



# Report of the Convocation Advisory Review Committee

February 2019



UNIVERSITY OF  
**TORONTO**

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## 1. Introduction and Background

### 1.1 Introduction

On March 29, 2018, the Chair of the Governing Council and the President of the University of Toronto (U of T) announced the creation of the Convocation Advisory Review Committee (CARC) to undertake a review of convocation at U of T with a focus on two broad themes - Venue and Ceremony. The review was commissioned in light of the impact of the growth in the size of graduating classes and the limited capacity of Convocation Hall.

Convocation remains one of the largest, most important and inclusive celebratory events held at U of T involving all academic divisions and a number of administrative offices. The reach of this event extends beyond the physical campus with the live worldwide webcast capturing a global audience.

In 2018, there were 35 ceremonies: 29 ceremonies in the Spring 2018 Convocation taking place over 11 days; and 8 in the Fall 2018 Convocation spanning across 4 days. Together the Fall and Spring ceremonies graduated almost 19,000 graduates and welcomed approximately 40,000 families and friends to the University.

Convocation ceremonies at U of T are organized by Faculty/School and degree<sup>1</sup>. For the Faculty of Arts and Science, they are further broken down by College, in accordance with the way in which students are currently admitted to the Faculty.

One of the distinguishing features of Convocation at U of T is that graduates come forward on stage to be recognized individually. Each graduate is greeted by the Chancellor and the President (or another presiding officer acting for them) and receives their diploma at the ceremony. This is a rare model for a university of this size.

As the capacity of Convocation Hall is approximately 1,700 people, attendance at many ceremonies has now reached, or exceeded, that limit. Steady enrolment expansion has led to the growth in our graduating classes, with the total number of graduates growing from 17,056 in 2013 to 18,981 in 2018 (11% increase), of which 12,841 attended their ceremony in 2013 to 15,348 in 2018 (20% growth). Currently, each graduand receives two guest tickets. Additional tickets, if available, go through an electronic random assignment process to be distributed to the requesting graduands.



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<sup>1</sup> Although not Convocation ceremonies, U of T has held graduation celebration events in Hong Kong, home to the largest concentration of U of T alumni outside of Canada. Normally held every two years by the Division of University Advancement, the last edition of the Asia-Pacific Graduation Ceremony took place in 2017 and welcomed approximately 800 attendees from across Asia, Canada, United States, Europe, and United Kingdom.

## 1.2 Mandate of the Advisory Review Committee

Given this growth scenario and the limited capacity of the current venue, the Committee's general mandate was to:

- Examine the *feasibility of the current model* taking into account the trend and forecast of the number of ceremonies, number of dates in Spring and Fall convocation periods and limited venue capacity,
- Examine and recommend *possible venue alternatives* and *possible changes in the delivery of ceremonies*, and
- Make recommendations that will allow the University to continue to provide an outstandingly positive, memorable experience for graduands and their families and friends.

The Committee was asked to consult, compile the outcomes of these broad consultations, and make recommendations under two broad themes of Venue and Ceremony, without limiting the scope of the review.

## 1.3 Consultation Process

The Committee met on 10 occasions beginning in April 2018 through January 2019. The work of the CARC was informed by extensive consultations with the University community. This included the Principals and Deans, divisional faculty and staff with involvement in convocation, the 2018 spring and fall graduating classes, the alumni community, and the broader University community in general.

### *Graduates*

Given the nature of the Review, it was vital that the Committee hear from as many graduating students as possible. To that end, a survey was undertaken of the entire June 2018 graduating class and the November 2018 graduating class. The response rate of the June graduates was 15.7% and for the November graduates was 19.7%.

### *Alumni*

Another critical stakeholder group was alumni. A survey was sent to all of the 255,594 living alumni with an active email address. 10,219 responses were received. In addition, the Co-Chairs of the Committee were invited to the University of Toronto Alumni Association (UTAA) Executive Board meeting to brief them on the process taken and the progress made by the Committee and gather their feedback.



### *Student Governments*

The five student governments were invited to meet with the Committee and/or make a written submission. They are as follows:

- University of Toronto Students' Union (UTSU)
- Association of Part-Time Undergraduate Students (APUS)
- University of Toronto Graduate Students' Union (UTGSU)
- Scarborough Campus Student Union (SCSU)
- University of Toronto Mississauga Students' Union (UTMSU)

### *Principals and Deans*

The Co-Chairs of the Committee met one-on-one with the senior academic leadership of the University:

- Dean of the Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering
- Dean of the John H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape, and Design
- Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science, as well as the
  - Principal of Innis College
  - Principal of New College
  - Principal of University College
  - Principal of Woodsworth College
- President of the University of St. Michael's College<sup>2</sup> and the Principal of St. Michael's College
- Provost and Vice-Chancellor of Trinity College and Dean of Arts, Trinity College
- President of Victoria University and Acting Principal of Victoria College
- Dean of the Faculty of Dentistry
- Dean of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE)
- Dean of the Faculty of Forestry
- Acting Dean of the School of Graduate Studies
- Dean of the Faculty of Information
- Dean and Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education
- Dean of the Faculty of Law
- Dean of the Joseph L. Rotman School of Management
- Dean of the Faculty of Medicine
- Dean of the Faculty of Music
- Dean of the Lawrence S. Bloomberg Faculty of Nursing
- Dean of the Faculty of Pharmacy
- Dean of the Dalla Lana School of Public Health
- Dean of the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work
- Vice-President and Principal of the University of Toronto Mississauga
- Vice-President and Principal of the University of Toronto Scarborough

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2 The Co-Chairs met with the outgoing President in May 2018 and with his successor in December 2018.

## *University Community*

The Committee also welcomed input from the general University community. An invitation to submit comments through an online form was part of the public announcement on the launch of the Committee. The announcement was published in the Provost's Weekly Digest and in the U of T Bulletin Brief.

## *Review Committee*

Finally, as this is an expert advisory committee comprising appropriate divisional and portfolio representation, the appointed Committee members shared with the entire Committee their professional expertise and experiences of respective stakeholders. As part of their role, the members attended a ceremony and observed the work behind the scenes. Ultimately, the recommendations in this report are a product of the Committee's efforts to think institutionally with the aim to pursue options for the benefit of the entire university.

## **1.4 Convocation at the University of Toronto**

### **1.4.1 Authority for Convocation and Conferral of Degrees**

Authority for convocation and the conferral of degrees is defined in the *University of Toronto Act, 1971*. Under Section 4 (4) of the *Act*, the Chancellor is Chair of Convocation and pursuant to Section 4 (5) all degrees are conferred by the Chancellor. In the absence of the Chancellor under Section 5 (3) the President shall confer degrees, and in the absence of the President degrees shall be conferred by such person as the Governing Council may designate. The *Policy on Presiding Officers for Convocation* (May 23, 2013) enables the President to delegate responsibilities among a list of other senior University leaders.

### **1.4.2 Role of the Office of the President and the Office of the Governing Council**

The Office of the President is charged with planning and implementing major university events, most notably convocation. The University Events Team in the President's Office oversees the protocol and ceremonial arrangements at convocation, ensuring that the exacting standards of the university are upheld and showcase the University of Toronto's commitment to tradition and excellence. The President's Office develops a unique slate of ceremonial roles for the Chancellor's Procession at each ceremony, and prepares the convocation scripts. Additionally, they work with the University carilloneurs and train the gonfaloniers who have been selected to represent their faculty or division at convocation. This Office is also responsible for all arrangements pertaining to the honorary degree recipients, from coordinating their travel and local accommodation, to preparing them for the ceremony, to the hospitality events (i.e., receptions, luncheons and dinners) associated with celebrating their honorary degree conferral with internal and external members of the university community. In some instances, faculty or divisional programming is developed for the honorary degree recipient. The President's Office also leads the Convocation Strategy Group, working with the Office of the Governing Council, Alumni Relations, University of Toronto Communications, and Academic and Campus Events (ACE), to refine each season's logistics and develop communications strategies and products to celebrate and profile convocation.

The Office of Convocation, part of the Office of the Governing Council, is responsible for the logistical details of the student and guest related elements of convocation for the University (all three campuses) and the Federated Colleges. In partnership with the academic divisions, the Office ensures that all eligible graduating students put forward by divisions receive the necessary communications to participate in the ceremony or collect their diploma if not attending. For the over 55,000 graduating students and guests, the Office ensures each eligible graduand has an accurate diploma in pristine condition inserted into hand-labelled envelopes; that each graduand is listed in the convocation programme booklet which is printed for each ceremony; and, has a marshalling card that is read by the official Reader at the ceremony. Accommodations for guests and graduands are coordinated by the Office in addition to overseeing the RSVP and ticketing system, ensuring the 40,000-plus guests have valid tickets for the right ceremony. [Accommodations include, but are not limited to: providing accessible seating; providing ASL interpreters; and, coordinating particular requirements for service animals.]

The Office also coordinates training for those involved in convocation including up to 40 Readers to announce the graduands, student and academic marshals, and various student teams that support the ceremonies. For each ceremony, the Office ensures that graduands have proper academic regalia, are seated in order, presented in an organised manner, receive the correct parchment, sign the official Signature Book and have their photo taken. This must be accomplished in a dignified but timely manner. The Office also organises the Academic Procession and offers a regalia rental service for students, faculty and staff.

The Office collaborates with the many campus partners that support convocation that includes Academic and Campus Events (ACE), Campus Police, Transportation Services, Alumni Affairs, Grounds, Housekeeping, the U of T Bookstore and our academic divisions.

With our vendor partners, services such as regalia rental, flowers and official photography at Convocation Hall are made available for our graduating students, faculty and guests. The web-cast of the ceremonies is also coordinated by the Office.

Throughout the year, the Office is also responsible for the reissue of degrees and diplomas for University of Toronto alumni; supports the University degree verification service for third parties – requests which number over 6,000 annually; prints close to 1,000 Certification of Degree letters and produces the annual official Roll Book for the University. In March, the Office organizes the “In Absentia” conferral of over 300 graduates who require a parchment but do not attend a ceremony. This unique model, in which a central office with a small team oversees production, various elements of the ceremonies in addition to records management related to diploma production and conferral of degree records, is uncommon among peer institutions in North America, especially those of the size of U of T with the scale of our ceremonies.



## 2. Alternative Venues

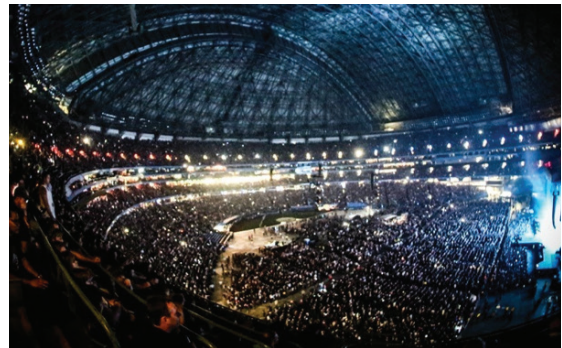
Convocation Hall, built in 1907, was financed by money raised by the University of Toronto Alumni Association and matching funds from the Province of Ontario. Since that time it has served as the venue for convocation ceremonies at U of T for all students, regardless of which campus they were located at for their studies. The Hall has four storeys, including two main seating floors, and a seating capacity of approximately 1,700. It is the largest indoor venue at U of T.

In assessing possible alternative venues to Convocation Hall, the Committee considered large off-campus indoor facilities, as well as two large on-campus outdoor venues. In considering these alternative venues, the understanding was that each graduand would receive four guest tickets and as such this was factored in when estimating the number of ceremonies that would be required based on the venue capacity.

### 2.1 Off Campus – Indoor

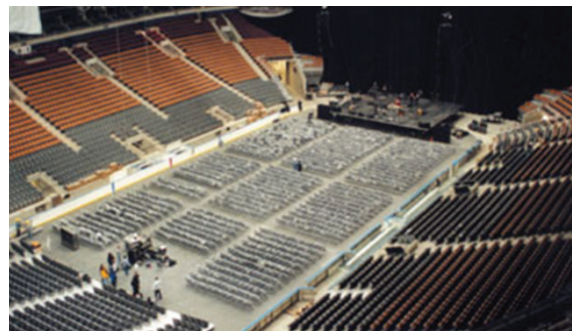
#### *Rogers Centre*

The Rogers Centre has a total capacity of approximately 52,500 using all levels including the very distant skydeck. Given this capacity only one day would be required for convocation with two ceremonies (one in the morning and one in the afternoon). It is critical to note, however, that it would not be possible to have a firm booking for any particular date as availability is restricted based on the prioritization of sports and other event schedules (e.g., concerts).



#### *Scotiabank Arena (formerly Air Canada Centre)*

The Scotiabank Arena has a capacity of approximately 12,900 – 16,100. This would allow for five ceremonies over three days. As with the Rogers Centre availability is restricted based on the prioritization of sports and other event schedules.



#### *Coca-Cola Coliseum (formerly the Ricoh Coliseum)*

The Coca-Cola Coliseum, located at Exhibition Place (45 Manitoba Drive) has a capacity of between 5,000 to 7,300. This would allow for 10 ceremonies over five days.



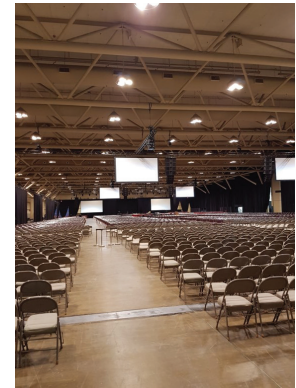
### *Enercare Centre*

The Enercare Centre, also located at Exhibition Place (100 Princes' Boulevard), is a facility with a number of very large rooms with very high ceilings. Four of those spaces can be combined to provide a capacity of approximately 12,000. This would allow for six ceremonies over three days.



### *Metro Toronto Convention Centre*

The Metro Toronto Convention Centre, a convention complex located along Front Street West, has capacity for approximately 10,500. This would also involve combining several large rooms to create one large space, allowing for seven ceremonies over three days.



### *Assessment*

All of these large venues clearly provide significantly more capacity than Convocation Hall. The most notable advantages of these large venues are: the ability to offer each graduand four guest tickets (as opposed to two), and, the need for fewer days devoted to the convocation each season. Other advantages include transit access (Rogers Centre, Scotiabank Arena, Metro Toronto Convention Centre) and on-site parking (Enercare Centre, Coca-Cola Coliseum).

The Committee discussed at length the implications of moving to one of these venues noting that at the core it would involve a fundamental change to the U of T convocation experience. The most significant change would be the elimination of the individual recognition of graduands. Graduands would likely need to be recognized in groups, for example by having all who are graduating with a particular degree to stand at the same time. This is an approach taken by many US institutions that hold their ceremonies in large stadiums like the Rogers Centre. Such an approach, however, is not common for universities in Canada. It was also noted that while neither were seen to be ideal, an arena setting (bowl-shape) would allow for a more positive experience as opposed to a stadium setting.

Substantial changes to the ceremony itself would also be required in order to adapt to a large venue. There would need to be recognition that these larger venues would require significant investment in audio-visual support and staging. [For those venues without stadium/theatre seating this would include a need for multiple video screens so that all attendees could see what is taking place on the dais.]

As many Faculties and Colleges host local celebrations (awards ceremonies, receptions, etc.,) this would require graduates and their guests return to campus for such events. In addition to the logistical implications of people returning to campus this will also result in a very high demand on limited on-campus event space.

It was also noted that these venues were not aesthetically appealing and as such there would need to be a significant effort made to create a visually appealing, U of T-branded, environment.

## 2.2 On Campus – Outdoor

The Committee also considered two on-campus outdoor venues (as there are no indoor venues on the St. George campus that are larger than Convocation Hall).

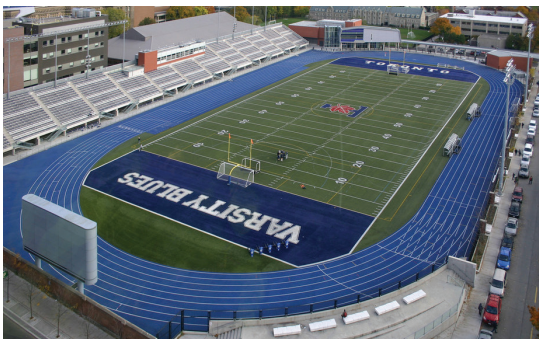
### *Front Campus (King’s College Circle)*

The large grass area in front of University College could provide a potential space for holding outdoor ceremonies. While it is difficult to estimate the capacity of this space (particularly in light of the planned Landmark Project which will result in a redesign of the space) a rough estimate is that it would be possible to seat approximately 8,200 (3900 chairs along King’s College Road and on King’s College Circle, and 4,300 chairs on the Front Campus itself). This would allow for ten ceremonies over five days.



### *Varsity Stadium (299 Bloor Street West)*

Varsity Stadium has a 5,000-seat capacity, however, extra seats have been added for other large events to bring the capacity up to approximately 6,000. This would allow for 15 ceremonies over seven days.





## Assessment

The Committee noted that the implications of using these venues was similar to those outlined above with regard to the off-campus indoor venues. In addition, it was recognized that holding ceremonies outdoors brings with it complications related to weather conditions. Given the inability to adjust ceremony schedules in real time and the undesirability of a ‘rain or shine’ approach, the Committee did not think that it would be practical to move to one of these venues notwithstanding that their on-campus locations gave them some appeal.

### 3. Feedback from Consultations

#### 3.1 Graduates

The Committee was extremely interested in hearing directly from graduates about their experience of their convocation. To that end, all June 2018 and November 2018 graduates were invited to participate in a survey (and were asked to provide the survey link to their guests). 15,553 graduates received the link to the survey. The total number of respondents, including guests, was 3,985, marking 7.3% for overall response rate and 16.6% for graduates’ response rate.

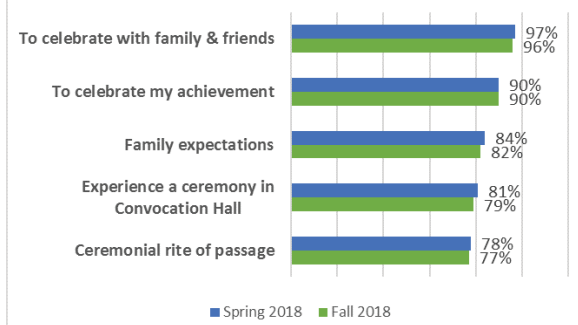
The survey asked respondents to indicate the Degree (if a graduate; domestic/international; constituency, and if not a graduate, alumnus/a, parent, guest, faculty/staff member, other); campus affiliation; academic unit affiliation; College affiliation (if a graduate of the Faculty of Arts & Science). 97% of the total respondents were graduates.

The first set of questions asked about guest tickets. The practice is for each graduand to receive a minimum of two guest tickets. The summary of the responses is presented below.

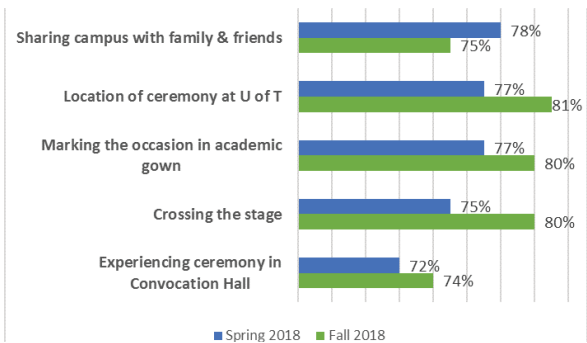
	Spring 2018	Fall 2018
Respondents who received <b>more than 2</b> tickets	52 %	52%
Respondents whose guests watched the ceremony outside Convocation Hall	27 %	22%
Respondents who would have invited more than 3 guests had there been no ticket limit	80 %	75%

It is clear that while there is an interest in being able to have more guests, a large number of graduands received more than the minimum number of tickets.

Graduates were asked about the reasons why they planned to attend the ceremony. The following factors were rated ‘very influential’ or ‘somewhat influential’:



Those who attended their ceremony were asked to indicate what they valued most about their convocation experience. The following were rated ‘valued very much’ or ‘valued’:



One of the matters at the heart of this review is the limited capacity of Convocation Hall versus the interest in the ability to have more guests attend a ceremony. When graduates were asked if they would consider an alternative venue to Convocation Hall if it would mean receiving four guest tickets, on the whole there was not strong support for such a trade-off.

**Spring 2018 Survey**

Alternative	Indoor/ Off Campus	Outdoor/ On Campus
Yes	26 %	38 %
No	49 %	37 %
Maybe	25 %	25 %

**Fall 2018 Survey**

Alternative	Indoor/ Off Campus	Outdoor/ On Campus
Yes	25%	32%
No	52%	42%
Maybe	24%	26%

The survey asked open-ended questions on what was liked most and least about the ceremony. Interestingly, some of the same points were raised under both categories revealing opposite reactions to the same issue, for example, the duration of the ceremony.

**Open-Ended Question: LIKED MOST**

Spring 2018 Survey	Fall 2018 Survey
1. Organized, Efficient, Quick (21%)	1. Organized, Efficient, Quick (22%)
2. Convocation Hall (16%)	2. Convocation Hall (15%)
3. Speeches (13%)	3. Crossing the Stage (15%)
4. Crossing the Stage (12%)	4. Celebrate with Classmates (12%)
5. Celebrate with Family & Friends (11%)	5. Speeches (11%)

“

*I DO APPRECIATE THAT IT WAS IN CONVOCATION HALL. MY GRANDFATHER, WHEN HE GRADUATED, ALSO HAD HIS CEREMONY THERE. IT'S NICE TO SEE THE TRADITION KEPT UP, AND NOT HAVE THE CEREMONY SET UP SOMEWHERE LIKE A GYMNASIUM.* ”

-Comment from 2018 Graduates Survey



**Open-Ended Question: LIKED LEAST**

Spring 2018 Survey	Fall 2018 Survey
1. Speeches (16% of entries)	1. Speeches (15%)
2. Too Long (14%)	2. Too Long (15%)
3. Hot Inside Convocation Hall (11%)	3. Nothing (13%)
4. No Complimentary Refreshments (5%)	4. Rain/Cold (6%)
5. No mortar board (5%)	5. No mortar board (5%)



**WHAT I LIKED LEAST WAS THAT I COULD ONLY HAVE 2 GUESTS. I BROUGHT MY PARENTS BUT WANTED MY GIRLFRIEND TO COME SEE ME GRADUATE.** »

-Comment from 2018

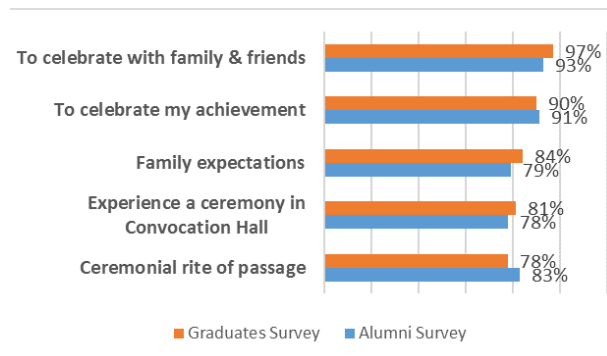
Graduates Survey

On the matter of accessibility needs, of the 216 total respondents, 6% indicated that they had requested accommodations before or at the ceremony. Of those 85% said they were ‘very satisfied’ or ‘somewhat satisfied’ with the accommodations they received.

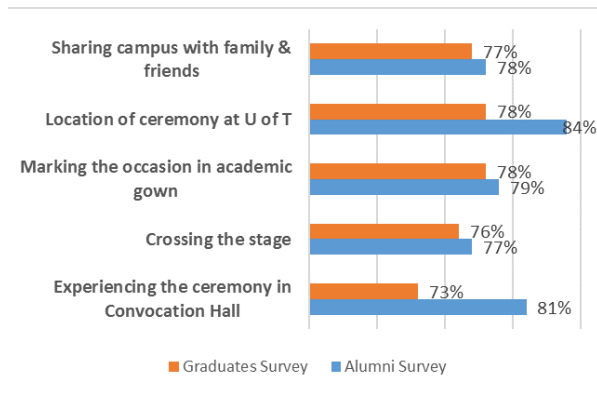
**3.2 Alumni**

The Alumni Relations Office within the Division of University Advancement (DUA) conducted the Alumni Convocation Survey in the summer of 2018. The same survey questions were used for the alumni as were used for the recent graduates. The survey was sent to all living alumni (255,594) with an active email address. 10,219 responses were received (a 4% response rate). The demographics were skewed towards recent graduates (2010-17; approximately 30%). The participation saw global representation of 86 countries – topped by Canada (7,576 response) and followed by the United States (783), the United Kingdom (105), Hong Kong (73) and Germany (35).

The results aligned closely with those of the Spring 2018 survey of graduates, including the number of guests the respondents would have invited had there been no limit (4 guests) and Convocation Hall ranking high in the decision to attend their ceremony.



Alumni had the same five reasons to attend their ceremony as ‘very influential’ or ‘somewhat influential’ as did the graduates. They were:



For those who attended their ceremony, alumni had a similar response as graduates with the location of the venue on campus and the ceremony in Convocation Hall ranking slightly higher. The following factors were ‘valued very much’ or ‘valued’.

In terms of the question as to whether an alternative venue would be acceptable in exchange for being able to have four tickets, similar to graduates this yielded a largely negative response, with the ‘no’ response being higher by 8 and 5 percentage points for an indoor venue off campus and an outdoor venue on campus, respectively, than in the graduate survey.

Alternative	Indoor/ Off Campus	Outdoor/ On Campus
Yes	16 %	30 %
No	57 %	42 %
Maybe	26 %	28 %

Responses to the open-ended questions about what they liked most and least about the ceremony were also very similar to those in the survey of the 2018 graduates. One exception to this were the comments on the heat and humidity in Convocation Hall. This is understandable given that many respondents had experienced their ceremony before the air conditioning was installed in Convocation Hall in 1997.

### 3.3 Student Governments

The five recognized student governments were invited to meet with the Committee and/or make a written submission. Their views were sought on the factors they thought that students value in their convocation experience and whether they felt that there would be an interest in moving to an alternative venue (off-campus indoor venue or on-campus outdoor venue) if this would allow graduates to receive four guest tickets. They were also welcome to provide any other feedback that they thought would helpful to the Committee.

The representatives all spoke about the value of Convocation Hall. It was remarked that many students valued the strong sense of connection to campus and the symbolic importance of having begun their university years with orientation on the Front Campus (and in Convocation Hall) and then finishing it there. It was also noted that many students took pride in showing off the campus, especially Convocation Hall, to their guests; this was a particular point for international students and for those students who are the first in their family to attend university. It appropriately reflected the magnitude and significance of such an achievement and life event. There was also a clear desire for respecting and maintaining the traditions of convocation, though there was also a desire in having more information available to explain these traditions.

They all acknowledged that two guest tickets were often not enough, however, notwithstanding this they did not think it was enough of a reason to move off campus into a large, impersonal, non-U of T venue. There was some openness to Varsity Stadium if a move was absolutely necessary, though it was noted that weather would be a significant challenge. There was support for continuing to offer an over-flow space for guests (currently this is provided in the Convocation Plaza).

### **3.4 University Community**

A general call for input from the University community was part of the public announcement on the launch of the Committee. Interested individuals were invited to submit comments through an online form. One hundred and nineteen comments or suggestions were received, the majority of the comments (79%) advocated for a stand-alone ceremony for the Department of Computer Science<sup>3</sup>, while the remaining comments included, among others, reflections on the prestige of Convocation Hall, request for different coloured hoods for each College, and a desire for increased faculty member participation.

### **3.5 Principals and Deans**

Principals and Deans were almost unanimous in the view that Convocation Hall should remain the venue for U of T ceremonies. Some were unequivocal on this point while others were open to the possibility of using an on-campus alternative. With one exception, there was no support for moving to an off-campus venue.

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<sup>3</sup> The Committee carefully considered this issue and concluded that that taking an anomalistic approach for one department, given the overall size and structure of the University and the related implications of such an action, would not be appropriate. A response was sent to the President of the Computer Science Student Union (see Appendix I).

The Co-Chairs heard about the importance of the intimacy of the experience in Convocation Hall. It was noted that the University had a successful formula for an approach that dealt with a relatively large number of students in a ceremony but still felt intimate. Echoing comments made by the other stakeholder groups, Principals and Deans spoke about the importance of students ending their U of T experience in a manner which celebrated the individual. Several remarked on the fact that many students began their University of Toronto experience in an Orientation event in Convocation Hall and that it seemed fitting that this would also be how they would end their time at the University. One noted that part of his remarks to the first year students at his College's Orientation in Convocation Hall included a comment that "... in about four years from now you will be walking across this stage". Another remarked that it was not the importance of the specific space per se but the experience of individuality.

“  
*THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ENDING  
MY JOURNEY AT U OF T IN THE  
VERY PLACE I BEGAN IT: CONVO-  
CATION HALL.*”

- Comment from 2018 Graduates  
Survey

Many Principals and Deans also spoke passionately about the importance of convocation as a major component of the foundation of the alumni relationship. They saw it as a “critical transition point” and as a “powerful moment to connect with the University”. A number expressed the sentiment that a “mass convocation” with an “anonymous ceremony” would not foster this connection and might undermine the sense of attachment, and that ultimately something very meaningful would be lost.

Given the number and diversity of the University's academic divisions, almost all leaders spoke to the importance of the distinctions between divisions and the need to respect the coherence of the respective communities. This included requests to ensure there is an opportunity for the divisional leader to have an opportunity to briefly address their students noting that students were more likely to identify with their Principal or Dean than other senior University leaders.<sup>4</sup> The College Principals shared their view that “College affiliation receives one of its final and strongest affirmations when students graduate together as a College-based cohort.” On a related point, the heads of the Federated Universities also spoke to the importance of the federated relationship being appropriately reflected in the ceremony.

Many suggested that enhancing the role of the Dean, and the Principal as appropriate, might also make it possible to reduce the time commitment of the President and Chancellor. There was universal acknowledgement of the fact that the current approach involved a very significant demand on the time of the President and the Chancellor, and there was considerable appreciation for the fact that this was likely not sustainable (even with the existing ‘substitutions policy’).

The Vice-Presidents and Principals of the University of Toronto Scarborough (UTSC) and the University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM) also spoke to the importance for their respective communities of their ceremonies at Convocation Hall. In their view this was a critical embodiment of the ‘one university, three campuses’ principle as all students, regardless of campus, had the same convocation experience. [Survey results seemed to support this view as there was no data to suggest that UTSC and UTM students had a significantly greater interest in alternate venues to Convocation Hall. Also, only a handful of graduates indicated in the open-ended questions a preference for ceremonies on their respective campuses.]

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4 Such a practice would be consistent with the tradition at the University of Cambridge (upon which many University of Toronto traditions are based) whereby the Heads of College have the ‘lead’ role at their congregations (graduation ceremony).

On the guest ticket issue, the extent to which this was perceived as a problem by the Principal or Dean varied significantly by division. For those who had ceremonies with larger numbers of students (500+) this was a pressing problem. There was an overall sense that it was likely that graduands would be interested in having more than two people attend their ceremony, however, for many divisions this was already possible. Many remarked on the significant growth in international student enrolment in recent years and the expectation that there would be greater numbers of graduands with family members travelling from outside of the country in order to attend a ceremony. There was also speculation that for these families the opportunity to experience the U of T campus alongside their graduand was important.

«

*AS SOMEONE WHO HAD NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE THIS BEFORE, THE WHOLE CEREMONIAL PROCESS AND THE ON-STAGE REGALIA WAS QUITE A SIGHT TO SEE. IT GAVE A LOT OF WEIGHT TO THE CEREMONY AND MADE ME APPRECIATE THE HISTORY OF U OF T, ESPECIALLY FOR AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SUCH AS ME.* »

- Comment from 2018 Graduates Survey

Finally, there were a number of comments about the traditions and rituals and their centrality to the U of T convocation experience. One Dean called the ceremony a “bridging moment from the academy to life” and said that it “reminds people that universities have the greatest longevity within our societies”. Others spoke of the “magic of convocation” and the “energy on campus” during the convocation season, with many commenting on the powerful personal moments they had witnessed on the Front Campus between graduates and their friends, family, fellow classmates and professors.

## 4. Recommendations

### 4.1 Convocation Hall

Feedback from all stakeholder groups on the issue of an alternative venue to Convocation Hall was largely consistent, namely, there is not much support for such a move. There is an appreciation of the various limitations that come with using Convocation Hall, however, the advantages of using Convocation Hall are seen by most to outweigh those limitations. On the whole there is a strong sense of pride in the tradition of convocation at U of T and a firm attachment to our traditional venue.

#### **Recommendation 1:**

THAT Convocation Hall continue to be the venue for all University convocations.

### 4.2 Number of Ceremonies

The Committee upholds the approach taken with regard to organizing ceremonies, namely that they are based on Faculties and on degrees, and in the case of Arts and Science this is further broken down on the basis of Colleges (given that this is the way in which students are admitted to the Faculty).



As noted at the outset of this Review, the forecast of the number of graduates based on enrolment projections indicates a continued growth upward for the short to medium term. Taking into account the above recommendation to remain in Convocation Hall, this will necessarily result in an increase in the number of ceremonies required. It is the view of the Committee, however, that it is essential that any further increases to the number of ceremonies are only as warranted by enrolment numbers and that the convocation timeframe be maximized to the greatest extent possible<sup>5</sup>.

This includes an understanding of the need to split into multiple ceremonies divisions that have reached the maximum number of graduands that can be seated in a ceremony without reducing the two guest ticket minimum. This is important for maintaining the quality and consistency of the convocation experience across all divisions. When such splits are necessary they should be done on the basis of internal cohorts. In the case of the Colleges within the Faculty of Arts and Science, this would involve splitting based on degree, for example a ceremony for Arts (HBA/BA) and a ceremony for Science (HBSc/BSc).

Futhermore, it is understood that in order to maintain this model going forward, divisional pairings, including pairings with longstanding partners, *may* change and that divisions that have historically had their own ceremony *may* require pairing with another division.

The Committee noted that the large number of ceremonies combined with the lengthy duration of the Convocation season necessitates the end to any remaining flexibility with deadlines and protocols. Specifically, deadlines will need to be pushed forward, walkthroughs will no longer be considered, and parchment holds will no longer be an option for divisions seeking a mechanism to collect outstanding fees.

**Recommendation 2:**  
THAT increases to the number of ceremonies are only as warranted by enrolment numbers.

**Recommendation 3:**  
THAT once a division has reached the maximum number of graduates that can be seated in a ceremony without reducing the two guest ticket minimum, the division will be split into multiple ceremonies.

### 4.3 Guest Tickets

The restricted number of guest tickets, as outlined above, is a source of concern for many graduands. The feedback received from recent graduates and alumni has made it clear however, that on the whole the preference to remain at Convocation Hall outweighs the desire for increasing the guaranteed minimum number of guest tickets.

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<sup>5</sup> It noted though, that the ‘triple-ceremony’ model (ie., three ceremonies a day) that was piloted in Spring 2018 was not advisable due to the strain on human resources and the heightened risks as a result of the limited transition time between ceremonies.

In an effort to address the capacity limits of Convocation Hall, since 2006 convocations ceremonies have been webcast. This has enabled interested parties who are unable to attend a ceremony to watch online in real time or after the fact by watching the archived footage.

In addition, for those who were not able to receive additional guest tickets as needed, seating has been available in Convocation Plaza (the large marquee that is erected on the Front Campus lawn outside of Convocation Hall). Guests in the Plaza are able to view the webcast on large screens. Some divisions also provide a webcast venue in their local environment (e.g., the OISE Auditorium, the Rotman Fleck Atrium, etc.).

These initiatives should be continued but consideration should also be given to formalizing additional interior ‘overflow’ space, in such locations as the JJR Macleod Auditorium at the Medical Science Building or the Lee and Margaret Lau Auditorium at Myhal Centre for Engineering Innovation and Entrepreneurship (CEIE). Further, ticketing this additional ‘overflow’ space should be explored as an option, noting upfront that this will have resource implications. In this ticketed scenario, a graduand would receive two tickets for Convocation Hall and two tickets for the ‘overflow’ space. Convocation Plaza would continue to be flexible space to accommodate overflow on a less formal basis, and remain unticketed.

While this does not mitigate the fact that not all guests can be in Convocation Hall, it ensures that those attending will know that there is a reserved space for them and it will also continue to allow them to be able to participate in many aspects of the convocation experience (e.g., greeting graduates as they exit Convocation Hall, taking pictures on the campus, etc.). The availability of additional interior ‘overflow’ space would be communicated clearly to the graduands when they order their tickets.

**Recommendation 4:**

THAT additional interior ‘overflow’ space be considered to increase formal seating options outside Convocation Hall, and further that an option to provide tickets for the ‘overflow’ spaces be explored with due consideration given to resource implications.

#### 4.4 Presiding Officers

As discussed in Section 1.4.1 (*Authority for Convocation and Conferral of Degrees*) the Chancellor is Chair of Convocation and confers all degrees, and in her/his absence the President is delegated this authority. In the absence of the Chancellor and/or President, authority is delegated among a list of senior University leaders pursuant to the *Policy on Presiding Officers for Convocation* (referred to here as the “substitution policy”).

It was very clear from the surveys of graduates and alumni, and from the consultations with the Principals of Constituent Colleges, Deans of Faculties, and Executive Heads of the Federated Universities that the participation of the Chancellor and President of the University of Toronto is highly valued as an important feature of Convocation. In fact, the Federated Universities emphasized the significance of the participation of either the U of T President or Chancellor in their ceremonies, given the nature of the relationship between institutions. But as discussed previously, with enrolment projections indicating continued growth over the short to medium term, it is simply not sustainable for the President and Chancellor to participate in every ceremony if these continue to take place at Convocation Hall. Spring Convocation 2019 currently projects 31 ceremonies.

Given this demography, and drawing upon the principles articulated in the substitution policy, it makes sense to distribute the presiding roles among the Principals, Deans, and Federated Heads more frequently than is current practice. This occurs at some other Universities – Cambridge, for instance – where heads of college preside over undergraduate congregations (convocations), as only one example of how different academic institutions manage their ceremonies. While the Committee does not advocate for this restrictive model *per se*, it does recognize the imperative of reducing the commitment of time on the President and Chancellor and supports more distributed responsibility.

**Recommendation 5:**

THAT the *Policy on Presiding Officers for Convocation* be used to greater advantage, with priority given to Principals of Constituent Colleges, Deans of Faculties, and Executive Heads of Federated Colleges in presiding roles where feasible.

#### 4.5 University Readers

The role of the Reader at convocation is to read the name of the degree, diploma or certificate being awarded, and the name of each graduand. Since the last Convocation Review (2006), a significant innovation has been the introduction of training for Readers. This includes advice on stage presence, pacing and linguistic coaching to accurately pronounce each graduand's name at the ceremony. While training is strongly encouraged, it is not mandatory.

The Committee discussed the critical impact of Readers on the individual student experience. Feedback received through the consultation process on the Readers was positive overall, although there are clearly still instances of mispronunciation. It is surmised that these are likely as a result of the respective Reader not having participated in the training.

Given the objective to make the convocation experience personal and meaningful to each participant, and noting the lasting, negative effect of having one's name mispronounced at an important life ceremony, it was the Committee's view that it is necessary to ensure that all Readers are of an equal caliber.

**Recommendation 6:**

THAT a trained cadre of Readers be formally appointed as 'University Readers'; and that these University Readers undertake the presenting duties at all convocation ceremonies to ensure a consistent, high quality of student experience. In recognition of this service to the University, a stipend consistent with practices at U of T for other special service should be provided.

## 4.6 Ceremony

An outcome of the 2006 Convocation Review was the adoption of the following statement of principle to inform future decision-making with respect to convocation:

*The convocation ceremony is a crucial part of the continuum of student experience at the University since it celebrates students' achievement and the University's pride in that achievement. In keeping with the goal of celebrating achievement the focus of the convocation ceremony should be on the graduands and their families and friends. The ceremony should be formal, dignified and respectful of the University's values and traditions, but not intimidating for those attending. It should continue to be personalized, providing in some way a personal interaction between the graduands and University officials.*

At the outset of its deliberations, the 2018 Committee reaffirmed this statement of principle, and it was with this lens that it reviewed the length of the ceremony. The Committee felt it was important to maintain the traditional elements and not sacrifice quality simply for expediency. Yet this had to be balanced with the reality of the large volume of ceremonies per convocation cycle, and the quality of the experience for graduands and guest when the ceremony ran too long.

Survey feedback varied on the impact of the speakers to the overall quality of the experience, relating specifically to honorary degree recipients and convocation speakers. Additionally, through the consultation process, the Committee clearly heard that the quality of the overall speaker experience largely depended on the dynamism of the orator, as well as the length of speech.

Other than the Chancellor and President who are carefully scripted and timed, it was noted that many speakers exceeded their time allotment, sometimes quite significantly, despite having been assigned a specific, timed slot on the program. It was the Committee's view that strict limits should be reinforced with each speaker, and all remarks vetted in advance by the Secretary of the Governing Council.

It was also proposed that all Honorary Degree citations should be of equal length (2-3 paragraphs being the ideal length) and written by one scholar or professional writer to ensure consistency of quality, drawing upon information contained in the nomination package. The honorary degree recipient's biography should be printed in the convocation program and this information would not be repeated in the citation.

In terms of speaking roles for divisional heads, it was reported that the absence of brief congratulatory remarks and recognition has the adverse effect of potentially disconnecting the graduands from their college-based, professional faculty, or graduate experience.

### **Recommendation 7:**

THAT all speakers, including Honorary Degree recipients, submit their speeches in advance for review for length by the Secretary of the Governing Council and for potential transcription for closed captioning.

**Recommendation 8:**

THAT all honorary degree citations should be written by one scholar or professional writer to ensure consistency of quality and length.

**Recommendation 9:**

THAT a very brief speaking role for the divisional head, connecting them to the graduating cohorts' experience, be included in the ceremony. In the instances where there are two divisions involved in a ceremony, then both heads will have a succinct speaking opportunity. If there are more than two divisions involved in a ceremony, the heads will be asked to decide amongst themselves on up to two representatives to speak on behalf of all participating divisions.

Outside the scope of this review was the ceremonial piece involving the Honorary Degree recipients. The Co-Chairs have identified some unique, innovative opportunities for consideration and will follow-up with the President, Chair and Honorary Degree Committee accordingly.

#### 4.7 Indigenous Representation

In 2016, the Ceremonials Committee of the Governing Council approved a *Statement of Acknowledgement of Traditional Land* to be used at specific University of Toronto ceremonies such as Convocation. Since then, the Convocation Ceremony's Opening Statement begins:

*I (we) wish to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and most recently, the Mississaugas of the Credit River. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.*

**Recommendation 10:**

THAT the *Statement of Acknowledgment of Traditional Land* be printed in the Convocation Program.

In January 2017, *Wecheehetowin: Final Report of the Steering Committee for the University of Toronto Response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* emphasized the imperative to enhance Indigenous inclusion at U of T, to begin generational cultural shift towards reconciliation. Since then, Indigenous elements have been included in ceremonies where the honorary degree recipient has been a member of the Indigenous community. For example, when Senator Murray Sinclair, the former Chief Commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, was awarded an honorary degree, during the Convocation ceremony an Elder presented him an Eagle Feather, and performers drummed the Chancellor's procession at the beginning of the ceremony and also offered an honour song.



The important principles of *Wecheehetowin* informed the Terms of Reference of the Convocation Advisory Review Committee. The group was charged to review the elements of the ceremony with a goal to maintaining the University's traditions while at the same time adapting to changing needs, and specifically to consider appropriate inclusion of Indigenous cultures.

The Committee member who is the Director, Indigenous Initiatives (Offices of the Vice-President & Provost and Vice-President, Human Resources and Equity), engaged in broad consultation throughout the review period with representatives of the U of T Indigenous community on what inclusion of Indigenous culture should look like. It became evident throughout the consultation process that such discussions were well-considered but, while everyone agreed there needed to be greater representation within the ceremony, there were differing opinions on how this might best be achieved to be as representative as possible.

Throughout the review period, the Committee engaged in meaningful discussion around the consultation feedback. Through that process, the following specific discussion points emerged as the primary themes around Indigenous representation and inclusion:

1. The need to develop a protocol for wearing of traditional regalia with academic regalia
2. Would the Eagle Staff or Eagle Feather be an appropriate symbol to include in the Chancellor's Procession?
3. Would community flags be suitably representative in the Procession of Gonfalons?
4. Could an end-of-year celebration for Indigenous students be enhanced, and would this increase Convocation participation rates?
5. Under which circumstances might the use of a hand drum be appropriate?

At the end of the Review period, it was the Committee's unanimous view that to ensure respectful and appropriate Indigenous representation and inclusion, further and broader consultation is necessary.

**Recommendation 11:**

THAT the Director, Indigenous Initiatives (Offices of the Vice-President & Provost and Vice-President, Human Resources and Equity) continue to facilitate this consultation process in the Indigenous community focusing specifically on the five discussion points stated above. This consultation period will culminate in a slate of the recommendations to be brought forward to the Secretary of the Governing Council and Assistant Vice-President, Office of the President, and Chief of Protocol by April 30, 2019. This deadline will ensure the recommendations will follow the appropriate governance path via the Ceremonials Committee for implementation in the Spring 2019 Convocation cycle.

## 4.8 Accessibility

### *Legal and Policy Framework*

The University of Toronto is fully committed to compliance with the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA) and the *Ontario Human Rights Code*<sup>6</sup>. The institution is also committed to the principle of non-discriminatory treatment for all, including compliance with the duty to accommodate.

The University's *Statement of Commitment Regarding Persons with Disabilities* states that it is the "University's goal to create a community that is inclusive of all persons and treats all members of the community in an equitable manner."

And according to the standards set by the Inclusive Design Research Centre (IDRC), "inclusive design is design that considers the full range of human diversity with respect to ability, language, culture, gender, age and others forms of human difference".

It was within this legal and policy context that the Committee considered matters of accessibility to ensure the convocation experience achieved the highest standard of inclusivity for graduands and guests alike. In evaluating the venue and the lived experience, the Committee reviewed the University's current accessibility arrangements and compared these to best practices at other North American institutions.

This past summer, a significant renovation to the stage in Convocation Hall eliminated a major barrier to accessibility for all participants in the ceremony, in addition to enabling all graduands to be called onto stage individually. The stage's lift, built circa 1950, was removed altogether and replaced by two ramps with handrails, one on each side of the stage, rendering it fully accessible. Now, every graduand accesses the stage and is presented to the Chancellor, President and audience in exactly the same manner. As witnessed in the Fall 2018 convocation cycle, this was a historic transformation and members of the Committee were very pleased to witness first-hand this progress in achieving full accessibility.



### *Consultation*

In addition to drawing upon the expertise of our own tri-campus staff, outreach was made to peers at other universities in Ontario and review encompassing North American institutions was conducted to gather and compare best practices in convocation accessibility.

Consultation with our graduates and their guests was also factored into the Committee's deliberations. As part of the June and November surveys referenced in section 3.1 of this report, respondents were asked to share their views on the accessibility of the ceremony. Additionally, individuals who had requested and received accessibility accommodations from the Office of Convocation in the past two years were contacted directly to provide qualitative feedback on their experience. Notably, of the former group, 85% of respondents indicated satisfaction with their overall experience.

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<sup>6</sup> Information on these guidelines and existing legislation related to disability more broadly is available at [AODA and the Law webpage](#).

The review of best practices at other institutions highlighted multiple approaches to addressing the accessibility of the convocation experience. Despite the general satisfaction rate, the Committee recommends that we should undertake a more comprehensive appraisal of our own accessibility practices and services as they relate to convocation, and consolidate these in the form of a dedicated webpage and possible Convocation App. This webpage would include, but not be restricted to, information such as the location of accessible entrances and washrooms; accessibility of the stage; parking; information for support persons, personal guides and service animals; location of nursing rooms; and availability of resources such as assistive listening devices. This would also incorporate information on how individuals request the accessibility accommodations routinely provided by the Office of Convocation. The Committee found the Harvard Accessibility Map<sup>7</sup> and the University of Waterloo<sup>8</sup> webpage to be particularly effective examples to use as reference points.

In undertaking this follow-up work, the University might then identify gaps and determine ways in which it can improve upon its existing level of accessibility, being mindful of the specific limitations imposed by this historic venue. For instance, of the best practices reviewed at other institutions, a significant number were providing live captions for their ceremonies. It will be important for U of T to follow-suit, as this will improve accessibility not only for individuals in our community with hearing loss, but also for those who process information differently, and for whom English is a second language.

**Recommendation 12:**

THAT a comprehensive Convocation Accessibility Webpage be developed with appropriate partners, that outlines the full suite of inclusive services available to our community, to be implemented as expeditiously as possible given the scope of the project.

**Recommendation 13:**

THAT a gap analysis be undertaken with the goal of improving accessibility services more broadly.

**Recommendation 14:**

THAT further steps be taken to explore the viability of the introduction of live captions recognizing the ongoing constraints of holding ceremonies in this historic venue.

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7 [https://commencement.harvard.edu/files/commencement/files/2018\\_commcement\\_accessibility\\_map.pdf](https://commencement.harvard.edu/files/commencement/files/2018_commcement_accessibility_map.pdf)

8 <https://uwaterloo.ca/convocation/accessibility-accommodations>

## 4.9 Notation of Achievement

In the context of discussions of best practices with regard to ceremonies, the Committee heard that many Canadian universities have moved away from grouping graduates by achievement and instead group graduands alphabetically. Notations appearing on the parchment of graduation with ‘high honours’, ‘honours’, ‘high distinction’ or ‘distinction’ are reflected in the programme for each ceremony alongside the appropriate graduands name. Such an approach simplifies the logistical arrangements required to ensure that each graduand is in the correct order, but it also has the potential of improving the guest experience as it makes it easier for observers to anticipate when their graduand will be coming forward.

### **Recommendation 15:**

THAT graduands will be presented in the ceremony in alphabetical order. The notations that appear on the parchment of conferral with ‘high honours’, ‘honours’, ‘high distinction’ or ‘distinction’ will continue to be reflected in the programme.

## 5. Conclusion

The Committee recognizes that the existing human and financial resources currently in place to support convocation are strained. Should the recommendation with regard to continuing to use Convocation Hall for all University convocations, with the concomitant need for large numbers of ceremonies over several weeks, be accepted, this will require a further investment of resources. It also recognizes the need for increased support for the important infrastructure that undergirds the convocation experience, in particular but not limited to, the Convocation Plaza. It is expected that given the strong expressions of support of Principals & Deans for the ‘Convocation Hall model’ that there will be similar support for, and understanding of, the need to direct the appropriate level of resources for this significant and vitally important University activity. Without this further investment it will not be possible to deliver on this model.

In closing, the Committee would like to thank the many members of our community – students, alumni, faculty and staff – who engaged with this process. We are grateful as well to the colleagues from our sister institutions who graciously hosted members of the Steering Group for site visits and generously shared their experiences<sup>9</sup>. The Committee was also very heartened by the level of participation in the surveys by our 2018 graduates and their guests, and members of our broader alumni community<sup>10</sup>. The open-ended responses provided a tremendous amount of feedback, much of which will help to inform operational decisions in the future. Finally, we are also deeply appreciative of the shared understanding of the importance of this milestone moment in the lives of our students and the genuine commitment to the student experience on the part of all those, at the divisional and institutional level, with a role to play in convocation.

We respectfully submit this Report to the President and the Chair of the Governing Council for their consideration.

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9 See Appendix E.

10 See Appendices F, G and H.