

CASE FOR SUPPORT



# Indigenous House

AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO SCARBOROUGH



UNIVERSITY OF  
**TORONTO**  
SCARBOROUGH

DEFY  
GRAVITY



## **Table of Contents**

- 1** Executive Summary
- 2** A Path to Truth and Reconciliation
- 4** Indigenous House
- 10** University of Toronto Scarborough: Building Inclusive Cities and Societies
- 12** Building on other Indigenous Initiatives at UTSC
- 14** Supportive Design for Indigenous-centred Programming
- 16** A Once-in-a-Generation Opportunity

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## Executive Summary

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Historically, Indigenous Peoples in Canada have been underrepresented in higher education, and they remain so today. Crucial work is needed to dismantle systemic barriers to participation and to create the culturally appropriate spaces that Indigenous stakeholders and community members have indicated are vital for Indigenous learners and faculty to feel safe and welcome on university campuses.

The University of Toronto and the University of Toronto Scarborough (UTSC) have been active participants in the Truth and Reconciliation process underway across Canada. Through the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report and the 2017 University of Toronto response report, *Wecheehetowin*, the University gained important insights into how to take the next steps in this ongoing journey. The reports called on the University of Toronto to create environments that are inclusive and welcoming of Indigenous Peoples, and, supporting this principle, to create dedicated, Indigenous spaces for Indigenous-identifying communities on campus.

We recognize that Truth and Reconciliation are not possible without thoughtful, concrete actions that move us forward. And, as Canada's largest university, we have a vital role to play in building those inclusive, welcoming spaces for Indigenous people. That's why the University of Toronto Scarborough is committed to building Indigenous House, slated to open in 2023.

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## A Path to Truth and Reconciliation

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As Indigenous stakeholders have made clear, universities are intrinsically tied to a history of colonization for Indigenous Peoples in Canada and, indirectly, to the traumas of the Canadian residential school system. The complexities of this past, in conjunction with a lack of welcoming, culturally appropriate spaces, continue to contribute to the low number of Indigenous learners, staff, and faculty participating in our post-secondary institutions.

Indeed, Indigenous students face significant barriers, especially cultural, when entering or participating in the western university model. These barriers not only compound the difficulties of recruiting Indigenous learners but also prevent students from successfully completing their degrees. As we create welcoming, inclusive, and Indigenous spaces, we foster a sense of belonging and connection, so vital to successfully navigating a post-secondary pathway.

As a highly visible response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's calls-to-action, Indigenous House will be a unique, 10,000-square-foot building steeped in Indigenous Ways of Knowing. It will support and nourish Indigenous communities on and around campus, providing space to reflect upon, share, and celebrate Indigenous cultures, arts, histories, and languages with Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities alike.

We need to move forward in the Truth and Reconciliation process urgently. UTSC is seeking donors and partners to help us meet our philanthropic goal of raising the final \$3.5 million of a total \$24 million project cost to complete the building of Indigenous House. We seek supporters who wish to have a lasting impact on Canadian society and who believe in and share UTSC's vision of inspiring inclusive excellence. Together, we can provide a culturally reflective space to gather, connect, and feel at home as we build fruitful, enduring partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members.

*Image: Gathering space*



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## Indigenous House

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With its bold architecture and position at the crest of Highland Creek (visible from Ellesmere Road), Indigenous House will be a highly visible signal to the University and surrounding area of our commitment to Indigenous communities and the Truth and Reconciliation process.

### Indigenous design philosophy

The building's architecture was developed in close collaboration and in partnership with UTSC Indigenous Elders' Circle, Indigenous stakeholders, and community group Native Child and Family Services Toronto with a design that prioritizes nature—the guiding principle behind Indigenous Ways of Knowing.

Designed by Alfred Waugh (Formline Architecture), a member of the Fond Du Lac Denesuline Nation of Saskatchewan, the building's breathtaking and original architecture was modelled from Indigenous space concepts such as the wigwam and the longhouse, with Indigenous symbolism and Knowledges embedded throughout.

Central to its Indigenous design philosophy is the fluid interchange and blurring of boundaries between interior and exterior space, with an emphasis on our relationship with the natural world. Interior spaces have been designed to function as extensions of exterior environments, with grounds that will focus on a replenishment of local indigenous plant species and species that support Indigenous botanic and medicinal practices.

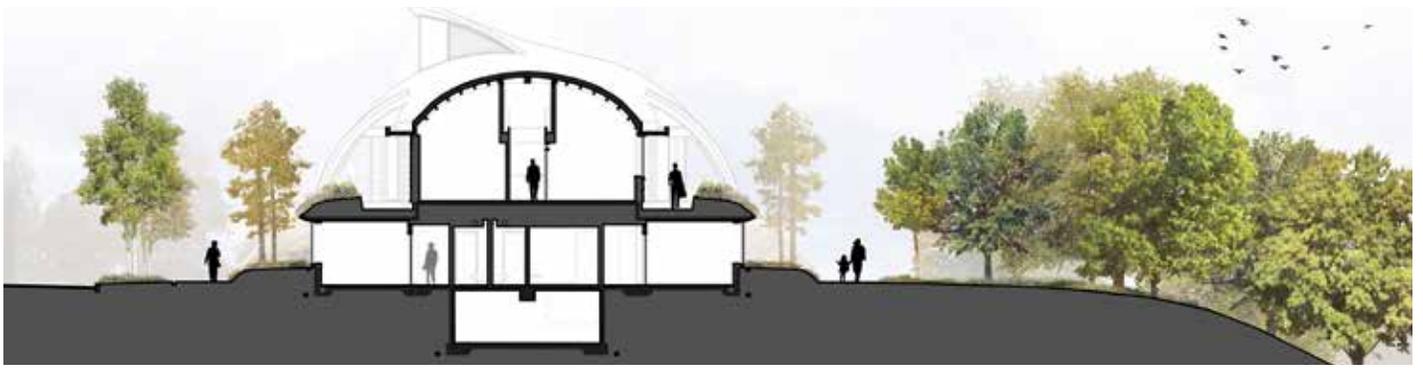
“The work of the U of T Scarborough Truth, Reconciliation, and Indigenous Initiatives Advisory Committee is bearing fruit, in that we are upholding and strengthening UTSC’s strategic priorities and objectives with respect to promoting, supporting, and enhancing Indigenous presence in all facets of our mission. The creation of this house is a concrete manifestation of our response to one of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s important calls-to-action.”

—Wisdom Tettey, Vice-President, University of Toronto and Principal, University of Toronto Scarborough

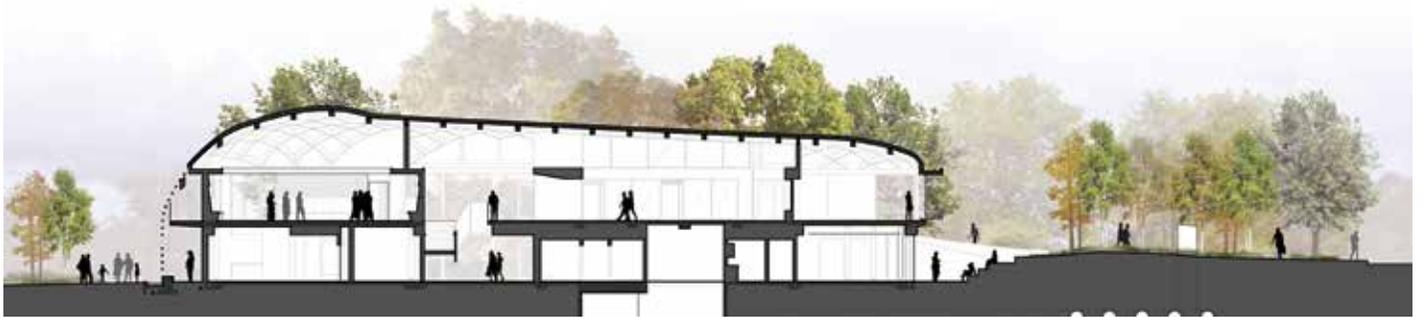


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All renderings courtesy of  
Formline Architecture and  
LGA Architecture Partners



*Cross section*



*Longitudinal section*



*West approach*

## Green technologies

Rather than playing a peripheral role to life on campus, Indigenous House will be an integral component of UTSC's master space plan as the University makes long-term investments that embrace Indigenous Knowledges, green technologies, and sustainable planting practices. Aspects of the building's environmental design include heavy and cross-laminated timber elements, the strategic use of concrete for thermal mass, earth tubes, geothermal loops, low velocity displacement ventilation, and other strategies to create a mixed passive-active energy system which significantly decreases the amount of energy needed to heat and cool the building. Low energy heating, water conservation, and the use of sunlight, rammed earth, and other natural building materials are all central to the building's unique design. The landscaping will likewise incorporate Indigenous ethnobotanical knowledge and practice to create a sustainable and nourishing natural environment, with edible, pollinator, and rain gardens.

Vitality, the building will break new ground as the first across U of T's campuses that has been designed to support indoor smudging practices, representing an important step forward for Indigenous inclusion at the University.

## Indigenous Elders

Onsite offices will support the presence of Indigenous Elders. The central meeting area is circular, supporting Indigenous Learning Circles, a traditional and non-hierarchical means of imparting Indigenous Knowledges. One of the most important elements of Indigenous House is its kitchen and communal dining area, a space in which students, faculty, staff, and Elders can gather to share food, an integral component of Indigenous cultures.

## Indigenous art

A permanent Indigenous artwork will be commissioned by UTSC's Doris McCarthy Gallery to stand outside the entrance of Indigenous House, and a second indoor artwork is being commissioned for the lobby. Along with the vitrine design of the gallery, Indigenous House will transform UTSC's campus into an important Indigenous cultural and artistic hotspot in the GTA.



*Tree coverage site plan*



“If you’re an Indigenous person on the path of post-secondary education, you need help. You need security. You need people around you that can help you. It is very, very important for Indigenous people to have that Indigenous House to keep you grounded.”

—Naulaq LeDrew, Inuit Knowledge Keeper at UTSC and Indigenous House Committee member



*Front entry*

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## Indigenous Participation in Ontario's Post-Secondary Institutions

Toronto has the largest Indigenous population in Ontario and the fourth-largest in the country. Yet, post-secondary enrolment remains disproportionately low.

According to Canada's 2011 Census, less than half of Indigenous men and women aged 25 to 64 (48.4%) had completed any form of post-secondary education, compared with two-thirds (64.7%) of non-Indigenous individuals. Just 3.5 per cent of Ontario's adult Indigenous population aged 25 to 64 had completed a university certificate or diploma below the bachelor level, and 9.8 per cent had a university degree, while 14 per cent held a college or trades certificate. University degrees present the starkest difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups, with 26.5 per cent of non-Indigenous persons holding a university degree.

At the University of Toronto Scarborough, only 34 – or 0.26 per cent – of our 14,000 students currently enrolled identify as Indigenous, well below the national Indigenous population of 4.9 per cent. The University of Toronto Scarborough is committed to increasing participation of Indigenous learners, not just at U of T but at post-secondary institutions across Canada.

## Indigenous House at a Glance

- Space: 10,700 sq. ft. (994 sq. metres)
- 2 floors; fully accessible design
- First floor:
  - 2 Elder offices
  - 4 staff/faculty offices
  - multipurpose office space
  - multipurpose room
  - student lounge
  - community kitchen
  - library/reading room
  - vitrine/gallery space
- Second floor:
  - Large gathering space (60-90 people) for large ceremonial events, lectures, workshops, and other activities; with modular furniture, can accommodate drumming circles, dancing, and more
  - small gathering space (20 seats)
  - storage and 2 meeting rooms
- Outdoor landscaping spaces will include:
  - Covered terrace space immediately adjacent to the building
  - Medicine Garden adjacent to the community kitchen
  - Large outdoor gathering space for pow-wows and other seasonal ceremonies
  - Large, exterior gathering space for sacred fires and ceremonial gatherings
  - An outdoor community cooking area, adjacent to the community kitchen
  - A natural-type children's play garden
  - A small outdoor classroom-like space that extends the multipurpose room
- New, permanent Indigenous artworks are being commissioned for the vitrine/gallery as well as a new, permanent artwork to be stationed near the entrance to Indigenous House.

*Image: Alanna Pasche and Deanne Hupfield perform at a pow-wow COVID-19 vaccine clinic hosted at U of T's Varsity Stadium in June 2021.*



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## University of Toronto Scarborough: Building Inclusive Cities and Societies

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Founded in 1964, the University of Toronto Scarborough has become an important hub for the eastern GTA, serving nearly 14,000 students each year. At UTSC, we take pride in our inclusive and diverse community – one that ignites imagination, sustains a passion for creativity, nurtures social consciousness and entrepreneurship, inspires impactful learning, and represents our surrounding neighbourhoods. Many of our students exhibit the trailblazing spirit and drive that comes from being the first member of their family to attend university.

Today, UTSC is embarking on an exciting new chapter in its history. We are transforming our campus as we grow our enrolment, academic programs, and community partnerships through the lens of inclusive excellence. We are forging powerful relationships with the communities we serve, and we are developing meaningful new ways to share knowledge and expertise and harness our strengths as a leading educational institution.

Indigenous House is an important expression of the University of Toronto Scarborough's shared values and collective vision to create and sustain an environment that supports inclusive excellence and dismantles systemic racism, a central priority embedded within its academic, research, and social missions.

Indigenous House is just one expression of UTSC's multi-layered approach to improving Indigenous representation and participation in post-secondary education. The building will create new opportunities to expand and nourish our Indigenous community by supporting each of the University's directives for positive change in response to the TRC's calls-to-action:

- To increase Indigenous recruitment and improve Indigenous student experience (undergraduate and graduate), including related Indigenous community outreach
- To develop and deploy Indigenous curricular initiatives (i.e. delivery of Indigenous material, Indigenous programs)
- To increase the number of Indigenous faculty
- To foster meaningful dialogue with Indigenous groups and stakeholders on curriculum, research ethics, and engagement
- To create Indigenous spaces on the UTSC campus.

“This project means a great deal to me and my future endeavours at UTSC. It will create space for all Indigenous students to meet, hold ceremony together, provide cultural activities for connection, and a safe environment to seek support from our fellow Indigenous community and Elders.”

—Alexis Bornyk (Undergraduate student and Member of the Truth, Reconciliation & Indigenous Initiatives Advisory Committee)



*Image: Students learn wood gathering techniques during a land-based Indigenous health course offered by the Dalla Lana School of Public Health at Hart House Farm in 2019.*



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## Building on other Indigenous Initiatives at UTSC

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UTSC has been tackling each of the directives listed on page 10 with sincere and meaningful efforts to transform our role and operations as an institution of higher learning in Canada.

- The University has been working for several years to increase Indigenous and Black faculty hires to five and 10 per cent respectively, to better reflect the overall community population.
- A campus-wide curriculum review aimed at incorporating Indigenous history and Ways of Knowing, as well as increasing inclusivity and diversity in all areas, is underway.
- With its Indigenous Languages Revitalization program, an emerging area of interdisciplinary strength at UTSC, the Department of Language Studies at UTSC has partnered with Indigenous community members to develop a 12-lesson online course module in Ojibwe. Expected to be piloted in the summer of 2022, this will be the first Indigenous language course offered at UTSC.
- Key new staff positions—such as an assistant director of Indigenous Initiatives—are poised to support Indigenous inclusion. UTSC’s Indigenous academic advisor and career strategist, for example, is a new role that supports Indigenous learners interested in pursuing post-secondary education. The Indigenous academic advisor leads an Indigenous pathway initiative, VILLAGE (Valuing Indigenous Learning, Leadership and Academic Growth in Education), with the aim of eradicating the often-invisible barriers Indigenous learners face and providing guidance and navigation through the unfamiliar social and academic systems of the western-oriented post-secondary environment.
- Indigenous welcoming ceremonies and other culturally appropriate events are used to foster experiences that support Indigenous students’ academic and cultural life holistically at the University. These efforts aid Indigenous recruitment and retention efforts and strengthen community partnerships—and will be housed within Indigenous House.
- Indigenous House will open up additional possibilities to strengthen community partnerships with organizations such as Native Child and Family Services of Toronto. Community-based pathway and outreach programs, much like UTSC’s well known Imani Academic Mentorship program, could leverage Indigenous House to support Indigenous children and youth based in the eastern GTA in finding pathways to higher education. This community-based programming would supplement UTSC’s existing VILLAGE pathway program.

“I hope Indigenous House builds a stronger sense of community and belonging at UTSC while providing opportunities for Indigenous community to connect to the land and/or engage in traditional ceremony. Increasing Indigenous presence is pivotal not only for Indigenous community members, but it also encourages further learning and dialogue with non-Indigenous students/faculty/staff and librarians in terms of the importance of Indigenous spaces.”

—Tee Duke, Assistant Director, Indigenous Initiatives, U of T Mississauga





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## Supportive Design for Indigenous-centred Programming

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Indigenous teaching models prioritize hands-on, land-based, and experiential learning, and the building was designed to allow these practices to flourish. The space will allow users to replace colonial practices with Indigenous paradigms of thought that will influence and deepen the experiences of Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants.

The programming at Indigenous House will reflect these Indigenous traditions of knowledge transference, opening up avenues to extend Indigeneity not just through UTSC's campus but across the eastern GTA. For instance, Medicine Walks led by Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers will teach community members the Indigenous names and chemical properties of native plant species, as well as the history of the local flora, their medicinal uses, and the history of the land. Following the walk, an Elder can offer a teaching around the sacred fire, while the outdoor or indoor kitchen is used to prepare those medicines, imparting vital, hands-on knowledge. Similarly, the outdoor ceremonial spaces can be used to hold pow-wows and other ceremonies, where Indigenous people, the UTSC community, and the wider community can gather, learn, and share these important cultural events. Supplementing these practices, pow-wow dance classes can be held either inside or outside the building, targeted to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners, helping to keep this vital form of cultural expression intact for future generations.

Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members can partake in programming that involves cooking Indigenous foods in the outdoor or indoor kitchen spaces, which will double as culturally appropriate learning exchanges. Following Indigenous teaching practices, task-oriented learning – such as cooking

traditional dishes – will help to combine lessons on history, culture, and language and prioritize an Indigenous understanding of Indigenous languages.

The library space will allow for easy access to Indigenous materials in one campus location and may be supported by a dedicated Liaison Librarian. This space will function in a similar manner to UTSC's The BRIDGE library space – a new entrepreneurial incubator located in the Instructional Centre building, which supports various research foci. As well as inviting visiting authors, a "Living Library" series could be held in the space that would allow community members to "check out" – much like a book – short term, one-on-one conversations with Indigenous guests.

One important monthly event currently in development by the Assistant Director, Indigenous Initiatives at UTSC is "Understanding Nishnaabe Bimaadziwin: The Journey of Our Relationship." These sessions, open to UTSC and the wider community, will focus on grounding and expanding non-Indigenous individuals' understanding of Indigenous worldviews, history, and Ways of Knowing. As the sessions immerse participants in an Indigenous space that reflects these worldviews and Ways of Knowing, it will provide a vital cultural anchor that will accelerate and intrinsically deepen participants' learning processes and further the community on its Truth and Reconciliation journey.

Indigenous House will fundamentally alter the character and impact of existing programming across UTSC. Monthly Truth and Reconciliation Talks that revisit the TRC's calls-to-action and UTSC's actions in addressing these – currently held virtually – will

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be more meaningful when they're held in an Indigenous space that reflects Indigenous communities and worldviews.

Similarly, annual events such as Red Dress Day, Orange Shirt / National Truth and Reconciliation Day, Indigenous Peoples' History Day, Treaties Recognition Day, and Indigenous Education Awareness Week will be marked at Indigenous House and open to the wider community. With its fluid spaces that seamlessly allow ceremonial practices such as smudging, the impact of these educational and awareness-raising events will be strengthened and deepened for Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members alike.

A highly visible hub, Indigenous House will be the fullest expression of Indigeneity across campus. It will immerse UTSC firmly within multigenerational, cultural, and environmental Indigenous paradigms and extend through UTSC's master landscaping plan and projects that will revitalize the natural landscaping surrounding Highland Creek. Remarkably intertwined in design and purpose, Indigenous House is poised to become the vehicle through which Indigenization and Indigenous Ways of Knowing can be blended within the academic, environmental, and cultural fabric of the campus and wider community.

Additionally, with both outdoor and indoor spaces featuring major Indigenous artworks, as well as a gallery space, Indigenous House stands to become an important hub for Indigenous art and artists in the eastern GTA.

“When you look at Bimaadziwin, it's very important to have that connection with the land, the space, and with the people as you're giving that session. It's very different for us to take participants out into the gardens, to take them out to being around a sacred fire. It's very different that we can be doing Ceremony like smudging inside the building.”

—Kelly Crawford, Assistant Director, Indigenous Initiatives, UTSC



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## A Once-in-a-Generation Opportunity

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As a core element of UTSC's master space, pedagogical, and strategic priorities, Indigenous House represents an important paradigm shift for Canada's largest and most prestigious university, one that could point the way forward in the Truth and Reconciliation journey with First Nations and set national and global examples of excellence for Indigenous inclusion.

By creating this integral space on our campus, we foster a multitude of opportunities to rethink and demonstrate what Indigenous inclusion means and how it can work on all levels of Canadian society. As such, the building's impact will reverberate far beyond its walls. It is foundational as the first step in increasing the participation of Indigenous Peoples not just at UTSC, but at post-secondary institutions across the country. In turn, we foster possibilities for Indigenous Peoples to play a more active role in the social, cultural, and economic fabric of Canada, to the benefit of all.

Indigenous House creates an unmistakable opportunity to teach, reflect, and embed Indigeneity and Indigenous Ways of Knowing within campus life. This unique space will also support the teaching of non-Indigenous communities across the eastern GTA the history, culture, art, resilience, and vitality of Indigenous

Nations in Canada. Its highly visible presence will nurture more inclusive, Indigenous-focused curricula, from history and culture to languages and environmental studies, while it simultaneously creates a gathering site within the eastern GTA to learn and experience Indigenous history, art, culture, and Ways of Knowing.

We invite you to consider supporting Indigenous House at UTSC with a philanthropic gift as part of Defy Gravity: The Campaign for the University of Toronto, the largest alumni engagement and fundraising effort in Canadian history. Defy Gravity will strengthen the University's commitment to inclusive excellence and accelerate its work on the biggest challenges facing the world. With your generosity, we can transform our campus as we embrace Indigenous learners, staff, and faculty.

Together, we can challenge the landscape of higher education in Canada to be more welcoming, and we can act to eradicate barriers to Indigenous inclusion. From a new space of Indigenous inclusive excellence, we can, together, chart an unprecedented course forward for Canada.

*Image: Hundreds of people, including children of all ages, attended a pow-wow at U of T's Goldring Centre for High Performance Sport in 2018.*



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