



GRADUATE STUDENTS' UNION

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
LOCAL 19, CANADIAN FEDERATION OF STUDENTS

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GSU Response to the 'Towards 2030' Task Force on Institutional Organization

The Graduate Students' Union is pleased to have this opportunity to participate in the consultation process on the 'Towards 2030' Task Force on Institutional Organization. Overall, we are encouraged by the University's foresight to engage in a long-term strategic planning process.

Due to current graduate enrolment expansion at the University of Toronto, students are facing many challenges associated with access to their supervisors, availability of study space, competition for research funding and increased class sizes. 'Towards 2030' presents an ideal opportunity to reflect on these current issues and to ensure that they are not further exacerbated by plans to increase graduate enrolment to 25% of the student population at the University of Toronto.

Our main concerns in 'Towards 2030' include:

- The "earned autonomy" model of tuition fee regulation, which will reduce access for students wishing to pursue post-secondary education (PSE) at U of T. Recent studies from Statistics Canada have demonstrated that tuition fee increases disproportionately affect low-income families, resulting in "financial reasons" being the most frequently identified barrier to university and college attendance for students who did not pursue PSE.
- Internationalization at U of T as a means to increase University revenue, rather than to enrich the student experience. International recruitment should be aimed towards the best students from across the globe, rather than the students who can afford to come to U of T. In this vein, U of T should seek to diversify its student population, and offer admission and funding support to international students from resource-poor countries as well as to First Nations students in Canada.
- The proposal for a sole graduate campus, which will reduce academic exchange. We advocate for a multi-campus strategy that maintains a balance between undergraduate and graduate enrolment.
- The promotion of professional graduate programs without significant attention to high student debt load and the realities of the job market.
- Increased commercialization of research at U of T, and prioritization of disciplines that are more amenable to industry-sponsorship, such as the natural sciences, engineering and the health sciences, which may place funding for basic research in the humanities, social sciences or sciences in jeopardy.

The following presents our response to the particular issues you asked us to address:

A. Academic and Administrative Relationships

A1 Academic Relationships

1. What is the preferred relationship between UTM/UTSC/St George with respect to undergraduate, professional, graduate and doctoral stream academic programs?

Overall, we believe in the maintenance of a multi-campus vision/strategy with improvement of the coordination and communication between the campuses. We do not believe in designating St. George as the sole graduate campus, as it would discourage exchange between students and scholars at different points in their academic careers. Undergraduate students can benefit from learning in a research environment and from interaction with graduate and professional students.

What configuration will optimize and promote collegiality, fairness, flexibility and quality?

The Graduate Students' Union favours a formula that would guarantee sufficient teaching and research assistantship positions in all three campuses to cover funding packages, as well as ensure that most graduate students gain this experience because it is critical for most future career paths. In order to optimize fairness, flexibility and quality, we need to improve transportation services to UTM and UTSC and perhaps provide compensation for travel time for TAs who have to commute for work. In order to improve collegiality, the University should participate in outreach activities and enhance the technical infrastructure for teleconferences and webcasts.

- 2. What differentiation of undergraduate, professional, graduate and doctoral stream academic programs across the 3 campuses should be achieved?**
- 3. For each campus, what is the optimal mix of graduate students to undergraduates?**

Every campus at the University of Toronto should have a balance between graduate and undergraduate students. An undergraduate/post-graduate mix ensures academic growth opportunities for graduate students, through the availability of teaching assistantships.

Expansion of professional graduate programs should be based on their academic merit and professional needs, rather than as a means to increase tuition revenues to the University. Unregulated tuition fees for professional Masters programs limit access to graduate studies. Increasing enrolment in large professional programs without sufficient attention to the reality of the job market creates the phenomenon of graduating highly skilled classes of students who have significant student debt, and cannot find work in their fields of study. Also, higher enrolment in professional programs often puts guaranteed work placements in jeopardy, forcing students to double up on placements or miss opportunities for placement, which negatively impacts the quality of their graduate experience.

Given that due to current graduate enrolment expansion, individual departments/programs are challenged in providing transfer opportunities to their Masters' students into PhD programs, the University should ensure that these constraints are clearly communicated to all newly admitted

students. Graduate departments/programs that offer ‘doctoral stream’ programs need to ensure that they have space and resources for their Masters’ students who are wishing to apply for doctoral studies.

4. What differentiation of pedagogy/program delivery should be encouraged across the 3 campuses?

Undergraduate students, graduate students, and professional-stream students contribute to the unique, diverse learning environment at U of T. Interdisciplinary programs at the University should be promoted and expanded upon, given the complex nature of current problems that require input and engagement from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. Consideration should also be given to the co-location of undergraduate and graduate students of the same discipline/department on the same campus.

5. Should U of T consider establishing additional campuses and if so under what conditions and for what reasons? Are three campuses sufficient to meet the current and future needs of the University?

In light of the increasing demand for post-secondary education in the near future, the University should investigate the possibility of a fourth University of Toronto campus in a region of the GTA with high population growth (e.g. Brampton).¹ We recognize the necessity of graduate enrolment expansion. However, we need to accommodate growth without compromising quality. With the projected increase of undergraduate enrolment in Ontario, the University should plan to maintain the present transition rate from undergraduate to graduate programs.

6. What partnerships with other post secondary institutions might be synergistic for the delivery, quality and variety of programs?

Collaborative programs with other technical colleges may be synergistic in the case of practical programs like engineering and architecture seeing that students receive more of a theoretical academic experience at the university and can gain the technical (hands-on) experience through other technical colleges. Opening the possibility to attend courses at other peer universities in the GTA is also a beneficial experience for students, both graduate and undergraduate. For instance, if a graduate-level course on a particular research topic is offered at another institution, and would be beneficial for a student’s research, he/she should be able to take the course for credit and have it count towards his/her degree.

A2 Administrative Relationships

7. Are the current Vice-Presidential, central service and administrative responsibilities and authority appropriately distributed across St George, UTM, UTSC? If not, what changes should be considered in order to better meet the needs of faculty, staff and students?

¹ The Canadian Census 2005 reported that Brampton is the fastest growing city in Canada (<http://www.statcan.ca>).

Student services should follow the multi-campus approach, in order to ensure accessibility and comprehensiveness.

8. What administrative/structural improvements would optimize flexibility, agility, and facilitate speedy decision making in each campus and across the University as a whole?

Greater student representation on decision-making bodies might help to ensure that decision-making is an open process at the University and that students, who are most often those affected by the outcomes, feel that they have been consulted. Student unions represent the democratically elected representatives of students at the University and should be further utilized, since they have access to their membership and are accountable to their membership. As stakeholders, students need to participate in governance in order to believe that they are capable of influencing the outcomes.

Furthermore, each campus should retain a level of autonomy for issues that affect their students directly and demand urgent responses. Thus each campus should retain some form of sovereignty that relates to the day-to-day running of activities. However, there is a need to share information concerning exemplary practices across campuses so that optimal programming can be achieved.

9. How might we optimize the use of technology for administrative purposes?

The University has yet to optimize the use of technology for administrative purposes. Students should be a priority in determining the appropriate technological investments at the University. There is a need to research how the current use of technology is supporting the goals of the University. The challenge with technology is its tendency to change rapidly, making it difficult for personnel to keep up with the changes, and thus affecting their capacity to deliver services.

Furthermore, keeping up-to-date with technology is one challenge, but a significant other is ensuring that end users make use of the services provided through technology. On top of ensuring that administrative personnel use technology appropriately, students as users must be made aware of such services. Issues of technophobia among administrators and accessibility to technology must be addressed.

Suggestions for optimizing technology include:

- Proxy voting and online surveys to get feedback from the student body and faculty members prior to major decision implementation.
- Coordination of programming for student events, so students are aware of what is happening on campus.
- Transparency by providing online minutes of discussions that take place at administrative bodies and are openly accessible to the student body.
- Empower student representatives with actual seats on these decision making bodies to consult the student body and with the means to receive feedback from the student body and deliver/report back electronically to the administrative body to ensure efficacy, accountability and environmental friendliness.

In all these areas confidentiality and privacy of individual information must be preserved.

10. How might consolidation/sharing of services to small divisions enhance effectiveness and efficiency? How might a revised consolidation/sharing of services across the three campuses enhance effectiveness and efficiency?

We are concerned that although in principle, the consolidation of services seems more efficient, it could result in decreased accessibility and convenience for students. Students should have access to the services they pay for without having to face obstacles in the bureaucratic structure of the University. Collaborative services may be useful, as long as each service-providing centre can retain its identity so that students can easily associate it with a particular service.

11. What *administrative structure* would optimize the support the University could provide for teaching and research - within the current financial parameters; within an enhanced financial environment?

There should be transparency and student representation in either financial environment. If enhancing the financial environment is expected, there should be limited dependence on external private resources to ensure retention of academic freedom. The objectives of academic freedom, intellectual property and accountability to the public should be maintained.

B. Creating Communities for Students

**1. In your view, what are the optimal ways to create communities for undergraduate students?
for professional students?
for graduate students?**

Strategies to create communities for students on campus should be broad and diverse, in order to outreach to as many students as possible. Academic and social events that allow students at different levels of study and from diverse disciplines to interact may help to foster a sense of community. Events that offer free food or at least food with student-friendly prices often draw students out. At social events where liquor is served, drinks should also be available at reduced prices. At the GSU, we have promoted particular campaigns or events by offering subsidized drinks at our pub. At such a diverse campus as U of T, the University should also promote conferences and events that facilitate cross-cultural dialogue and provide opportunities for community building. Mentorship programs that assist students in more than their academic challenges, might also be useful.

Graduate communities could be created by: conducting outreach to different divisions and different departments within each division; promoting community involvement opportunities catered to the different graduate disciplines; hosting activities in collaboration with the GSU, which promote interdisciplinary dialogue and enrich the overall learning experience of the graduate students. Similarly, professional communities could be created by promoting weekly departmental seminars/gatherings and facilitating opportunities for interaction with senior professionals in the field.

2. What is the role of technology in creating/supporting communities?

Graduate students may not often be aware of events that occur outside their departments. Perhaps graduate research could be featured prominently on the U of T website, by focusing on particular students' projects in various disciplines across the university. Also, the University could promote publications by U of T scholars in open access journals, which may encourage students and faculty to read outside their discipline and to gain a greater sense of the diversity of the research that is conducted at the University of Toronto.

3. How should the needs of commuter students best be addressed?

The University should join student unions on campus in lobbying the province for affordable public transportation for students and should ensure that there are accessible lounges for non-resident students to communicate and socialize. For example, the Grad Lounge that opened at Grad House last spring, and is currently under construction, has very non-graduate student friendly hours: 10-6 pm. A lounge that caters to graduate students should be remain open into the evening, since many graduate students remain on campus after regular work hours.

C. Research Institutions & Industry Partners

1. What should be the goal of establishing these partnerships?

Research partnerships should be established in order to:

- Improve the overall quality of the research, but without infringements on academic freedom or restrictions on the intellectual property of the scholars.
- Promote dialogue and facilitate resource exchange or sharing.
- Provide the means for the research outcome to reach the community directly by establishing solid public relations with the relevant sectors of the community.

2. How might the University's relationships with the external research institutions and industry partners be further enhanced?

- As a public institution, the University should be responsive to the public's needs, rather than to particular needs of private companies. Further commercialization of research, and prioritization of projects that are 'market' friendly may place funding and support for basic research in the humanities, sciences and social sciences at risk.
- If industry-sponsored research is to be further enhanced at the University of Toronto, there should be clear whistle-blower protection in place for both faculty and students, in order to protect researchers' intellectual property.
- Academic freedom and research integrity at U of T should be maintained. The University should remain independent and should maintain its function as a place where ideas can be openly debated and discussed, and most importantly, shared. The goals of the University are thus different from private industry, which is oriented towards secrecy and innovation for the purpose of profit-making, rather than the greater social good. Financial dependence on external partners, should bear no influence on the research outcomes or the accessibility of the knowledge to the public.

- The institution should retain its independence with regard to directing research and maintaining the cross-disciplinary diversity on campus with no prioritization towards marketable or industry-friendly research disciplines.

3. To what extent should such partnerships include national and global relationships?

- Global exchange is critical at this time, and would enrich the overall outcome of research at this institution, especially where research is focused on social transformation not only at the local level, but also at the global level.
- Research partnerships should not be limited to wealthy countries but should include and empower developing countries.
- The University should increase opportunities for student exchange programs with partner institutions and offer international student admission at reasonable fees to maximize the cultural exchange experience for students in all disciplines across the campus.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Task Force on Institutional Organization. We look forward to your final report.

Respectfully submitted,

The GSU Executive