

# University of Toronto Communications

## KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS 2017–2018



Creating stronger bonds on all three campuses



High performing team of communications experts



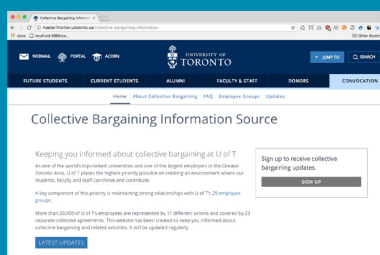
President Meric Gertler announces launch of School of Cities on Metro Morning



A Toronto Times Tasting Test: Syrian chefs, U of T Experts, sold-out New York Times event



#SupportTheReport postcard campaign



Collective Bargaining communications support



59 paid media placements

32 stories placed in high-priority international media outlets

86 stories internationally in total

**THE CONVERSATION**

Now reaching a million readers per month

JUNE 2018

## University of Toronto Communications: Activity Report, 2017-2018

As the University of Toronto Communications (UTC) team enters its fourth year, we are looking back at a year of a number of firsts – for UTC, and for the University.

For the first time, the central communication team and the communication teams at University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM) and University of Toronto Scarborough (UTSC) are united – structurally, through a joint reporting relationship of the senior communications leaders to their principals and to the Vice-President, Communications, and philosophically, in support of one University, three campuses.

For the first time, and with remarkable success, we pursued an earned and owned media strategy to raise U of T's profile in targeted national and international markets.

For the first time, the central communications team was an early and active participant in communications strategy related to labour relations and collective bargaining during difficult but ultimately successful discussions.

For the first time, with the support of the Provost, we celebrated our “media stars” – faculty members from across the academic divisions who consistently make the extra effort to engage with media on a range of topics, and who, collectively, help make the case for the relevance and importance of scholarship and research. We also had our first-ever partnership event with the New York Times – a first for a Canadian university<sup>1</sup>. And for the first time, we offered professional development, in the form of workshops on writing and placing op-eds, to faculty members interested in engaging the broader public in their scholarship and ideas.

We played a key leadership role in the creation of “The Conversation Canada,” a new national news organization based at U of T and another first for Canada. With funding support from the Provost, and leadership from the Vice-President, Communications, the Conversation has brought academic journalism to a million readers each month since its launch and is now part of a 26 cross-Canada university academic channel.

These are just a few of the many in a year of firsts.

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<sup>1</sup> For the fiscal year 2017-18, U of T was the most visible university in Canada among major Canadian print/digital outlets, garnering roughly twice the media profile of UBC (the second most visible university) and York, and nearly four times that of Ryerson and McGill (Source: CORMEX Research, May 2018).

In the 2017-18 Strategic Plan, UTC proposed six initiatives:

1. The creation of the University of Toronto Brand Hub
2. A strategy for raising the profile of the President
3. The realignment of the content hub to support the brand hub
4. A communications and marketing plan for supporting the university's global engagement
5. The second stage of the U of T internal communications project
6. A talent management strategy for U of T communications staff and experiential learning pilot project for U of T students

The following sections comment on our progress against each of these initiatives.

#### [The creation of the University of Toronto Brand Hub](#)

This year we completed the first reputational health research study to assess internal and external awareness of and engagement with the University. This research involved 45 one-on-one interviews, and an online survey of more than 14,000 internal and external stakeholders. The results – and especially the dichotomy between internal and external perceptions of the University – are illuminating, and will form the basis of much of the work to come in the next year.

Our thinking on the Brand Hub itself has evolved this year. Midway through the year, with the encouragement of the president, we turned our attention to creating an integrated marketing team to be shared between DUA (for advancement and alumni-specific marketing) and UTC (for institutional brand strategy and marketing). We are working closely with DUA and look forward to introducing the integrated team to senior leadership in the early fall. We will then be in a position to recruit new members of the marketing team, select a new Agency of Record, and act on the results of the reputational health research study.

While this work to create the new team continues, we have collaborated with DUA on a number of integrated communications and marketing campaigns, including, most recently, the Entrepreneurship and Innovation campaign. U of T News stories and videos profiling student and alumni startups were the basis for an advertising campaign that led viewers back to a new entrepreneurship hub created by our digital creative services team. Earlier in the year, and for the first time, U of T developed and placed full-page ads in the New York Times to support the VPI and OSR's joint US recruitment/conversion campaign.

#### [A strategy for raising the profile of the President](#)

This year we focused our attention on raising the President's profile internationally, working with colleagues in VPI and DUA to identify media opportunities connected to presidential travel. Our global media relations strategist accompanied the President's delegation to Mexico in April: a first for a presidential trip. The president gave 13 interviews to external media outlets

over the last year; our team prepared briefing notes and support for each of these interviews. We also helped draft two op-eds for the president and placed one.

Freedom of speech on university campuses continued to be a contentious issue this year. Two members of the UTC management team participated on the Freedom of Speech working group (which produced a new website) and the team continues to provide support on this issue.

Most recently, the President was the public face of the new School of Cities, and his interviews on Metro Morning and with the Globe and Mail have helped raise the profile of this important initiative.

Our original proposal for a strategic plan with targets and benchmarks related to presidential profile has not yet come to fruition, but we are now revisiting it with the president's staff.

### *The realignment of the content hub to support the brand hub*

We set three goals for the content hub in 2017-18:

1. To build more formal relationships with the communications teams at UTM and UTSC
2. To align the content hub with the brand hub so that our storytelling helps illustrate U of T's brand attributes
3. To focus on finding and promoting the best stories about U of T's global impact

We've made strong progress on the metrics associated with these three goals – the first two are discussed immediately below, and the third is covered in the next section.

### *Integration of communications across the three campuses*

Our integration efforts with UTM are well underway. Working with members of the UTC Management Team, the Executive Director of the new Communications team at UTM has developed an organizational structure and mandate, conducted a listening tour of UTM stakeholders, and is well along the path to building a new team.

At UTSC, we partnered with the Vice-President and Principal on a review of the UTSC communications function, which led to a restructuring of the reporting relationships and leadership at UTSC communications. We are now participating in the search for a new Executive Director for the UTSC communications team.

This process has involved sensitive negotiations and discussions, but we are already seeing positive results and we are confident that the closer integration that results will form an essential foundation for building a new narrative that communicates the unique strategic advantage of one University, three campuses.

### *Using storytelling to bring to life the U of T brand*

While we changed direction on plans for the brand hub, we continued to increase the quality and reach of our reputational storytelling. U of T News published 1,172 stories, a 15% increase over the previous year (our goal was 10%), with UTC staff producing about 60% of the content and the rest produced in partnership with communications colleagues across the university.

Video production also increased: the team produced 40 videos (up from 29 the year before and 11 two years ago), which achieved 1.1 million total views – up 182% from the year before. The number of people reading U of T News stories has also increased. The site achieved a 23% increase in unique page views (our goal for the year was 10%), aided in part by new social media strategies and by a new product, “Published Today at U of T News”, which the news team sends every evening to 675 university leaders and subscribers.

U of T Magazine continues to be an important tool for connecting with alumni around the world. This year the Magazine published two print/digital issues and one standalone digital issue, and embarked on the redesign of the digital and print publications. We also launched a review of university magazines, with a view to finding greater efficiencies and revenue opportunities.

Strategic use of our digital channels has also been successful: overall, the institutional social channels (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) grew by 22%, and we are now reaching over half a million people via social media. These channels are important for community building: Instagram in particular has attracted an engaged following among students and prospective students, and Twitter was an essential tool for the launch of the School of Cities.

The media relations team continues to develop external interest in the University’s scholars and students and their accomplishments, and build reputation with engaged stakeholders. This year we achieved an 86% increase in media hits, and worked with 17 faculties and central divisions to bring positive attention to their achievements and initiatives. (The next section will outline the results of our new international media relations strategy.)

The media relations team also experimented with new methods for promoting U of T expertise:

- We partnered with the New York Times to launch a joint event at the University of Toronto featuring the work of our food researchers alongside Syrian chefs in Toronto. This sold-out event generated terrific profile for the University and helped us build an important relationship with a key US news outlet.
- The team organized three op-ed sessions for faculty, two led by New York Times opinion editor Clay Risen and one by USMC principal Randy Boyogoda.<sup>2</sup>

Media Relations also provided extensive support to the President’s Office for the Bernie Sanders speaking engagement at Convocation Hall and the G7 foreign ministers’ meeting at Simcoe Hall.

Reputational storytelling includes managing and framing difficult or complex issues, and once again this year, the content hub worked closely with the President’s Office and other vice-presidential portfolios to provide advice and support. The team provided spokesperson training

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<sup>2</sup> When the van attack occurred in Toronto on April 23, Risen immediately approached Boyogoda, who wrote an opinion piece (“[Is This Toronto](#)”) that ran the following day in the Times.

for 14 senior leaders, drafted 40 issues briefs, and wrote 106 brand journalism stories – a 70% increase. We also contributed to the development of the new Issues Management Group process.

### Supporting the University's global engagement

We committed to supporting the Vice-President, International's strategic plan through earned media and on our owned and social channels, and set targets with the VPI team. We have exceeded those targets in all channels:

- We placed 32 stories in high-priority international media outlets<sup>3</sup> and a total of 86 stories internationally
- We placed four op-eds in international outlets and one with an international focus in a domestic outlet
- At U of T News, unique page views from countries other than Canada grew 25%, year-over-year, to 518,547
- On the U of T Facebook channel, our international follower base grew 19%, from 244,424 to 290,570

### Internal communications

Our plans for collaborating with Human Resources & Equity and the Office of the Provost on the next stage of internal communications were postponed when the Provost requested a strategy for communications with graduate students and we were asked for communications support during collective bargaining and academic continuity preparations (see Unplanned Accomplishments). We intend to resume work on internal communications in the 2018-19 year.

### Talent management

This year we piloted a number of programs and workshops as a start to the longer-term plan for a “communications college” for University of Toronto communications professionals. These included the second annual “Field Day” – a daylong program of case studies and high-profile guest speakers that drew more than 150 participants from the three campuses. We also experimented with skills development in particular areas of communications, offering workshops on newsletter strategy and planning, media relations best practices, and social media content strategies for higher education. All together, these sessions attracted about 200 participants from all three campuses and were well received by Faculty communicators.

At UTC, managers completed professional development planning with each staff member (see appendix) and over the course of the year each team organized a learning session for the rest of the portfolio.

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<sup>3</sup> The twelve target outlets are Al Jazeera, the Guardian, BBC, the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Boston Globe, the Economist, the Hindustan Times, the Times of India, Reforma, the Times of London, and the Wall Street Journal.



## Unplanned accomplishments

This year UTC worked on three major initiatives not captured in our 2017-18 strategic plan.

### *Naylor report advocacy campaign*

From June to December, UTC collaborated with the Office of the VPRI and the GRO on a strategy to build support for the recommendations of Canada's Fundamental Science Review panel ("the Naylor Report"). We said in the communications plan that our success would ultimately be measured by whether the federal government acted on the recommendations of the report; in the end, the government made significant investments in basic science that aligned with the Naylor Report. Communications metrics also showed the campaign's success: content on owned and social channels met or exceeded awareness and engagement targets. We aimed to publish five news stories and one video; we published 19 news stories and three videos, including one featuring Nobel laureate John Polanyi voicing support for the report. We aimed to publish 25-40 social media posts over the course of the campaign; we published 69 posts. More than 40 faculty members picked up and shared one or more of these posts (our goal was to have ten faculty members share our content). And we worked with GRO on a postcard campaign to the federal Science minister in support of the report that saw more than 7,500 distributed and signed.

### *Graduate student communications and collective bargaining/academic continuity communications*

For the first time, the central communications team was involved early and extensively in communications strategy for collective bargaining – and for the CUPE units in particular. This initiative had two overlapping phases:

- From September to January, UTC worked with the Provost's Office and the School of Graduate Studies on a strategy for raising awareness of graduate student services, funding and support. The challenge was to ensure that target audiences understood these topics and heard about them from the university. Target audiences were graduate students themselves, academic administrators at the decanal and departmental level, and faculty members. Products included U of T News stories about successful graduate students and customizable fact sheets on graduate student support programs and graduate student funding. As part of this phase of the project, we consulted on the strategy and execution for the rollout of the 10,000 PhDs study.
- From October to March, we supported collective bargaining with communications strategy, planning and execution. We circulated a daily watching brief of related social media accounts and web sites, published news stories on bargaining milestones reached, and supported academic continuity communications and planning. We also created a Collective Bargaining microsite that gathered and organized information that was otherwise difficult to find. The microsite provided the university with a place to outline its positions on issues such as conversion, and – because it was linked from the homepage – gave members of the U of T community ready access to clear, accurate information about the bargaining process

and timelines. We created a newsletter template and sign-up on the microsite that was subsequently adopted by the JSPP communications team.

#### *Jointly sponsored pension plan communications strategy*

Beginning in September, we supported the initiative, led by Professor Angela Hildyard, to develop a new jointly sponsored pension plan (University Pension Plan Ontario) with Queen's University and the University of Guelph. We wrote a communications strategy, liaised with communications counterparts at the other universities, and provided feedback and guidance to external advisers. Our Issues and Media Strategist was a member of the University's communications committee, which included representatives from UTFA and USW.

#### *Conclusion*

As the University of Toronto Communications enters its 4<sup>th</sup> year, much has been accomplished but much remains to be done.

We have regained our reputation as the leading university in Canada in media relations. We have developed key campaigns to focus public attention on U of T at specific times of the year with measurable results with a focus on our research and teaching. We have used the University's 3 priorities as a framework for telling hundreds of stories about an emerging national and global University of excellence. We created new channels and made greater use of video, images, graphics and authentic storytelling. And we have run selective digital and print advertising campaigns promoting the U of T brand, locally and globally. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we have created a high-performing team of marketing and communications professionals who are getting stronger, smarter and more experienced at telling the U of T story consistently and forcefully in a global environment. We look forward to year four to do even better.