

Final Report & Recommendations from the Use of Instructional Space Policy Review Working Group

Office of the Vice-Provost, Strategic Enrolment Management
October 2025

Executive Summary

Providing students with a transformative learning experience is at the core of the University of Toronto's mission. To achieve this, instructional (i.e., classroom) space must be treated as a strategic institutional asset. These spaces should be planned, allocated, and managed to advance the University's teaching, research, and service priorities, while remaining flexible to meet evolving academic and community needs. Because the University's primary responsibility is to educate students enrolled in degree, diploma, and certificate programs, all other uses of instructional space are subordinate to this academic purpose.

The University lacks a policy dedicated to how instructional space is used. In general, the use of space on campus is guided by three main policies: *Guidelines for Central Room Allocation* (1981), *Space Policy – Permanent Accommodation* (1993), and the *Policy on Temporary Use of Space* (and associated procedures) (2010). These policies reference or allude to instructional space to varying degrees but are not specific to its use. Additionally, while these policies address important aspects of scheduling and space allocation, they contain overlaps, inconsistencies and gaps which have led to confusion around booking priorities and a lack of alignment between institutional needs and available space.

Several recent reviews have highlighted these challenges and recommended clearer policies, including consistent definitions of space and activities. In response, a Working Group was established to review existing policies, with the purpose of developing a comprehensive framework for the use of instructional space (see Appendix 1 for the Working Group's Terms of Reference and membership).

The group, chaired by Dwayne Benjamin, Vice-Provost, Strategic Enrolment Management, met from January 2024 through October 2025. This report summarizes their work and presents recommendations for a policy framework designed to clarify roles, streamline processes, and ensure that the use of instructional space supports the University's academic mission.

Introduction

Space Classification

The University catalogues space according to the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) space standards, which include a classification scheme that categorizes the wide range of

physical spaces that make up a university. Examples of these categories include classroom facilities, research labs, academic offices, administrative offices, and library facilities. At U of T these classifications are maintained in ARCHIBUS, the University's space management system.

"Classroom facilities" is the COU term for instructional space, which it defines as "a room primarily used for scheduled teaching purposes which does not require special equipment of a kind that makes the room unsuitable for classroom instruction." In plain language, this refers to classrooms, seminar rooms, lecture theatres, tutorial rooms and labs when primarily used for teaching purposes.

This policy review focused on the **use of instructional space only** as identified by COU. Other types of space at the University and their use (e.g. offices, outdoor space) were not part of the review.

Space Allocation

The allocation of academic space and facilities – that is, the permanent assignment or removal of space – is overseen at the institutional level through the Capital Projects and Space Allocation Committee (CaPS) on the St. George campus, and, at UTM and UTSC, the UTM Capital Projects and Space Allocation Committee (MCaPS) and the UTSC Space Planning Sub-Committee.¹ Guided by the Council of Ontario Universities Space Guidelines and classification system, CaPs and its counterpart UTM and UTSC committees approve all space allocations at the University, designate spaces for particular uses, and approve any changes to established designations.

Because space allocation is under the purview of these committees, it was out of scope for the policy review. The focus was instead on how instructional space is used at the University. From a policy perspective, "use" refers to how, when, and for what purposes space may be scheduled or booked.

Space Management

While space allocation is determined at the institutional level, the day-to-day management of space is decentralized: some spaces are managed centrally, while others are managed by divisions. Once a space has been allocated and designated for a particular use by CaPS or its counterpart committees at UTM and UTSC, responsibility for scheduling and oversight rests with the unit to which it has been assigned.

The use of instructional space is guided by three main policies: *Guidelines for Central Room Allocation* (1981), *Space Policy – Permanent Accommodation* (1993) and the *Policy on Temporary Use of Space* (and associated procedures) (2010). While each addresses aspects

¹ See Appendix 2 for a list of historical space allocation committees at the University of Toronto.

of space management, overlaps, gaps and omissions create confusion. For instance, while one policy prioritizes academic courses for space bookings, academic activities at the program or institutional level are not addressed, for example, activities that may not be directly tied to an academic course, but support curricula or institutional operations.

These challenges have been highlighted in several reports and reviews, including the Report of the Coordinated Academic Room Booking (CARB) Committee (2019); the Infoslem Scheduling Process Review (2019); annual Transforming the Instructional Landscape (TIL) Advisory Reports, and the 2022 Learning Space Management Administrative Review.

Recommendations from these reports and reviews included:

- Clarifying space definitions and activity types
- Establishing clear booking priorities for different activities
- Defining roles and responsibilities in space management
- Creating a comprehensive instructional space policy and supporting guidelines.

In response, a Working Group was established to review existing policies, identify gaps, and recommend updates (see Terms of Reference, Appendix 1). The Working Group met regularly from January 2024 to October 2025, conducting an environmental scan of best practices, leading a tri-campus consultation process, and drafting a report with recommended actions.

Environmental Scan

An extensive review of instructional space policies across U15 and AAU institutions was conducted to help identify best practices. Nine institutions with comprehensive use of space policies were identified, including University of California, Berkeley; Cornell University; University of Michigan; University of Ohio; Penn State; University of California, Los Angeles; University of Washington; the University of Calgary and the University of British Columbia.

Across these institutions, several common best practices emerged:

1. **Institution-first stewardship:** Instructional space is treated as a shared institutional resource, typically overseen by the Provost or Vice-President Academic, and allocated through centralized, data-informed processes. Day-to-day scheduling and assignments are often delegated to registrarial, facilities and divisional units.
2. **Defined space categories and scheduling scope:** Policies clearly delineate which spaces are centrally scheduled or reserved (e.g. classrooms) versus those managed

locally (e.g. faculty offices, research space), ensuring transparency in scope and responsibility.

3. **Tiered priority ladders:** All institutions codify a hierarchy of use: credit-bearing instruction is scheduled first (including related activities tied to the official academic curriculum, such as examinations), followed by major academic events (e.g. convocation), other internal activities, and finally activities hosted by external or commercial users.
4. **Optimization of timetables and utilization:** To reduce peak-time bottlenecks, universities adopt strategies such as fixed class blocks, extended instructional hours, and monitoring seat-fill ratios. These measures improve efficiency and spread classroom usage throughout the day and week.
5. **Transparent, differentiated fee structures:** Internal academic bookings are generally not charged user fees, while ancillary units and external bookings pay published rates, often with surcharges for premium rooms, after-hours use, or AV support.
6. **Governance and conflict resolution:** Policies designate a clear authority, typically a senior leader or committee, to resolve conflicts and ensure decisions align with institutional priorities rather than ad-hoc negotiations.
7. **Continuous improvement and alignment with capital planning:** Several universities link space-use data to long-term planning, prioritizing renovations, accessibility improvements, and technology upgrades based on utilization and pedagogical needs.
8. **Criteria for non-course activities:** Requests for events beyond credit courses are evaluated using consistent criteria, including mission alignment, size and space fit, host (internal vs external), frequency, duration, and setup requirements.

Together, these best practices illustrate a coherent model in which space is managed centrally, prioritized transparently, and optimized to advance the academic mission.

Community Consultation

Process

To inform the policy review, it was essential for the Working Group to understand the range of activities that take place within instructional space at U of T, and how these activities are defined by space users. For example, what is considered an academic versus academic-related use of space? Or, non-academic? To this end, the Working Group coordinated a

university-wide consultation to deepen their understanding of the various activities occurring in university classrooms, the frequency and prioritization of non-instructional uses, and other divisional practices related to the use of instructional space.

The Working Group identified specific consultation groups across the University (see Appendix 3), along with consultation leads for each group who were responsible for overseeing the consultation process. Consultation leads for the academic divisions were appointed by the respective Deans.

To guide the consultations, the Working Group developed three sets of questions tailored to academic divisions/groups, administrative/staff groups, and student groups. These questions, which may be found in Appendix 4, were provided to each consultation lead. Orientation sessions were conducted for the leads, offering an overview of the policy review and the consultation process to better prepare them for engaging with their division or unit.

Consultation leads determined the most appropriate consultation methods for their constituency (e.g. meetings, town halls, surveys). Consultations took place from October 2024 through February 2025. Consultation leads submitted a report summarizing the results of their consultations to the Working Group, using a provided template.

How is Instructional Space Used at U of T?

Consultation groups were asked to list the ways in which they use instructional space for non-instructional purposes, and to categorize these uses with the following labels: academic, academic-related, operational, and non-academic. They were also asked whether there are activities not directly tied to course or program requirements that they considered to be academic or curricular.

These four types of activities (academic, academic-related, operational and non-academic) were not defined for consultation groups, as the intent of the consultation was to understand the ways in which different user groups define the activities that take place in university space.

While all consultation groups provided a list of activities for which they use instructional space, some groups did not categorize these activities according to the above labels, citing the difficulty of doing so. Others categorized almost all activities as academic, with some offering the rationale that every activity supports the University's educational mission.

Most commonly, activities were categorized differently across consultation groups. For example, some felt that recruitment events were academic, while others classified them as non-academic. Activities were also frequently defined in more than one way; a common

example of this were conferences, which were categorized as academic and non-academic, depending on purpose, focus and host.

Table 1, below, presents the categorizations of activities emerging from the consultations, with some activities assigned multiple labels. Although some consultation groups did not categorize all of the activities they identified, the recurrence of activities across groups meant that the majority were ultimately classified.

What is most apparent is the multitude of ways in which University classrooms are used outside of course instruction.

Table 1: Consultation Group Classifications of Activities in Instructional Space

ACADEMIC	ACADEMIC-RELATED
Classes, Labs, Seminars Programming by academic support groups Student Presentations/Workshops (e.g. Capstone Projects) Workshops for Students (including professional development) Conferences & Symposia (organized by department/faculty or students) Colloquia/Guest Speakers/Lecture Series Test/Exam Review Sessions Tests/Exams/Assessments Grading (e.g. collaborative grading sessions) Exam Viewings Exam invigilator/Chief Presiding Officer (CPO) training CPO handout rooms & conflict rooms Make-up Tests Trainings: TA, clinical instructors, students Office Hours (instructor & TAs) Student Group Work Student Study Groups / Writing Groups / Thesis Groups Thesis Defenses Meetings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lab • Research Team • Committee • Supervisory Committee • Student/Instructor 	Welcome/Orientation Activities Recruitment events/activities Year-end activities and celebrations Student club/group meetings Seminars Conferences Colloquia Colloquia receptions Student Hackathons/Competitions Job Talks (candidates) Practice Job Talks / Mock Interviews (students) Alumni / Career Events Faculty committee meetings Program Information Sessions Social activities for students/learners Writing Circles Music & Performance Rehearsals Language exchanges/English language development workshops Teaching & Learning pedagogical workshops & showcases Academic integrity workshops & training Convocation

Rehearsals & Coaching Studio classes (non-credited) Individual practice space (music) Faculty Development sessions Outreach events Experiential learning	
OPERATIONAL	NON-ACADEMIC
Staff meetings/retreats Professional Development for staff/instructors Training for staff/students Faculty meetings Governance meetings Prep space for instructors IITS planning Exam staging Hiring interviews Yearbook & Graduation Photos Marketing Production Activities/Focus Groups TA/RA meetings and planning sessions Departmental/faculty meetings	Recruitment events/activities Welcome/Orientation activities Retention activities Activities hosted by external groups Industry lunch & learns Community outreach activities Three Minute Thesis Advancement & Alumni events Networking events (alumni, industry) Film Shoots Professional Exams (External) Camps (summer) Experiential learning events & activities Student Success programming Career Fairs Executive and continuing education programs/courses Master classes (Music co-curricular) Town Halls Convocation events

As noted above, some activities were assigned different categories by different consultation groups. Table 2, below, shows activities that were classified under more than one label (academic, academic-related, operational, or non-academic).

Table 2: Activities that were categorized in multiple ways

Activity	Categorizations
Seminars	Academic; Academic-Related
Conferences	Academic; Academic-Related
Colloquia	Academic; Academic-Related
Workshops	Academic; Academic-Related

Experiential Learning	Academic; Non-Academic
Convocation	Academic; Non-Academic
Recruitment Activities/Events	Academic-Related; Non-Academic
Faculty Meetings	Academic-Related; Operational
Welcome/Orientation Activities	Academic-Related; Non-Academic
Training (Various Types)	Academic; Academic-Related; Operational
Rehearsals	Academic; Academic-Related

Prioritization of User/Activities

Stakeholders agreed that course delivery/instruction was the single most important use of instructional space on campus, and generally, that external events should receive lowest priority in terms of booking. Student, faculty and staff use was ranked in the middle (when ranked at all), although a clear hierarchy of use did not emerge from the consultations.

While all agreed that course instruction takes top priority, some did acknowledge that this prioritization limited the ability to use space for other purposes, as well as the ability to book space ahead of time, which posed challenges for some groups. It was noted by some that space policies should account for activities that reflect institutional commitments or obligations to ensure that these are not de-prioritized.

What We Heard

In addition to the categorization of activities, the consultation groups provided valuable feedback and insights into the use of instructional space on campus. Some key themes that emerged include:

- **Space booking systems and processes are inefficient, overly complex and not transparent**

Users must navigate inconsistent booking processes, often resulting in delays, confusion, and frustration. The absence of visible schedules makes it difficult to identify available spaces, and users are not always matched to rooms that meet their specific needs in terms of size, accessibility, or technology. Current booking systems often do not take into account activity type or group size. Long lead times and unclear contact points further hinder timely bookings.

- **There is a perceived lack of available space across the University for instructional and non-instructional use, and for large activities/events.**

Respondents reported challenges with classroom availability, and in particular, a shortage of larger instructional spaces. While it is understood that academic courses are prioritized,

this limits access to classrooms for other activities – an extra challenge for large events, for which there are limited spaces on campus that can accommodate. As a result, organizers struggle to find space and are unable to plan for recurring or annual events. Respondents voiced a need for additional designated spaces for events or non-academic activities. Additionally, frustrations arise when course-based activities occupy co-curricular spaces, reducing availability for non-academic use, and when classrooms are taken offline for maintenance without sufficient notice.

- **Costs associated with room bookings can be prohibitive.**

Booking space can be accompanied by high fees, especially when booking outside one's division. These costs can be prohibitive, particularly to cost-recovery or smaller units. Some voiced that they incur fees even when booking a room with no additional requirements (e.g. A/V, catering). Students are notably impacted by room rental costs.

Consultation groups also provided insights more specific to their constituencies and/or experiences, as well as feedback that focused more on the quality, accessibility and type of university classrooms, such as the need to update spaces, ensure adequate, consistent technology, and increase the inventory of flexible classroom space to accommodate diverse teaching modalities. While out of scope for this policy review, which is focused on the booking, use, and prioritization of instructional space, this feedback demonstrates what is top of mind when people think about instructional space. Where appropriate, comments about classroom design, maintenance and other matters have been shared with the appropriate University units.

While the intent of the consultation process was not for consultation groups to put forward recommendations, several suggestions were tabled:

- **Develop an automated, centralized booking system.** Many respondents emphasized the need for a system that provides real-time space availability, is user-friendly and easily searchable, and allows filtering by room accessibility, type, equipment and so on. A consistent approach to space booking was seen to improve access and utilization, as well as tracking space use and inventory.
- **Eliminate or reduce costs associated with room bookings for certain user groups and/or activities.** Several consultation groups noted that current fees can be prohibitive, particularly for students and student groups. They proposed fee reductions or waivers for non-revenue generating events or activities that serve the University's mission, while maintaining charges for external users, fee generating events or events requiring support.

- **Accommodate activities that reflect institutional commitments or priorities.** Some respondents expressed that there should be dedicated access to instructional space for activities that may not typically be prioritized under existing policies or guidelines but are considered important to the University and/or specific divisions. One stakeholder group suggested “dynamic prioritization”, which would consider time of day and time of year needs.
- **Expand and/or better communicate the availability of instructional spaces.** A number of consultation groups expressed interest in increased access to instructional space, potentially supported by a centralized booking system, real-time digital signage showing availability, and greater opportunities to use classrooms during evenings and weekends. Some also encouraged promoting underused or distinctive spaces for non-academic activities.

Recommended Changes to Current Institutional Policies

Considering the observations from the environmental scan, the community consultations and the review of existing policies, the Working Group recommends the following actions:

1. Create a new **Use of Instructional Space** policy that clearly articulates the purpose and use of instructional space, outlines the governance process, identifies priorities for booking, and provides guidelines for booking oversight, timelines and when fees apply for non-instructional use.
2. Retire the **Guidelines for Central Room Allocation** (1981). Pertinent information in these Guidelines is captured in the Terms of Reference for each campus’ space allocation committees, and prioritization information will be captured in the new policy.
3. Revise the **Space Policy – Permanent Accommodation** (1993). Recommend a working group, with representation from the St. George, UTM and UTSC space allocation committees, to review and update this policy, ensuring alignment with the terms of reference of each space allocation committee.
4. Revise the **Policy on the Temporary Use of Space** (2010) to remove the prioritization list and refer to the new Use of Instructional Space policy for this information. The current priority listing in the Policy on the Temporary Use of Space does not align with other policy documents.

Appendix 1: Use of Instructional Space Policy Working Group Terms of Reference

Purpose:

The Working Group to Review the Use of Instructional Space Policies and Guidelines is tasked with reviewing and revising current policies and procedures related to the use of instructional spaces at U of T to identify gaps in information and opportunities to streamline various documents into a unified policy and guideline document for the Use of Instructional Space at U of T. Specifically, the working group will:

- Conduct an environmental scan to identify best practices for Use of Instructional Space policies and guidelines.
- Review and recommend changes to institutional policies and guidelines regarding the use of instructional space and the temporary use of space, with the possibility of streamlining policies and guidelines documents.
- Recommend a reporting framework for an annual utilization of instructional space report.
- Identify and define the different uses of academic space on campus and establish principles to support the different uses of academic spaces.

The report and recommendations will be made to the Provost and proposed policy changes will follow appropriate governance process.

Current policies, guidelines and committee terms of reference related to space:

- Guidelines for Central Room Allocation
- Policy on the Temporary Use of Space at the University of Toronto
- Procedures for the Temporary Use of Space at the University of Toronto
- Space Policy – Permanent Accommodation
- Capital Projects and Space Allocation (CaPS) Terms of Reference

Consultation Process and Membership to Review Recommendations

Working Group

- Dwayne Benjamin, Vice-Provost, Strategic Enrolment Management (Chair)
- Randy Boyagoda, Vice-Dean, Undergraduate, Faculty of Arts & Science
- Alison Gibbs, Director, Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation
- Joyce Hahn, Chief Administrative Officer, Division of the Vice-President & Provost
- Anne Macdonald, Assistant Vice-President, Spaces & Experiences
- Ron Saporta, Chief Operating Officer, Property Services & Sustainability (F&S)
- Angelique Saweczko, University Registrar
- Sandy Welsh, Vice-Provost, Students

Support: Office of the VPSEM

Roles & Responsibilities

The Working Group will commit to:

- Attend all scheduled meetings for the working group. If unable to attend, ensure feedback on agenda items is provided ahead of the meeting.
- Share all communications and information with their division/department/unit and solicit feedback on proposed updates.
- Make timely decisions and take action to keep a forward momentum for the working group.

The consultation group leads will commit to:

- Scheduling meetings with identified stakeholders
- Facilitating discussions with stakeholders
- Providing report backs to the Core Working Group

Deliverables:

The Working Group will submit a report based on findings from the policy review and consultations and will draft institutional policy/guidelines on the use of academic space. Proposed policy changes will follow appropriate governance processes.

Meeting Schedule for the Working Group

- All meetings will be chaired by the VPSEM.
- Meeting agendas minutes will be provided by the Office of the VPSEM, this includes:
 - preparing agendas and supporting materials
 - preparing meeting minutes
 - scheduling meetings
- Meetings will typically be held once per month for approximately one and a half hours. Meetings may be held either in person or online depending on the availability of the group.
- Recommendations will be made by consensus. If consensus is not possible, the working group chair makes final decision.
- If required, working group meetings may be arranged outside of these times at a time convenient to working group members.

Appendix 2: History of U of T Space Allocation Committees

Committee on Accommodation and Facilities Directorate (CAF)	prior to 1989	Vice Provost and Assistant Vice President (Planning & Budget)
Accommodation and Facilities Directorate (AFD)	1989 to 2012	Vice Provost, Space and Facilities Planning
Capital Project and Space Allocation Committee (CAPS)	2013 to present	Vice President, OREP & Vice Provost, Academic Operations

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Appendix 3: Consultation Groups

Academic Divisions	<p>University of Toronto Mississauga</p> <p>University of Toronto Scarborough</p> <p>Faculty of Arts & Science</p> <p>Faculty of Applied Science & Engineering</p> <p>Rotman School of Management</p> <p>Faculty of Music</p> <p>Faculty of Kinesiology & Physical Education</p> <p>Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape & Design</p> <p>Faculty of Dentistry</p> <p>Ontario Institute for Studies in Education</p> <p>Faculty of Law</p> <p>Temerty Faculty of Medicine</p> <p>Faculty of Information</p> <p>Lawrence Bloomberg Faculty of Nursing</p> <p>Dalla Lana School of Public Health</p> <p>Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work</p> <p>Leslie Dan Faculty of Pharmacy</p> <p>School of Continuing Studies</p> <p>School of Graduate Studies</p>
Academic – Other	<p>Teaching & Learning</p> <p>Academic Roundtable</p>
Administrative Groups	<p>Tri-Campus Chief Administrative Officers</p> <p>University Planning</p> <p>Facilities & Services</p> <p>Division of People, Strategy, Equity & Culture</p>

	Tri-Campus Campus Events Tri-Campus Registrars Indigenous Initiatives
Student Services / Students	Tri-Campus Student Life Recognized Student Groups (tri-campus) VPSEM Student Advisory Group (tri-campus) Divisional student groups*

*Some divisions included student groups in their consultations.

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Appendix 4: Consultation Questions

Academic Units and Student Services Consultation Groups

Definition: Instructional space is defined by the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) as “a room primarily used for scheduled teaching purposes which does not require special equipment of a kind that makes the room unsuitable for regular classroom instruction.” This refers to **classrooms** and excludes, for example, spaces like speciality labs or departmental offices. With this definition in mind:

1. Outside of instruction connected to course/program requirements, what are the ways in which you currently use instructional space on campus?
2. How would you categorize these activities, using the following buckets: a) academic, b) academic-related, c) operational, d) non-academic?
 - o Are there activities not directly tied to course/program requirements that you consider academic/curricular? If so, what are they?
3. When thinking about the types of uses you’ve identified, what are your priorities for using instructional space on campus, in terms of activities and/or user groups prioritized?
4. Do you have any concerns related to **access to and/or use of** instructional space at U of T?

Additional questions for extended consultations:

1. How frequently does your unit use instructional space for non-academic related activities?
 - a. Can you provide examples of the types of non-academic activities for which you use instructional space?
2. Do you find it easy to book instructional space for non-academic purposes?

Student Consultation Groups

1. Do you ever need to, or wish to, book instructional space for academic or non-academic purposes?
 - a. If academic, what would those activities be?
 - b. If non-academic, what would those activities be?
2. What do you feel should be the top three prioritizations for the use of instructional space on campus (prompt: in terms of: types of activities and/or user groups)?

Additional questions for extended consultations:

1. Do you find it easy to book instructional space for academic or non-academic purposes?
2. What is your perception about the availability of instructional (classroom) space for your academic program, during and outside of scheduled classes?

Administrative/Staff Consultation Groups

1. How often does your unit support non-academic activities in instructional space?

- a. Can you provide examples of the types of non-academic activities you support in instructional space?
2. What data would you find helpful on how instructional space is used?
 - a. What types of reporting requirements and/or metrics would you like to see in policy procedures/guidelines?
3. What are the greatest concerns that are raised in your areas about **access to, and use of**, instructional space at U of T?
 - a. Do you hear different concerns from different user groups?

Additional questions for extended consultations:

1. What is the role of Archibus data in developing a strategy around the use of instructional space?
2. What works in terms of the ongoing maintenance and repair of instructional space when it is used for non-academic purposes? What doesn't work?
3. Are there any details that should be highlighted that speak to room utilization from the campus planning and operations perspective?