw on teaching and learning expertise from faculty, staff, and students across the university to inform teaching and learning best practices as they intersect with classroom space and technology. TIL's focus is on the university's academic spaces.
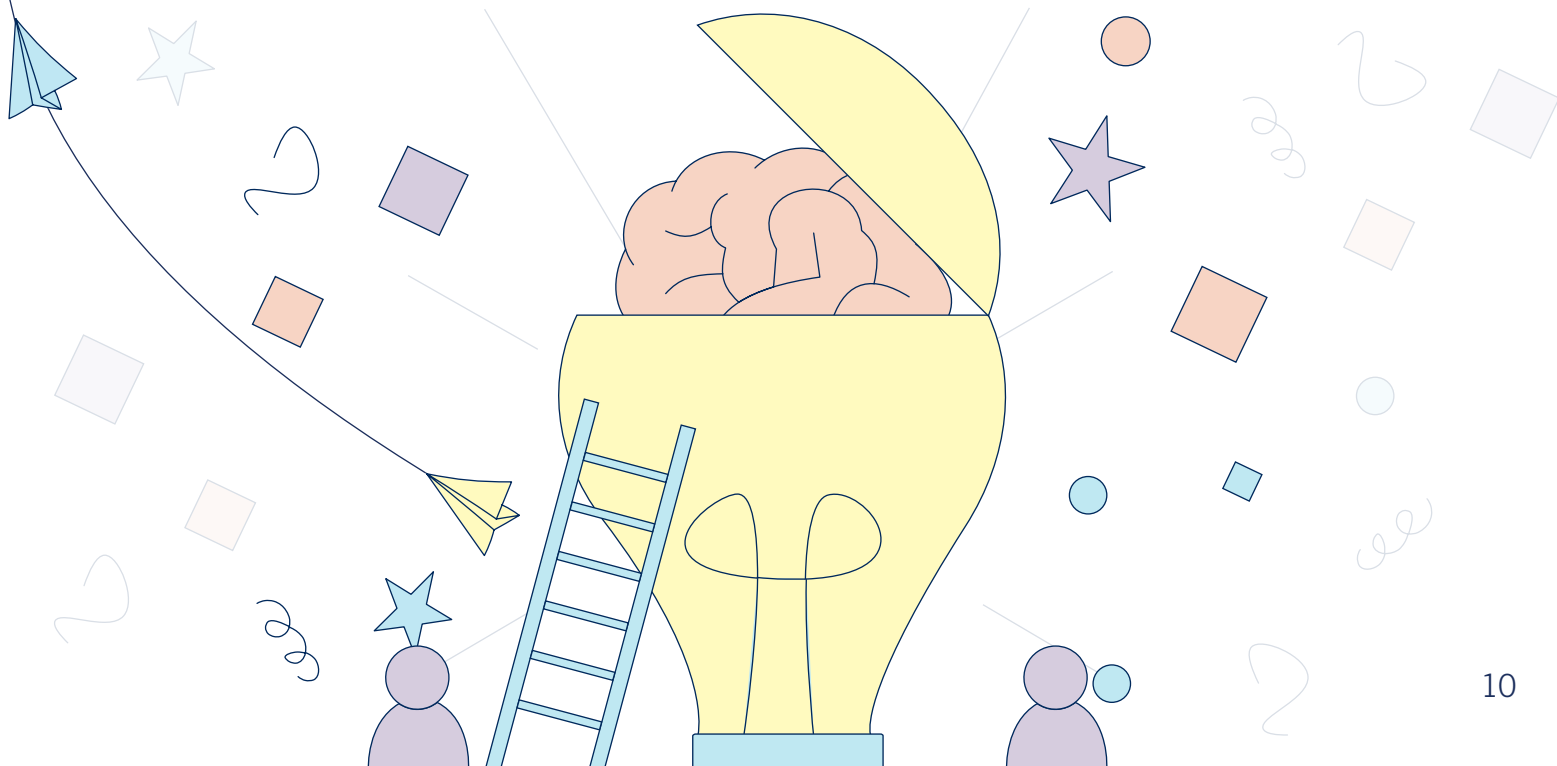
University College

University College (UC) plans to renovate several of its spaces, with a view to enhancing student spaces. We conducted design research, exploring the needs of the UC community when it comes to space and identity at the college. The insights generated will inform the redesign of spaces, grounding the transformation in the College's foundational principles of equity, diversity, inclusion and sustainability.

University of Toronto Quality Assurance Process

Ensuring that students receive the best experience in their academic programs is a high priority at U of T. The Innovation Hub is pleased to continue our partnership with the Faculty of Arts & Science to support units as they prepare for their self-studies as part of the University of Toronto Quality Assurance Process (UTQAP). This year, our teams worked in partnership with several departments to conduct student consultation regarding four key areas: academics, support, community, and extra-curriculars, with a focus on introducing equity-related topics into the feedback process.

Innovation Hub Projects Come to Life

Change can take time at U of T, but as time goes on we are beginning to see many of our projects come to life. This past year, we saw some of our projects come to fruition on campus.

Robarts 4th Floor

The Innovation Hub was grateful to conduct design research that contributed to the design of the newly renovated Fourth Floor Reading Room of Robarts Library which opened this past year to students, staff, and researchers. The revitalization transforms a hallowed, double-storey space into a graceful and inclusive learning commons designed to meet contemporary student needs and learning styles.
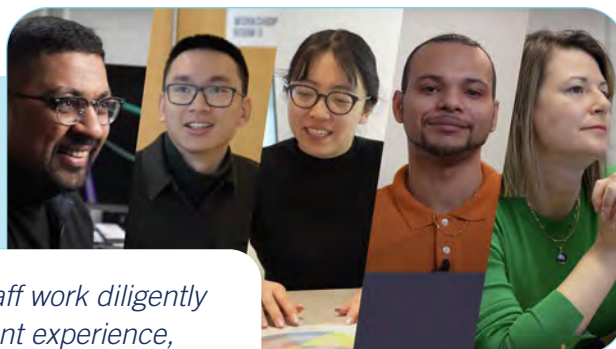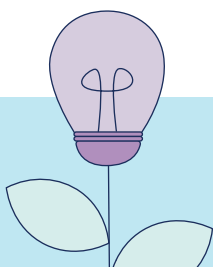
"The Innovation Hub is nothing short of amazing. Through their networks and user-oriented design thinking methods that connect and understand our diverse users' perspectives, they helped our Project Team approach space re-design with an open mind. The story-based discussion with our users brought genuine and valuable feedback that helped establish design guidelines for our space planning. The student-led team helped us with the space renovation that our students embraced. We will be working with them on future space initiatives." **– Glen Morales, Chief Administrative Officer, University of Toronto Libraries**
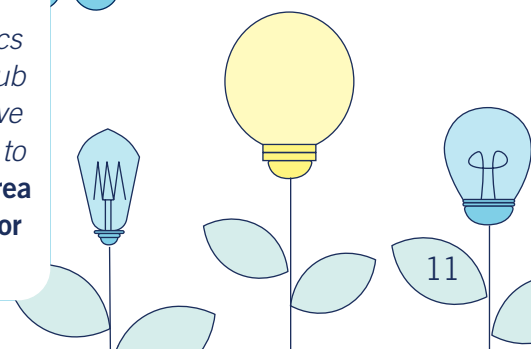
Academic Integrity Video Series

The Innovation Hub was pleased to partner with Academic Integrity at U of T to create the *It's Okay to Ask for Help* video campaign which encourages students to reach out for help with their studies and introduces them to the people behind many of the academic support services offered on campus.

"While University staff work diligently to support the student experience, there are times when the best people to speak to students on sensitive topics are other students. The Innovation Hub provides an outstanding and innovative solution to this challenge of speaking to students in the student voice." - **Andrea Russell, University of Toronto Director of Academic Affairs**

11

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.

Therapy Dogs

In collaboration with the University of Toronto Students' Union (UTSU), 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 2021, our team participated in the School of Graduate Studies Resource fair, introducing graduate students to ways to get involved in the Innovation Hub.

UTSU Fall Orientation

As part of the UTSU grand opening of the new Student Commons, our team welcomed new students to our space in room 300 and introduced them to our work.

Innis Social Innovation Certificate

In partnership with Innis College, the Innovation Hub welcomed students as part of the social innovation certificate program's "road trip" to learn about how our work is creating change on campus.

Amherst College Visit

Students from Amherst College, a private liberal arts college in Amherst, Massachusetts visited the Innovation Hub to learn about our approach to design thinking in higher education.

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 a good team?

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.

Commuter Student Spaces

In partnership with Spaces & Experiences, we will explore the needs of commuter students to make design decisions for future spaces and modifications to existing spaces.

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

The Innovation Hub will support ten 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).

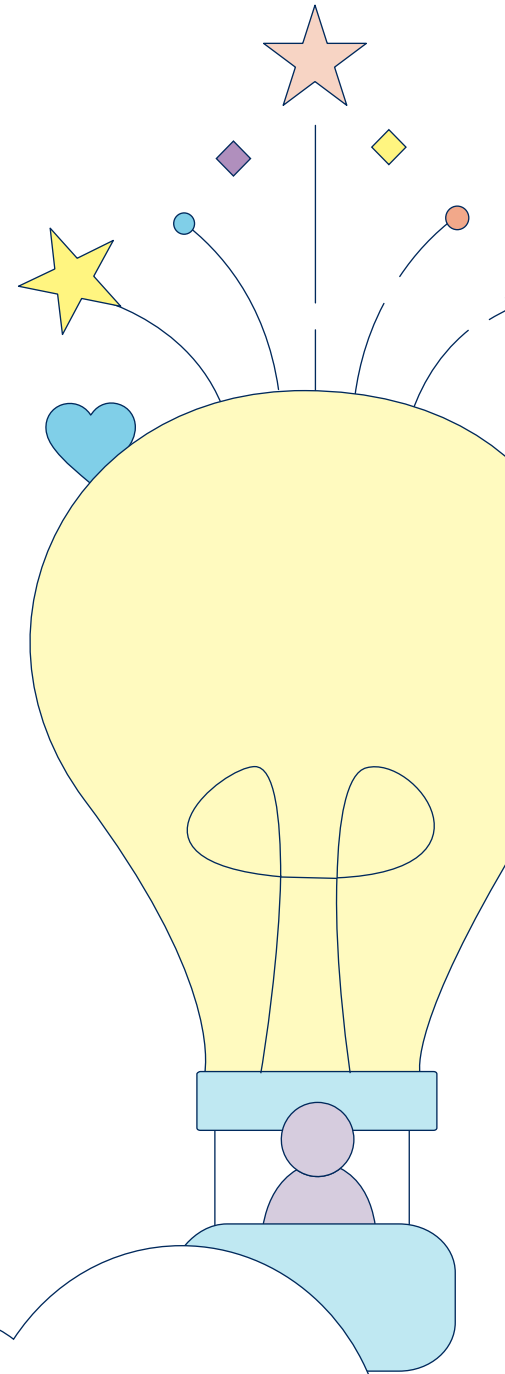## International Students First 48 Hours

In partnership with the Office of the Vice-Provost, International, the Innovation Hub will engage with 8 incoming international students and produce a short documentary based on their experiences as they first arrive in Canada.

Sport & Rec: Expanding Access Phase 2

In partnership with Sport & Rec, we will continue last year's collaboration to reimagine movement programs, services, and spaces through co-creation and student feedback.

Students with Family Responsibilities Project

In partnership with Family Care Office, we will explore the needs of students who are also parents, as they navigate their multiple roles and responsibilities while studying.
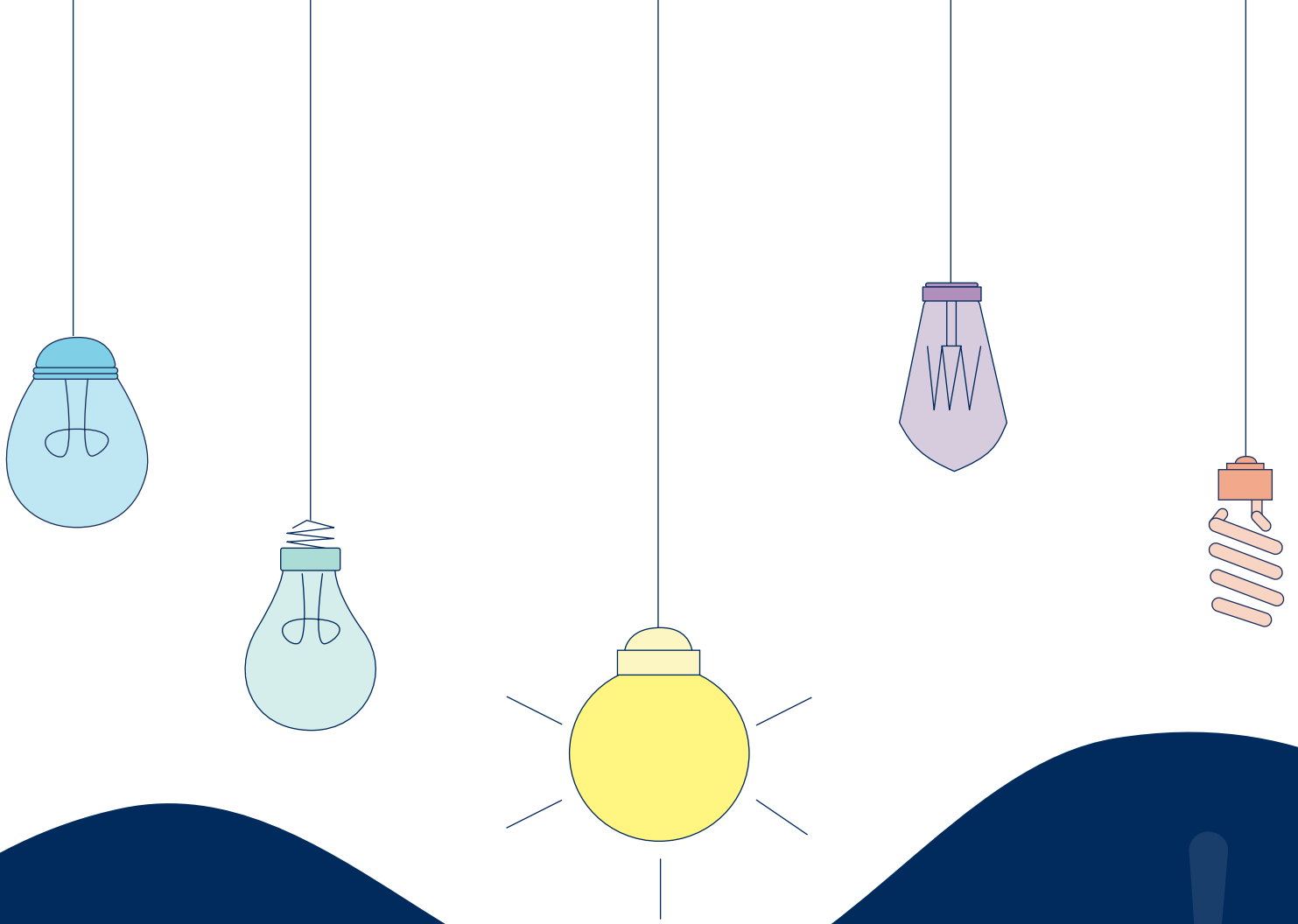
Get Involved in Our Work

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**.

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

INNOVATION HUB

STUDENT LIFE