Introduction

We would like to thank the Office of the Provost and the Office of the Vice-Provost (Academic Programs) of University of Toronto for inviting us to be the members of the external review panel for the University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM). In particular, we would like to acknowledge the pre-arrival preparatory work done by Justine Garrett, Coordinator, Academic Programs and Planning in the Office of the Vice-Provost (Academic Programs) and the on-site efforts of Jessica Eylon, Program and Planning Officer, UTM. Their work ensured we got to UTM well-prepared and once there had a productive and enjoyable site visit.

In addition, Dean Amy Mullin’s comprehensive document, “University of Toronto Mississauga – Academic Portfolio 2015” provided the basis for the questions that we were able to address in our discussions with the many well-intentioned and enthusiastic faculty, staff, and students from the UTM, and their colleagues from across the University of Toronto. Their thoughtful insights and willingness to engage in frank exchanges, in both public and private sessions, have informed the reflections we offer below in the body of this report.

The external review consisted of meetings where all three of us had the opportunity to interview a wide range of stakeholders from the academic, administrative, and student (undergraduate and graduate) ranks of UTM. These meetings were held over two and a half days – from Monday 2 November to Wednesday 4 November 2015.

We have used the terms of reference as the template and have consolidated background materials and interview/discussion meetings around the themes that we were asked to address. We conclude this report with a summary of our observations and suggestions.

We would very much like to emphasise that our overall impression of the UTM is very positive – excellent professorial complement, engaged and committed support staff, motivated and
enthusiastic students, lovely facilities, and an idyllic setting. The building blocks for a successful and productive future are all in the mix. These facts must be kept clearly in mind as we address some of the aspects of life at UTM that its constituencies find troubling because it is in these positive features that solutions to problems can be found. Interviewing members of the UTM community, we heard point and counterpoint perspectives. In this report we have attempted to synthesise complicated matters into comprehensible pieces. We also provide some suggestions for how to move forward without prejudging the outcomes that should emerge from consultation, open debate, and willingness to compromise.

1. Congruence of academic plans with those of the University as whole

It is apparent to us that the rate of growth in the student body and in the professorial complement align with the general academic plan of the University of Toronto. Providing a high-quality education to well-prepared students by attracting and retaining world-class academic talent is manifest on the UTM campus and is consistent with the University of Toronto’s mission as a research-intensive university with excellent teaching programs across a wide range of disciplines. At the same time, however, the alignment of plans is not the same as successfully implementing them. Indeed, one of the recurrent issues, raised in virtually every meeting that we had with faculty, staff, students, and administrators was the almost ubiquitous presence of “growth pains.”

One of the most visible areas where growth has produced stress has been in faculty/student ratios, which are acknowledged to be quite high. We understand that this growth has played a role in financing the expansion of the campus’ physical plant, which in turn has been necessary to accommodate the increased numbers. Now, UTM must dedicate its attention to other aspects of growth management, meeting challenges of teaching increased numbers of students, allocating new positions in concert with an overall strategic plan, and engaging all faculty in the integration of teaching and research. In order to manage growth, the portfolios of the Vice Deans as well as those responsible for advising and academic integrity need attention and resources. We address this further under “organisation”. Suffice it here to say that the external review panel believes handling the impact of growth at UTM deserves serious attention.

A second major theme, not always directly linked to the above issues, with roots as much in history as in recent growth, was “identity.” Not everyone with whom we spoke shared the same ideas about the expectations that the University of Toronto has for UTM, and not all converged around a shared sense of an identity for UTM itself. Squaring the circle between research intensity and educational programs, while certainly not unique to UTM, is exacerbated by significant differences across departments; colleagues from different disciplines seem not to share a common vision on this matter. We think it is important for UTM to articulate a vision that will allow its various constituents to establish a secure and stable identity, even while recognizing that it will be experienced in
different ways. While it is not our place to draw the profile of that identity, we can nonetheless make note of some of the elements we think contribute to it:

- participation in and contributing to the faculty and research strengths of the University of Toronto
- location in an attractive suburban setting, with wonderful facilities
- exceptional partnership with the city of Mississauga
- imaginative, new interdisciplinary programs in some specialized areas
- students who are hungry for success
- a passionate and committed group of alumni.

The more than can be done to solidify a UTM identity, the less confusion there will be about fundamental questions of purpose, and the more effective the entire institution will be in delivering its teaching and research missions. But this identity must be actively shaped, and all constituents must feel that they have a stake in it. The very best decanal leadership must be sought to collaborate with the Principal in this effort. Opportunities for communication and participation must be created and incorporated into the UTM culture, and the entire campus should consider opportunities to replicate and adapt the programs that have most effectively leveraged UTM’s strengths. We recognized considerable differences of opinion about how to respond to the perceived goal of seeing more innovative graduate programs offered at UTM; these differences were not only disciplinary but also generational. Yet we think that there are many opportunities to be tapped and numerous opportunities to be created across the disciplines, which can play an important role in the dynamic shaping of UTM’s identity.

In this process, UTM’s relationship to the St. George campus must be clarified. There are real and perceived inequities and disparities noted by faculty, staff, and students, sometimes across identical departments on the two campuses. From our perspective, at the present time UTM is somewhere between a comprehensive university within a multi-university system and a multi-disciplinary division within an integrated three-campus one-university model. In either case, local academic leadership must work with the U of T administration to find a way to balance UTM’s independence and its ties in ways that will not disadvantage UTM faculty and students relative to their counterparts at the St. George campus (or at UTS). Otherwise, it will be difficult for UTM to forge a sense of identity that is not coloured by the feeling that it is a poor relation, even where the facts speak loudly about the quality of its faculty and their research. We return to this issue in the conclusions.

The de-centralised, activity-based budget model of the U of T seems to have produced inequities among faculty who are otherwise peers. While we do not profess to understand the details of these inequities, some (e.g. differential start-up packages and/or teaching loads) were not disputed at any level. Some of these conditions may derive from the fact that the U of T activity-based budgeting, which is necessarily program-centric, does not reflect well enough the tri-campus nature of graduate education or the fact that a number of faculty have their principal academic/research “homes” downtown while their undergraduate teaching duties are
at UTM. If the U of T wishes to sustain the three-campus model to the benefit of all, these inequities need to be addressed.

An additional theme needs to be noted here that builds upon the foregoing observations: we heard strong assertions about unequal treatment and evident inequities in distributive mechanisms for supporting student life and learning at both the graduate and undergraduate levels, and in providing an environment which professors could thrive in their research and pedagogical endeavours. We recognize that workloads cannot be calibrated according to a single measure and differ across disciplines. But the discrepancies reported to us were across campuses within disciplines. *We think it ought to be the responsibility of University policy, and not left to the budget model and resource allocation mechanisms alone, to insure equity in matters such as workload.* We also encourage a more refined calculation of the work associated with teaching, one that would recognize, e.g., the difference between teaching a large lecture course with few supports and a medium sized course with adequate assistance. We would encourage the administration to consider developing a comprehensive and uniform policy regarding the equitable deployment of TAs and other teaching supports across programs and campuses, while avoiding the inflexibility of quantitatively fixed ratios. Below, we discuss resources in detail (under point 5).

2. **Progress on academic priorities and capacity to meet challenges and opportunities**

We did not discuss the strategic academic plan for UTM in detail, and are not certain that one exists beyond the level of generalities. The Principal did indicate that he would be working on this issue upon his return from administrative leave. This means that the campus has not adapted to growth in as strategic a way as it might, and some departments are suffering from the “whiplash” effect of being catapulted into expansion with too few opportunities to plan in a deliberate fashion. We were made aware of departmental five-year plans, but do not know whether or how they have been synthesized or coordinated. The sheer number of faculty searches in certain areas, sometimes in a single department, gives us cause to wonder about the effectiveness of UTM’s faculty expansion plan. While the faculty must be expanded, we note implausible numbers of searches in single areas, and a correspondingly large number of searches that need to be carried forward from one year to the next.

*UTM should take this unique opportunity of faculty expansion to go beyond the need to respond to demand, and use it to help shape a distinctive profile in a deliberate way.* Some strategies that might be considered include “cluster hires,” interdisciplinary appointments, positions that will best expand upon the recent successes in the IMI and Medical Academy programs, and positions that would encourage the pursuit of new directions in the traditional humanities and social science disciplines.
This said, there are additional opportunities for UTM and the downtown campus to leverage mutual interests by making the connections between them as seamless as possible, even with the geographical and cultural challenges. Students seem to face challenges in meeting their schedule of classes both on the UTM campus but also especially when they must travel across campuses. *A university investment in more frequent, high-tech, WIFI-enabled shuttle buses could go a long way toward enhancing mobility and incentivizing collaboration across the campuses.*

UTM appears to have struggled to maintain the quality of its applicant pool over the course of its recent expansion. Expanding its catchment area seems entirely possible given the physical attractiveness of the campus setting, its new facilities, and some innovative programmatic offerings. To do so, however, would require some imaginative solutions to the shortage of on-campus student housing. We do not ourselves have immediate solutions to this problem to suggest, but we recognize the talent and resourcefulness of the Chief Administrator Officer who in collaboration with the academic leadership should undertake collaborative conversations with the City of Mississauga and the central U of T administration to address this issue.

3. **Approach to graduate and undergraduate education in support of students’ academic experience**

The quality of the student educational experience is determined first and foremost by the quality and level of interaction with faculty. We were made aware of instances where class size is unacceptably large, in which the assignment of additional support to help with sections or tutorials is uneven, and in which tenure-stream faculty whose graduate departments are located downtown have a distant relationship with undergraduates at UTM. As faculty/student ratios are rebalanced, it will be important to pay attention to the depth and quality of the encounters between faculty and students.

We perceived tremendous enthusiasm and interest among undergraduate student academic associations. These should be encouraged and supported in a systematic way. For example, *it may be helpful to join forces with the student academic associations in the offering of services to students, both to avoid duplication and to increase the variety of services provided.*

Undergraduate students can also be helped further, and their graduation rates increased and time-to-degree reduced, with more effective and coordinated advising. Advising is currently distributed across two portfolios, which does not make obvious sense and seems to require a reorganisation of the relevant portfolios. The need for more opportunities for the development of English language and communication skills, mental health/wellness support, as well as training in the understanding of boundaries related to academic integrity, were prominent concerns among those we interviewed. We were heartened by the existence of an “early alert” system designed to identify students in difficulty, and we encourage efforts in this area.
The graduate student experience, as revealed to us, varied considerably by department (and sometimes within the heterogeneous departments at UTM), with the most serious issues expressed by students whose graduate research departments were located principally downtown or who were in departments at UTM that did not map directly onto the most relevant graduate department. These issues overlap with some of the fundamental UTM “identity” issues mentioned above, but can nonetheless be addressed in some relatively direct ways (e.g., creating incentives to host conferences, lectures, and seminars at the Mississauga campus; sponsoring community-based research projects and opportunities for engaged learning; incentivizing multi-disciplinary collaborations at UTM that cross the humanities, social sciences, and the hard sciences).

It is noteworthy that the IMI is on an extremely positive and strong upward trajectory. Its leaders are enthusiastic, and seem to form a cohesion in vision that surpasses that seen elsewhere. Another encouraging example is the Medical Academy. The latter, however, has a reporting structure is not directly to the leadership at UTM but rather to the Medical Division. More initiatives of both types, local programs and collaborative efforts with other divisions, are needed as UTM evolves.

4. Fostering and supporting a culture of excellence in research and scholarly activities

UTM has a strong group of leaders, as well as a cohort of faculty, who are committed to research and scholarship of the highest calibre. There is, however, a perception that the UTM campus has become a workhorse of undergraduate training, rather than a significant part of a well-integrated and functioning tri-campus university. As noted above, the UTM faculty/student ratios are the highest among the three campuses. In 2013, the reported student/faculty ratio was 38:1, compared to the St. George overall ratio of 20:1 and the Faculty of Arts and Science ration of 30:1 in the same year. Faculty members offered that their heavier teaching loads created inequities that make for uneven competition on the research front with colleagues who are principally located at the St. George campus.

There is also a perception of inequity in start-up funds provided to faculty members located at UTM, as well as perceptions of inequity in obtaining opportunities in key leadership roles, for example, as graduate chair. Faculty members reported that such lower financial support impacts the ability to gain competitive advantage, including being able to attract the best graduate students and post–doctoral researchers. Culture differences across how various disciplines work between campuses also create challenges. For example, we heard of the difficulties in fostering cross-discipline research and curriculum development because of sparse opportunities for discussions between members of disciplines in the sciences and in the arts and humanities.
Faculty members from some disciplines are often “missing in action” from UTM, because their research space at the St. George campus offers a dynamic quality that is absent on the suburban campus. Not surprisingly, they prefer to be located downtown. Yet there are tremendous possibilities for interdisciplinary research and for the creation of new interdisciplinary programming, as befits some aspects of modern research at any newly created university campus. Nonetheless these seem to be impeded by the absence of a common vision for UTM’s role in the tri-campus system. It may also be useful to consider the unique research and scholarship opportunities for faculty members and graduate students who choose UTM.

5. Organisational effectiveness, financial structures, and resource allocations

Many of those we interviewed reported a belief that there is an imbalance in the transfer of funds from UTM to the University, an imbalance alleged principally with respect to the relative contributions of UTM/St. George. Based on data we received, there certainly appears to be a noticeable financial transfer imbalance to the University Fund, a fund that is re-distributed to academic divisions across the University of Toronto’s divisions. Many faculty members commented on this information, noting that for every $1 that UTM contributes to the University Fund, $0.29 is returned, whereas by comparison, the Faculty of Arts & Science receives $0.85 for every $1 it contributes to the Fund. There may very well be a logical explanation for the difference, but it has not been elaborated for UTM colleagues and should be made clear to all.

While while we are agnostic as to the merits of these reports, they do persist. Whether anything needs to be rectified or not, there seems to be the need for a vigorous and clear communications campaign to daylight all the information, to present it to all faculty and students, and for those who are in positions of responsibility to explain the rationale for that aspect (at least) of the overall U of T budget. We understand that at the U of T, as at many institutions, many acting officials have lost the original recipe for the way the cake was baked, but institutions can and do change, and the constituents of UTM deserve to be fully informed about the structure and implementation of the budgets that affect them.

We heard also of challenges with obtaining timely replacements for leaders at UTM, including a perception that there were many roles for which interim leaders were installed because of an inability to find suitable administrators. This is not intended to address the quality and quantity of the work done by interim leaders. Rather, we think timely, permanent appointments are necessary to give the community an appropriate sense of the importance of the jobs that are being done.

UTM seems to have reached a threshold and may have outgrown its old administrative structure. The Principal-VP, Dean, and CAO model is a reflection of a time when UTM was a much smaller place and now appears quite odd. On the strictly academic side of the equation, the sub-dean structures have become too large to be managed and need to change. The distributed current distributed model of organising enrolment management and academic
advising should be examined to find the right mix of working and reporting relationships, being mindful of the fact that “with whom one works” can be as important as “to whom one reports.” It seems clear to us that enrolment management has to be closely coordinated with academic planning in order to manage growth in classes, as well as for planning increases in faculty, staff and technical support complements. It might be useful to review the portfolios related to these areas to consider new structures or new communication paths across related leadership roles for better alignment of these portfolios. As just noted, workload associated with the academic portfolio would also benefit from review. With the administrative structure potentially being resourced-stressed, leaders have allocated considerable time to day-to-day management with little slack time to consider different ways of doing things. It is important to reflect on the question of who will take charge of strategic academic and institutional planning and innovation at a time when everyone is busy managing growth.

6. Relationship to other University of Toronto campuses and divisions

As with any Faculty, division, or school, the key element of the relationship of UTM to the U of T is the identification of the former’s distinctiveness as part of a broad strategic planning exercise of the latter. Some faculty members see the St. George campus as the head and heart of the U of T and are not very interested in further developing the tri-campus vision; others offer a strong presence at UTM and are yearning for a clearly articulated vision and distinctive place for UTM within the tri-campus union. These latter faculty members also seek to have at UTM an alignment in driving such a vision forward by members of the UTM community, as they feel that scattered efforts toward building community have been only weakly, if at all, effective.

There are challenges felt without such a vision, for example when the accreditation of important programs must rely heavily on the profiles of faculty at the St. George campus. Students have also commented on a need for a greater sense of community at UTM, both in the faculty body and among the teaching assistants. There is superb opportunity to create a nexus of UTM activity in research to complement that at the St. George campus, and to build on differentiation that profiles unique programs such as offered in management. This could assist in recruitment of high-quality students, which is currently a priority. Such a strategic definition of the relationship would also provide a focus to advancement and fundraising for UTM.

With the high growth occurring and planned at UTM, as well as the corresponding growth in faculty and staff complement expected, UTM is in a strong position to shape its profile and culture to reflect a distinctive niche and to differentiate itself in research and scholarship.

7. UTM’s local, national, and international outreach and societal impact

UTM is in an exceptional position with regard to its strong relationship with the City of Mississauga and the pride and respect that the mayor and the citizens of Mississauga show to
the campus. Alumni leaders are a supportive, strong and committed group, enabling connections for UTM’s leaders and for its students, and bridging the campus with the community in areas such as career services and mentorship for students. With its emphasis on professional programs and community-based learning, and the development of the new medical programs, UTM is establishing clear impact on its local environment and on society generally. In our conversation with alumni leaders, however, we did notice the strain of dual identity between U of T and UTM.

We were impressed with the innovativeness, quality, and responsiveness of several niche programs that linked UTM to its location but also to the larger goals and objectives of the University of Toronto as a whole. It has had good success in attracting international students to several of its signature programs already (IMI, MAM, sustainability management, forensic science) and is launching initiatives in big data and management for scientists. As noted above, these kinds of initiative should be further encouraged.

Final observations and summary of suggestions

The campus mood regarding the selection of new dean was quite tense not only about who it should be, but also what that person should be expected to do and over what he or she should have control. Given what was mentioned above regarding the differential nature of attachment to the campus by professors from different fields of study, we think this moment will be decisive in setting a tone for the next several decades. We urge the Provost, Principal, and Advisory Committee to consider the following as they frame the attributes and style that will be needed to ensure a bright future for UTM in choosing the next Dean.

1) How does UTM fit into the overall vision and strategic direction of the University of Toronto?
2) In line with that vision how can a shared “collective identity” among the various stakeholders on the UTM campus and with their counterparts elsewhere at the University of Toronto be shaped?
3) What are the distinctive missions of the UTM within the broader framework of the University of Toronto’s objectives for a synchronised three-campus model and are the current resource allocation systems properly aligned to achieve these goals? If not, does the model of a comprehensive university within a U of T system make sense?
4) Does the UTM receive its “fair share” of the resources that it generates in order to address the local needs and contribute to the overall objectives of the University of Toronto? If not, what can be done to correct any inequities?

Below is a list of some of the suggestions we have made (directly or implicitly) in the body of this report:

a) Dealing with the impact of growth at UTM deserves serious, publicly visible, attention on the part of the campus and University leadership.
b) A vision for UTM, consonant with its position within the larger U of T, should be articulated in a way that allows various constituents to establish a secure and stable identity, even if expressed in different ways.

c) An identity for UTM must be actively shaped, and all constituents must feel that they have a stake in it.

d) UTM should take the opportunity of faculty expansion to go beyond the need to respond to demand, and use it to help shape its distinctive profile in a deliberate way.

e) University policy, and not the budget model and resource allocations alone, have to ensure that UTM professors, students, and staff are treated equitably in matters such as workload, research support, advising, and the assignment of teaching support.

f) The goal of clarifying the vision, distinctive mission, and achieving transparent equity in budget allocation mechanisms should be balanced with expectations about the role of UTM in the overall U of T structure.

g) On more immediate and practical matters, it would be helpful for administrators to discuss with student associations the best way to “join forces” in offering of services to students to avoid duplication and to increase the variety of services that can be provided.

h) Similarly, a university investment in more frequent, high-tech, WIFI-enabled shuttle buses would go a long way toward enhancing mobility and incentivizing collaboration across the campuses.

i) The student to tenure-stream faculty ratio should be reduced as quickly as possible to bring it into line with other divisions, determining what the right ratio is should be based on nuanced and statistically controlled comparisons.

j) Efforts should be made to keep UTM “stars” on the local campus and avoid having them shift to UTSG downtown.

k) Efforts have to be made to avoid having faculty (and students) at UTM feel like second class citizens within the University of Toronto “polity”.

l) UTM students need to have opportunities to participate in international educational and practical experiences.

m) As Mississauga itself has undergone considerable demographic, social, and economic changes, it is important to reassess and strengthen the relationship of UTM to the City.
n) The proposal to limit incoming classes to no more than 4400 for the next 4 years to ensure student quality must be accompanied by a continuation of faculty expansion in order to achieve its stated goals.

o) A new integrated planning cycle needs to be created, with specifically assigned task forces on contentious matters.

p) UTM should have in its toolkit unique research and scholarship opportunities for faculty members and graduate students who choose the campus.

q) Constituents of UTM deserve to be fully informed about the construction and implementation of the budgets that affect them.

r) Academic leadership at UTM and at the U of T as a whole should reflect on who will take charge of innovation, at a time when everyone is busy managing growth and the daily routines of administration.

s) By encouraging careful reflection and fostering distinguishing initiatives, UTM can place itself in a superb position to shape its profile and culture, to reflect a distinctive niche, and to differentiate its research, scholarship, and educational programs and approaches within the University of Toronto.