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1. Executive summary

The University of Toronto (U of T) is a world-class institution that is grounded in excellence and expertise. Over the course of its 190-year history, the university has attracted top talent and minds from all corners of the world. It now ranks among the top 25 universities in the world and is among the top 10 public universities globally.

Today the university serves a range of individuals and delivers on mandates at its three campuses, along with a central mandate from President Meric Gertler that includes Three Priorities:

1. Leverage the university’s urban location(s) more fully
2. Strengthen and deepen key international partnerships
3. Re-imagine and reinvent undergraduate education

While this report was commissioned to better understand the communication functions at the University of Toronto at Scarborough (UTSC), it inevitably looked at how UTSC Communications sits alongside the University of Toronto Communications (UTC) in the broadest sense. This report is based on interviews with a wide range of internal stakeholders along with opinions and views on the university at large. UTSC was the focus of specific attention regarding its various communications teams and how they function. Some clear themes emerged:

- The University of Toronto, at its core, has a much different cultural dynamic than the UTSC campus. As one interviewee expressed: “UTSC lightens up what is otherwise a very serious university.”
- UTSC is seen as an innovative campus, from its deep commitment to diversity and inclusion, to its extraordinarily rich undergraduate education.
- UTSC is synonymous with the community of Scarborough and links itself to the eastern GTA, aspiring to be an “anchor institution” in the region. It is an important part of the social fabric of its suburban location.
- Internal communications is an important part of UTSC Communications’ work, including support for local student groups, events, faculty initiatives and community engagement.
The report findings are contextualized against the complexities that arise in a vast organization that has geographical, historical and cultural differences at each of the three campuses.

The balance of the report reflects on practical ways to evolve the communications function at UTSC and the wider communications organization. Recommendations are aimed at leveraging the work that is underway at both UTSC and the centre, and includes strategically positioning the communications functions to manage risk and better utilize the value in the University of Toronto brand. If applied, these recommendations are intended to create a world-class communications function that is reflective of the organization it serves.

The UTC brand equity survey that is underway will help inform this step.

The recommendations that follow are divided into two groups pertaining to UTSC and UTC.

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The Tantalus Group was secured in the autumn of 2017 to review UTSC Communications.

The Tantalus Group is a global firm of management and communications consultants that advises leaders on business opportunities and threats, from strategy, marketing, communications, organization and digital, to business transformation, change management, sustainability and mergers and acquisitions. The business cuts across all sectors and geographies. Tantalus has a team of strategy and communications consultants in Asia, Europe and North America and draws on decades of practical experience advising CEOs, CFOs, CCOs and executive committees. We also work closely with teams within companies, to better understand the unique demands of working in a fast-paced, changing global environment.
A. Request for proposal

Tantalus was hired to understand, observe and reflect on the following, as defined in the Request for Proposal:

**Communications services within UTSC, specifically:**
- What communications products services are currently being provided at UTSC
- What communication outcomes UTSC needs to achieve
- What is the gap between the current products and services and the desired outcomes
- What organizational, process and/or resource changes are required to address those gaps

**The relationship between UTSC Communications and UTC, specifically:**
- How could the relationship between the UTSC Communications and UTC be described and/or organized in a manner that provides maximum effectiveness on behalf of both UTSC and the university as a whole
- How can the above relationship be replicated as a model in relationships between UTC and other faculties and divisional communications departments across the university

B. Undertakings

The Tantalus Group undertook the following as a means of informing this report:

- Publication and online review (see Appendix A)
- One-on-one interviews with a wide array of internal stakeholders (see Appendix B)
- Competitor university review (see Appendix C)
- Social media review and analysis

C. Understanding UTSC

Founded in 1964, UTSC is home to 13,000 mostly undergraduate students. The campus prides itself on experimental education that includes a co-op program, internships and hands-on research. The campus is diverse, lively and is home to students from 85 different nations and 150 student groups.

The university continues to grow and adapt, offering “the breadth of the liberal arts and the rigor of one of the world’s best research universities,” according to the UTSC website.

The campus is located in the suburbs of Scarborough (Toronto’s largest green area), and is home to the Toronto Pan Am Sports Centre, a world-class fitness and training centre, representing Canada’s largest investment in amateur sport infrastructure.
3. Findings

UTSC Communications exists within a much wider tri-campus arrangement, which presents a very complex reality. Tantalus spoke with 28 people, sometimes on numerous occasions, including student leaders, academia, all levels of leadership, and employees from all three campuses. Dozens of publications were reviewed along with other communications material.

Opinions about UTSC — and UTSC Communications — range vastly from one internal stakeholder to the next. Many agreed, however, that UTSC is colourful and dynamic. There is also agreement that the university is changing and adapting to new world realities, such as serving an ethnically diverse community that has a range of options when it comes to their post-secondary education needs, including the two other University of Toronto campuses. There was also agreement that UTSC is distinct from the commonly-held views about the University of Toronto and its long history and reputation.
There was also feedback specific to UTSC. The co-op program was universally praised and many noted that their community-based undergraduate experience is second-to-none. But there was also a perception that the campus is seen — by a range of stakeholders — as somewhat inferior. The perception lingers. Today, all three campuses compete for the same students and criteria for a spot at any of the universities are virtually the same.

Regarding UTSC Communications, there was praise for the functions of social media, earned media, and the production of well received and accessible publications. Storytelling is underway (as championed by David Estok at the centre), and there is significant, steady growth in social media content and followers, as well as the number of stories and videos produced within the team.

While many of the interviewees recognized the good work UTSC Communications delivers — and how much it has improved over time — it was evident that they believe there is room for improvement.

Last, many of the interviewees expressed a desire to see the three communication teams at UTC, UTSC and UTM work together more.

Highlights:

- The need for more focus on ensuring the university continues to meet its domestic targets (i.e., to not lose sight of its core audience and their needs).
- Better resourcing the international team — especially the communications function that supports it — in their goal of engaging international communities in the United States, China, the Middle East and elsewhere.
4. Tantalus Recommendations

The following recommendations are divided in two parts: UTSC Communications and UTC.
A. UTSC Communications

As mentioned, UTSC Communications have recently improved — perhaps in response to this review — but there are still many unresolved issues.

A clarification of reporting structures

The ideal structure would see the head of UTSC Communications reporting directly to UTSC’s Principal with a dotted line to the Head of Communications at UTC. Roles and responsibilities should also be made clear.

Mandate letter

Once the team has a sense of its goals and objectives, each team member should craft a mandate letter to outline their top priorities for the year ahead. Ideally, each mandate letter would reflect the wider remit of the team and flow up to the team leader’s mandate letter.

UTSC-specific external research

Mirroring the external research described below, this research will help UTSC understand what key stakeholders — such as governments, partners, First Nations, the wider community, and others — think and expect of the university. While this will partly be achieved by the Brand Equity Survey that is currently underway, it is essential to understand UTSC in greater detail. A detailed overview of the process is defined under the UTC recommendations section (section 4.B).

Reputation management plan, including metrics

Similar to the risk, reputation and brand plan identified for the wider University of Toronto communications function, we recommend a focused reputation plan for UTSC. The localized process would follow the same steps as the UTC-wide process and includes:

- Creating a working group that includes leaders, communicators and clients
- The working group could draw upon a variety of research including the Brand Equity Survey, the external research advocated for above, and the competitor analysis that Tantalus undertook for this review. It should also include best practices for delivering a communication mandate to institutions with numerous locations and varied issues. This might include looking internally to the successful Recruitment and Registrar Team model.
Move to internal agency model and conduct listening tour

UTSC Communications would be best served by creating an agency style offering, whereby they are seen as providing expert counsel and best practices to the wider UTSC organization. This would include strategic communication counsel, best practices and standards (i.e., brand guidelines), strategy and planning advice and issues management to key departments and campuses. As well, and akin to the practice underway within the University of Toronto Mississauga Communications team, the team lead and key staff should meet with representatives of key portfolios to understand their needs and concerns.

Move to a structured budget process

A move to a more structured budgeting process would allow UTSC Communications to prioritize spending to accurately reflect the priorities and issues in managing risk and reputation.

Rebuilding the UTSC Communications team — and subsequently budgeting and resourcing it effectively — to meet the demands and needs of the internal client will be an important step in ensuring success.

In turn, aligning with the budgetary processes established at UTC and UTM would ensure the budgetary spend would reflect the number of students, faculty, alumni and other stakeholders.

UTSC Dialogue and Engagement Sessions Pilot

UTSC is an anchor institution in the community. This offers an opportunity to bring together a range of stakeholders to engage on important issues. UTSC can take a leadership role in this space, hosting a range of engagement and dialogue activities such as private lunches, community dialogue sessions and sponsored panels. The research mentioned above can also help identify issues to be addressed.
B. University of Toronto
Communications at the centre
and how to work effectively with
the campuses

UTSC Dialogue and
Engagement Sessions
Pilot

As noted above, the brand research that is underway will begin to
address what external stakeholders think and expect of the university.
Additional research would also provide a much greater understanding
of the organization from a qualitative and quantitative level over time.

In addition, to better understand what stakeholders think of the
University of Toronto and its campuses, other recommendations
include:

• Undertaking a reputation tracker to establish a baseline for the
  university as a whole and its campuses. This will help gauge
  sentiment and define emerging issues. As well, it will underpin
  broader reputation management activities. Repeating this task
  on an annual basis will provide an understanding about how
  stakeholders perceive the university over time.

• Engaging a range of key internal and external stakeholders in one-
  on-one interviews to more fully understand the issues that have
  been identified within the tracker data.

Risk, reputation and
brand management
plan

With the goal of understanding and managing risk, gather a cross-
functional working group of approximately 12 to 15 individuals
with representatives from the university’s leadership team and
communications function at all three campuses. This should include
vertical representation — leaders, rising stars, agitators — from both
the core communications teams and also those communicators who
sit in the various departments (i.e., clients).

It is vital to have senior leadership representation from the three
campuses (Vice Presidents) and ideally this working group will report
to the President.

Initial steps:

• Gather for a two-day workshop to define goals, objectives and
  parameters of the working group. Workshop to showcase expertise
  in risk, reputation and brand management, including bringing
together external speakers to share global best practices.
• This team could draw upon a variety of research, including the Brand Equity Survey and the competitor analysis that Tantalus undertook for this review. It could also include best practices for delivering a communication mandate to institutions with numerous locations and varied issues. This includes reviewing the current Recruitment and Registrar Team model.

Enhanced campaign-based communication strategy

Further to the campaigns underway at UTC, Tantalus recommends crafting a broader campaign-based communication strategy for the University of Toronto that would see four to five campaigns unfold over a calendar year and would involve all three campuses.

Initial steps would include understanding university-wide key priorities, issues and themes, and include input from an array of leaders and communicators. The working group could be a great resource through this process.

The aim would be for UTC to deliver the “big picture” campaign story for the campus as a whole, while each campus would deliver their own content, ultimately supporting the core narrative for each campaign. This would afford the campuses the opportunity to bring to life their own people and products. All communications media (online, social media, collateral material, etc.) would support and underpin the campaign.

Four to five issues would be addressed, bringing focus to what matters to the university. UTC would be responsible for crafting the core narrative and any shared communication tools (posters, stories for the external website, etc.), and UTSC, UTM and University of Toronto St. George would build upon this foundation to share their own story. Campaign themes might include innovation or entrepreneurship.

Ambassador initiative

Stakeholder research, as described earlier, will underpin the importance of a strong relationship with the wider community, including central Toronto, Scarborough and Mississauga.

Once there is a detailed understanding of the communities in which the university operates, there is the opportunity to engage in meaningful ways. One way is by developing an ambassador initiative that sees representatives from all areas of the university represent the university to external audiences.

Ambassadors, “the face of the university,” should be identified, asked to participate, and receive stakeholder engagement training to prepare them to be the voice of the university.
### Community and stakeholder dialogue forums

Further to the pilot program identified at UTSC, there is the opportunity to adopt dialogue forums at all three campuses. The stakeholders and issues are different, so each university can tailor the activity to meet their own needs. Again, the proposed research will be vital in understanding the issues in more detail.

### Mini secondments between departments

The best way for communicators to understand the challenges and issues at each of the three campuses is to spend more time working together. Over the course of a year, it is feasible that each individual working in a communications role can spend a day working at one of the other two campuses. These mini “secondments” should have goals and objectives identified and agreed upon between the participants. Ideally the host campus will entertain their guest, showing them the local culture and environment as a means to fully understand the wider University of Toronto experience.

### Thought-leadership series

The university is well situated to position itself among society's most important thought leaders on key matters. Thought leaders include heads of government, First Nations, business leaders, innovators, community leaders and others who are helping shape society.

Events might include panels and private dinners and could take place in key markets, both domestically and internationally. The aim is to associate the university with pivotal issues, such as innovation or the importance of investing in research.

### Appropriately resourcing the international communications team

The university is increasingly turning to China, India, the Middle East and the United States to recruit students and bolster budgets. The international team is vital in making this happen, but their communication support is minimal (at present time there is only one full-time communicator devoted to this team, a media relations expert). There needs to be a better understanding of what resources the team requires, along with a detailed communication plan.

### An integrated social media strategy

Analysis of three monthly social media reports from each of the three campuses indicates that:

- The university could benefit from an integrated social media strategy for all three campuses, ensuring that UTC is amplifying UTSC’s and UTM’s social media presence.
- Select a social media strategist to work across all three campuses and define key performance indicators (reach, number of followers, engagement rate, etc.), along with a strategy that would fit with the university’s broader communication goals.
• Conduct a competitor analysis to understand how other universities are effectively using social media.

• Develop a better mix of earned, owned and paid social. In today’s media environment, content needs to be boosted and amplified. Also, consider offering a more global range of social media tools, such as China’s WeChat and other regional favourites.
Appendix
Appendix A:
Publication and online review

**UTSC**
- By the Numbers
- Commons Magazine
- Commons (online) and its readership survey
- Inside UTSC
- Intervals
- Research and Innovation
- Social media reports for August, September and October 2017
- UTSC News (including sample bi-monthly news and social media reports)
- Strategy Plan
- Viewbook 2017/2018
- Viewbook 2018/2019
- 150 Neighbours project
- utsc.utoronto.ca

**UTC**
- The Bulletin Brief
- International Strategic Plan UofT Magazine
- utoronto.ca

**UTM**
- utm.toronto.ca
Appendix B:
Interviewees

Andrew Arifuzzaman, Chief Administrative Officer, UTSC
Zahra Bhanji, Director, Office of Vice Principal Research, UTSC
Althea Blackburn-Evans, Director, Media Relations, UTC
Chris Boutet, Director of Digital Content & Engagement, UTC
Laura Boyko, Assistant Dean, Health, Wellness, Physical Activity, Recreation and Sport, UTSC
Gwenyth Burrows, Executive Director, International
Curtis Cole, Registrar and Assistant Dean, UTSC
Jennifer Curry, Director, Office of the Vice President and Principal, UTSC
David Estok, Vice President, Communications
Paul Fraumeni, Director, Digital Creative Services and Co-publisher UofT Magazine, UTC
Vinitha Gengatharan, Special Advisor, International Strategy and Partnerships, UTSC
Meric Gertler, President
Vivek Goel, Vice President, Research and Innovation, University of Toronto
Bruce Kidd, Vice President, University of Toronto & Principal UTSC
Paul Kingston, Professor and Director, UTSC
Michael Kurts, Executive Director, Communication Partnerships, UTC
Jennifer Lanthier, Director, University of Toronto, News
Erin Lemon, Executive Director, News and Media
Leslie Lewis, Assistant Dean, Academic, UTSC
Desmond Pouyat, Dean of Student Affairs
Shelley Romoff, UTSC Head of Communications and Public Affairs (interviewed twice)
Ted Sargent, Vice President, International, University of Toronto
Amorell Saunders N'Daw, Senior Advisor, Equity and Diversity
Sitharsana Srithas, President, Scarborough Campus Students’ Union
Jane Stirling, Director, Marketing and Communications, UTM
Kimberley Tull, Manager Community Development and Engagement
Lynn Tucker, Associate Professor, Teaching Stream, UTSC
Georgette Zinaty, Head of Alumni Relations
Appendix C:
Competitor university review

As a means of understanding UTC in context of its key competitors, Tantalus engaged large, public universities throughout North America to understand how they budget and resource communications, as well as where the function sits within the organization.

The University of Toronto was not revealed as the source of these requests, but a promise was made to share the survey highlights with those who did participate.

We engaged eight universities and heard back from two American and two Canadian competitors. We reached out to:

- Arizona State
- Berkeley
- Harvard
- McGill
- Ryerson
- University of British Columbia
- University of Michigan
- Waterloo

Not every university shared the same information, but we did learn the following:

**University A:**

- Student undergraduate and graduate population: 46,000 FTE
- Resourcing:
  - Central communications function: 125 FTE
  - Communications staff embedded in each the 19 schools and colleges, and additional third party agency support
  - Central communications reports to president via VP for communications
- Undergraduate tuition:
  - In-state: USD $30,000
  - Out-of-state: USD $62,000
  - Did not disclose communications budget.

**University B:**

- Student undergraduate and graduate population: 37,000 FTE
- Resourcing:
  - Entirely decentralized structure with 50 communications staff working across eight faculties
  - Four executive groups, multiple incubators and a central communications unit
- Undergraduate tuition:
  - Canadian resident with Permanent Resident status: Between CAN $7000 - 10,000
  - Did not disclose communications budget.
Appendix C:
Competitor university review (continued)

University C:
- Student undergraduate and graduate population: 46,000 FTE
- Student undergraduate population: 31,000 FTE
- Undergraduate tuition:
  - In-state: $9,000
  - Out-of-state: $23,000
- Communications team: 30 people, reports to Chancellor
- Communications budget: USD $5.3 million

University D:
- Student undergraduate and graduate population: 63,000 FTE
- 14,434 international students from 162 countries (24%), a 9% increase over 2015/16
- Undergraduate Tuition:
  - Canadian Citizens and Permanent Residents: CDN $170 per credit*
  - International students: CDN $1160 per credit*
  - *some exceptions
- Decentralized communications function
Appendix D:
Bios: Wylie Rogers and Alexandra Wright

Wylie Rogers
Wylie Rogers has 20 years of experience in North America, Europe and Asia, having worked in politics, the media, business and management consulting.

Wylie was previously the head of public affairs for BASF in Asia Pacific, a US$ 10 billion business, overseeing 15 countries in the region while based in Hong Kong. He also headed ABB Group’s corporate communications team in Beijing, China, a US$ 2 billion business, and had roles ranging from spokesman to speechwriter and head of copy for the ABB Group in Zurich, Switzerland, a US$ 30 billion business. Before moving abroad, Wylie worked as a reporter and speechwriter in Canada.

Wylie attended INSEAD in France and Singapore for executive development and has a BA in English Literature with Honours. He did his post-graduate studies in journalism and has volunteered with the International Journalism Federation in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. As President of The Tantalus Group Wylie manages the global network of Tantalus management consultants.

Alexandra Wright
Alexandra Wright is a seasoned strategist, communicator and leadership coach who has worked for an array of organizations, leaders and teams to help manage issues and minimize risk.

Alex is a big-picture thinker and problem solver, whose career has focused on strategic planning, issues management, communication and leadership coaching. She is also skilled in reputation and risk management, media relations, crisis communication, and financial PR. Alex has worked extensively in the arena of energy, sustainability, climate and the environment, and safety.

Alexandra’s education includes a BA in Linguistics, a Diploma in Public Relations and a Graduate Certificate in Executive Coaching. She is a lover of the great outdoors, travel and adventure, architecture and design, and yoga.