

Balancing the Campus: Perspectives on UTM's Master Space Planning

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Executive Summary

As UTM plans for the future, several challenges and opportunities have been identified:

- Parking
- Servicing
- Transit
- Pedestrian connections
- Gateway and landmarks
- Edges
- Street furniture and amenities
- 4-season open space

This report addresses almost all of these items within the context of overall campus growth and development. Specifically, we note that the construction of the new Instructional Centre (IC) – which will increase classroom space at UTM by an additional 50% – will significantly alter the balance of student population and activity on campus. The bulk of student activity in the past has centered in the South Building, with its 4 large lecture theatres, food service, and meeting space. With the construction of the Hazel McCallion Academic Learning Centre, student activity has shifted significantly with the extensive utilization of study space at the HMALC. Consequently, food services and open space utilization appears to have increased in the CCT lobby, likely due to proximity to the HMALC.

Given the student activity shift noted above, it is probable that a similar shift will occur when the IC opens, particularly because it will offer a variety of space functions in large capacities – instructional space, open-use computing facilities, study space, and food service. Thus, the following planning goals largely focus on contending with this activity shift: (1) *distributed parking* – parking space must be balanced across campus; (2) *accessible transit* – public transportation stops must be located near campus population centres; (3) *pedestrian connectivity* – campus sectors must be interconnected, and intervening landscape features must be pedestrian-permeable; (4) *effective signage and landmarks* – campus signage and landmarks must be enhanced both for on-campus direction and incoming traffic; (5) *open-space usage* – more outdoor amenities and furniture must be provided to increase user-friendliness of outdoor spaces.

This report offers the following recommendations based upon their abilities to meet the aforementioned planning goals:

1. Creation of a north campus parking lot
2. Re-establishment of north campus transit stop
3. Creation of pedestrian path across north campus field
4. Creation of a campus welcome centre
5. Improve on- and off-campus signage
6. Creation of a continuous, circum-campus jogging/walking/cycling path
7. Addition of outdoor seating in and adjacent to green-space

We are also addressing two additional issues not covered by the eight challenges and opportunities that have been identified in the context of UTM's planning. Firstly, as UTM plans enrolment for the future, graduate enrolment is expected to increase significantly beyond its current on-campus levels. As such, two specific needs attendant to graduate students must be addressed: the need for graduate- and family-friendly housing expansion, and the need for a graduate student centre.

Secondly, given the significant past and continuing increase in undergraduate enrolment at UTM, it has become increasingly difficult to effectively schedule examinations into existing space. Additionally, the traditional convocation ceremonies for UTM students at Convocation Hall on the St. George campus presents ongoing logistical problems, and is an inappropriate location for a large graduation class who have spent the vast majority of their academic careers at a different location.

To address the above two issues, we recommend:

1. Graduate and family housing relocation to the MaGrath Valley and Leacock Lane communities, and the construction of a new, higher-density undergraduate residence on the current Schrieberwood site
2. Construction of a field-house: multi-use, large capacity building for examinations, convocation, and other usage

Introduction

U of T Mississauga is consistently associated with its heavily-treed and green campus. An integral part of UTM's identity, campus green-space has been effectively preserved even amid unprecedented enrolment growth and associated building projects. However, green-space preservation has led to a lack of parking space on campus, which is not easy to remedy effectively, particularly in light of the opening of the Instructional Centre (IC) in 2011. Because the building will fundamentally shift the balance and flow of student activity toward the north end of the campus, parking space must be increased in this area.

In spite of effective green-space preservation, future campus development can provide the opportunity to take better advantage of UTM's outdoor environment. Currently, the bulk of outdoor seating on campus is located in mostly built-up areas, such as the western pathway from the South Building to the Five Minute Walk. Pedestrian connections through the green-space on campus are not currently optimum; additional connectivity between campus sectors can ensure better pedestrian traffic circulation and accessibility.

Finally, a significant challenge identified by the Office of the Registrar Planning Team is the lack of any campus focal point for visitors. On-campus events and recruitment efforts have been somewhat hindered by a lack of signage, or an obvious main entrance to the campus. While the preservation of green space on campus has strengthened the identity of UTM overall, it has, in practice, somewhat obscured the identity of important focal points and destinations on campus. This may be easily rectified without ecological compromise.

Recommendations

North campus parking lot

Because of the anticipated student activity and population shifts on campus, solutions to the campus parking shortage cannot be planned without taking overall campus population distribution into account. For example, while the expansion of parking in Development Site 9 may alleviate aggregate parking shortage, it would not effectively serve the significant campus population that exists in the North Building or will exist in the Instructional Centre. Furthermore, persons with physical disabilities will continue to face challenges in moving between parking concentrations near South Building and the northern end of campus.

Thus, this report recommends the construction of a parking lot on the site directly opposite the North Building on the northwest side of the Outer Ring Road (See Appendix A, Development Site R1). This recommendation has the following advantages:

1. Development Site R1 is in close proximity to the North Building and the Instructional Centre
2. This parking lot could also serve future residence development on the Schrieberwood site

North campus transit hub

The existing transit stop at North Building services only the inter-campus shuttle bus. In order to better serve the transit needs of the north campus area (where the IC will become a campus-entry destination) a municipal transit hub needs to be established. Our recommendation is that the existing shuttle bus stop should be relocated adjacent to the IC, and that the stop should also serve as an additional municipal transit hub. The advantages are:

1. Creating a new municipal transit hub, instead of relocating the existing stop near the Kaneff Centre, will ensure that both the south campus and north campus populations are adequately served.
2. Relocating the existing shuttle bus stop to the IC will support the greater student population anticipated at the IC, and minimize traveller confusion by sharing a location with municipal transit.

North field pedestrian path

The current arrangement of pedestrian pathways and green space create barriers to pedestrian traffic, particularly between the residence enclaves on the north-west side of campus and the sites of the HMALC and IC. This is particularly important because the residence enclave includes UTM's three major residence halls: Roy Ivor Hall, Oscar Peterson Hall, and Erindale Hall.

The north campus field is currently underutilized. The lack of outdoor furniture and pathways creates an uninviting environment where the bulk of activity on the field is limited to practice of the Toronto Argonauts. The position of the field as a central location bordered by campus activity hubs creates an opportunity for it to become a campus focal point.

In order to ensure easy access from the residences to the IC and HMALC as well as develop the north field into a campus focal point, we recommend transforming the field into a campus quad that will include playing fields, more trees, outdoor furniture, and additional pathways. Pathways would join the Five Minute walk immediately adjacent to Erindale Hall with the service road adjacent to the HMALC, while the outdoor furniture, enhanced landscaping with tree plantings, and reconfigured laying fields would create an inviting quad. The advantages of this recommendation are:

1. Takes advantage of existing, impromptu pedestrian pathway.
2. Facilitates movement of traffic between significant campus activity and population centres.
3. Encourages more student usage of north campus field.
4. Creates an outdoor focal point for the north end of campus.

Campus Welcome Centre and signage

While recent years have seen the construction of architecturally significant buildings to the campus as UTM has grown in enrolment, there has been little development in the way of campus signage, and no focal point for visitors to campus. This has created problems for visitors and people new to the campus in finding their way onto and around campus.

Welcome Centre

Typically, the Recruitment and Admissions (R&A) office has served as an initial destination and point-of-contact for visitors to campus. In order to facilitate its function as such, the R&A office was relocated to the former Springbank building as the UTM Welcome Centre. However, this solution proved unsatisfactory due to the building's dislocation from the rest of campus. The R&A office has since been relocated back in the South Building, adjacent to the Meeting Place. While its new location has facilitated operations, it lacks a strong visual presence and is difficult for visitors to find.

The Conference Services department is also an initial point of contact for visitors to campus. Its current location on the 3rd floor of South Building is also difficult for visitors to find. Thus, we recommend the creation of a campus welcome centre to house both the R&A office and Conference Services. This centre should be located contiguously with the campus, in a location that is easily accessible and evident from both main entrances to campus. The best location to meet these criteria is Development Site 8 (See Appendix A). In order to fully take advantage of the visibility of the site, the hill immediately in front of and adjacent to South Building must be reduced in height, and there must be a clear, intuitive traffic link from main entrances to the Centre. This will eliminate current orientation problems experienced by visitors entering the campus, and will enhance the external visibility of Development Site 8.

Some advantages of this recommendation are:

1. High visibility from Collegeway and Mississauga Road entrances
2. Will provide a one-stop point of initial contact and information for any visitors to campus

Signage

There is very little directional signage on campus; such as it is, existing signage is inconsistent and does not adequately provide direction over the whole campus. This creates problems for visitors, new students, and new staff and faculty. Additionally, the existing campus entrances are poorly marked, and do not reflect the importance of UTM within the municipal community as well as within the academic community – the current Springbank Centre site is particularly problematic. Its locale at the main entrance to campus provides an opportunity to create a welcoming entrance, however its current layout presents visitors with a parking-lot view and minimal landscaping. Thus, we recommend enhanced, more visible entrance signage, as well as a robust, accessible on-campus system of signage. The on-campus system should include several outdoor campus maps that identify the user's current location as well as the campus locations of all academic and administrative offices on campus.

Circum-campus path

The athletic and leisure space on campus is currently limited to the various athletic fields on campus. While these serve the purpose of some athletic and leisure activities, they do not take full advantage of the overall campus environment. Additionally, while there is a picturesque nature trail on the eastern and north-eastern sides of campus, the trail is relatively inaccessible, and not well known due to very limited visibility and lack of signage. Currently, the Outer Ring Road is used extensively by community members for jogging and walking, which presents a safety issue because of the lack of continuous pedestrian pathways. Thus we recommend the creation of a continuous, paved pedestrian pathway encircling the campus. Generally following the Outer Circle road and joining with Residence Road, this pathway will allow users to enjoy the overall natural and architectural beauty of the campus as well as providing a safe, accessible outdoor path for users with limited mobility. The advantages of this recommendation are:

1. Enhanced accessibility for all users to campus green space
2. Outdoor athletic amenity in addition to existing playing fields
3. Provides accessibility for users with limited mobility
4. Improves pedestrian safety along Outer Ring Road

Outdoor seating

Current outdoor seating at UTM is relatively sparse in comparison to the amount of green space. The seating that exists is largely limited to areas away from green space. While that seating is well-used, we recommend additional outdoor seating be installed in campus green spaces. This would take further advantage of the campus' natural beauty, and provide greater access for the community. Possible locations include:

1. Along proposed north field pedestrian pathway
2. Along proposed circum-campus path
3. Along Five Minute Walk
4. Improved seating on South Building patio area
5. CCT Courtyard

Graduate and family housing enhancements

Part of UTM's strategic plan for 2030 calls for a significant increase in graduate student enrolment on campus. While there is currently a small population of graduate students on campus, housing for these students and their families is limited to the small Schrieberwood community at the north end of campus. These townhouses are old, and in need of extensive renovation or rebuilding. Additionally, they are situated at the opposite end of campus from the new UTM Early Learning Centre in the Leacock Lane community.

In addition to the expansion of graduate student enrolment, undergraduate enrolment will continue to grow, requiring additional residence space. In order to accommodate this growth, and address the need for additional graduate and family housing, we recommend the re-establishment of the MaGrath Valley and Leacock Lane residence communities as family and graduate housing. We further recommend that the existing townhouses in the Schrieberwood community be replaced with a new, higher-density apartment style residence for undergraduate students, similar to the successful ones recently operationalized (Erindale Hall and Oscar Peterson Hall). The advantages of these recommendations are:

1. The new graduate housing will be located much nearer to the childcare centre
2. The townhouse-style residences are more appropriate for families than an apartment-style residence
3. The new apartment-style residence will greatly enhance the visual appeal of the north end of campus, and make more efficient use of the land

Field house

UTM's enrolment growth has changed the identity of the campus from a mere satellite campus or college of the Faculty of Arts & Science, into an important undergraduate educational and research focal point for the western GTA. As such, it is increasingly a destination for academic conferences and other community events. UTM's efforts and willingness to host these events is continually restricted by its limited classroom space and absence of large-capacity event space. In addition, UTM's strong identity as a discrete and major academic division within U of T is hampered by the necessity for our graduating students to convocation on the St. George campus, a locale that many students never visit during their entire undergraduate career.

Finally, undergraduate enrolment growth with limited space has placed logistical constraints on how exams are scheduled and conducted. While UTM has been able to adjust its scheduling and examination practices to accommodate for enrolment growth, it has placed undue burdens on other campus facilities, such as the new gymnasium in the Recreation, Athletics, and Wellness Centre (RAWC). Additionally, the new 12-week term has necessitated many high-enrolment courses to conduct mid-term examinations outside of class time – typically during evenings when there are rooms available.

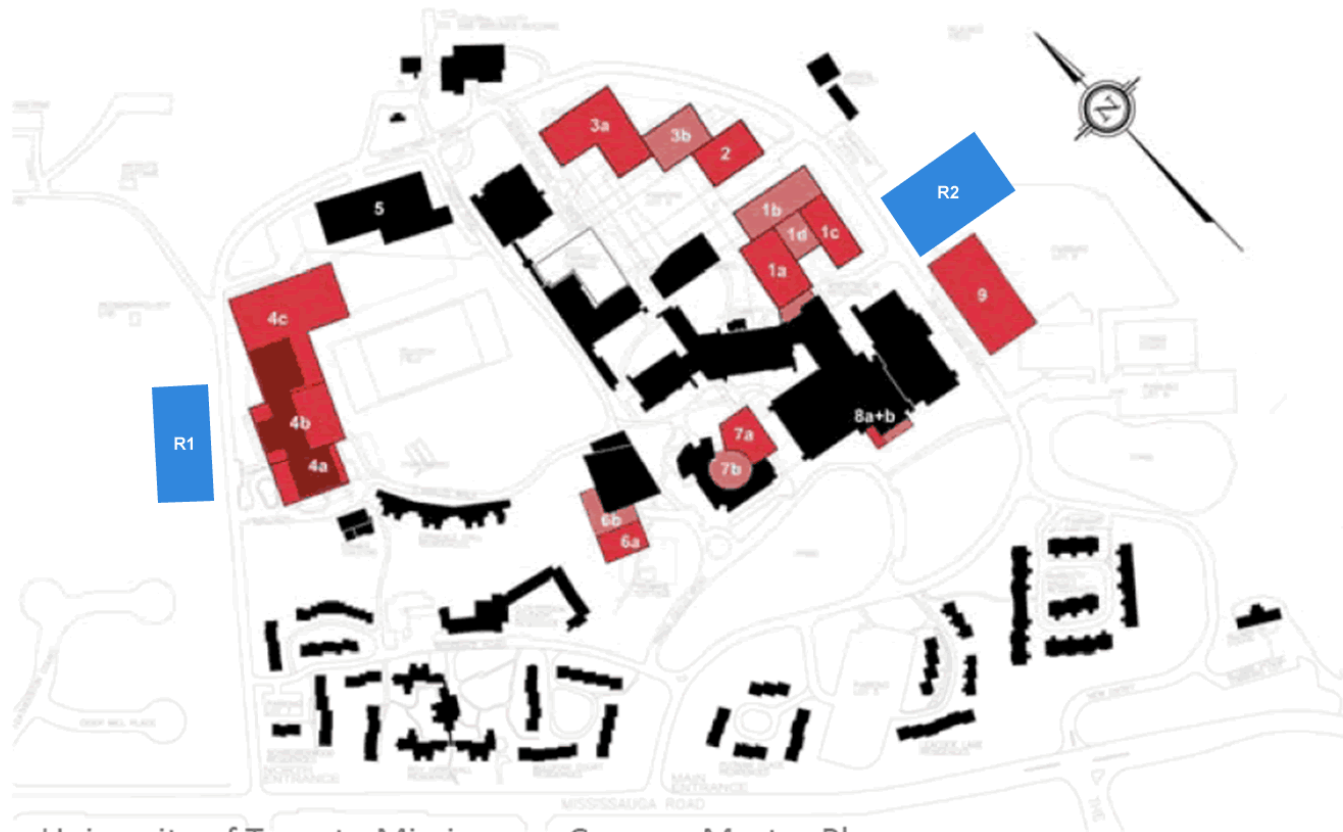
Given the absence of large-capacity event space in the face of the aforementioned campus developments, we recommend the construction of a multi-purpose, high-capacity field house. We recommend that it be constructed on the site opposite the RAWC (See Appendix A, Development Site R2). The advantages of this recommendation are:

1. Provides high-capacity testing space for mid-term exams and final exams
2. Provides a location to hold convocation ceremonies for UTM graduating students
3. Provides a venue for hosting conferences and other community events
4. The location will provide good proximity to student services, athletics, and Conference Services, as well as parking

Conclusions

UTM's considerable growth over the last decade has been well-managed – the campus' green space has been well-preserved, and placement of new buildings has taken advantage of, and been harmonized with the environment. However, as we move forward in the future, particularly in light of the new IC, more needs to be done to ensure balanced activity and campus amenities that are accessible to all. The recommendations within this report will enhance existing campus features, accommodate future developments, and solve existing campus space and circulation issues.

Appendix A: Development Sites 2010



University of Toronto Mississauga Campus Master Plan

DEVELOPMENT SITES 2010