



FOR INFORMATION

PUBLIC

OPEN SESSION

TO: Business Board

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DATE: November 20, 2024 for November 27, 2024

AGENDA ITEM: 3

ITEM IDENTIFICATION:

Annual Impact Report: University of Toronto Communications (UTC) FY 2023-2024

JURISDICTIONAL INFORMATION:

Pursuant to Section 5.7 of the Business Board Terms of Reference, the Board is responsible for reviewing the University's institutional communications activities.

GOVERNANCE PATH:

- 1. Business Board [For Information] (November 27, 2024)**

PREVIOUS ACTION TAKEN:

The previous report was presented to the Business Board at its November 22, 2023, meeting.

HIGHLIGHTS:

This status report provides Business Board with an update on UTC's activities during the FY2023-2024 period.

It showcases the outstanding work UTC does in bringing visibility to the achievements of our research-intensive university globally, which in turn helps fuel bottom-line outcomes such as recruitment, retention of talent, and attracting investments and partnerships.

Our team created brand content that resulted in 176 million targeted impressions, more than 310,000 global news media mentions, and being named Not-for-Profit

Communications Department of the Year award by the International Association of Business Communicators.

We built on U of T's historic strengths and engaged colleagues to finalize our five-year vision, which mandates a two-way communication mindset in everything we do.

We highlight what we did to promote some of our key priorities: AI and Sustainability. We also detail how UTC captured the largest share of coverage in external news media of any Canadian university and greatly expanded its footprint in global news media with media coverage in top international publications such as *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *BBC* and *The Economist*.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

None.

RECOMMENDATION:

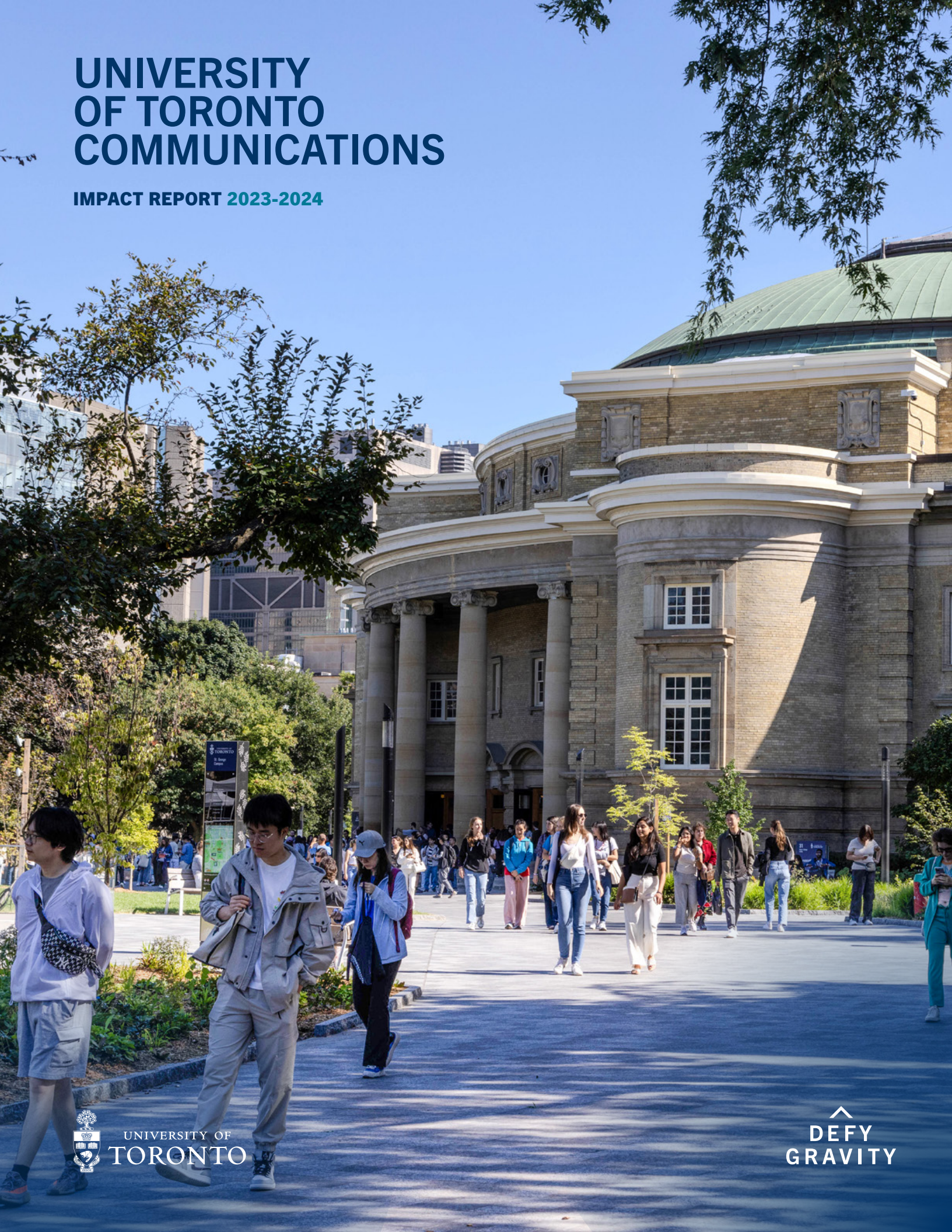
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DOCUMENTATION PROVIDED:

- *UTC's Annual Impact Report FY2023-2024*

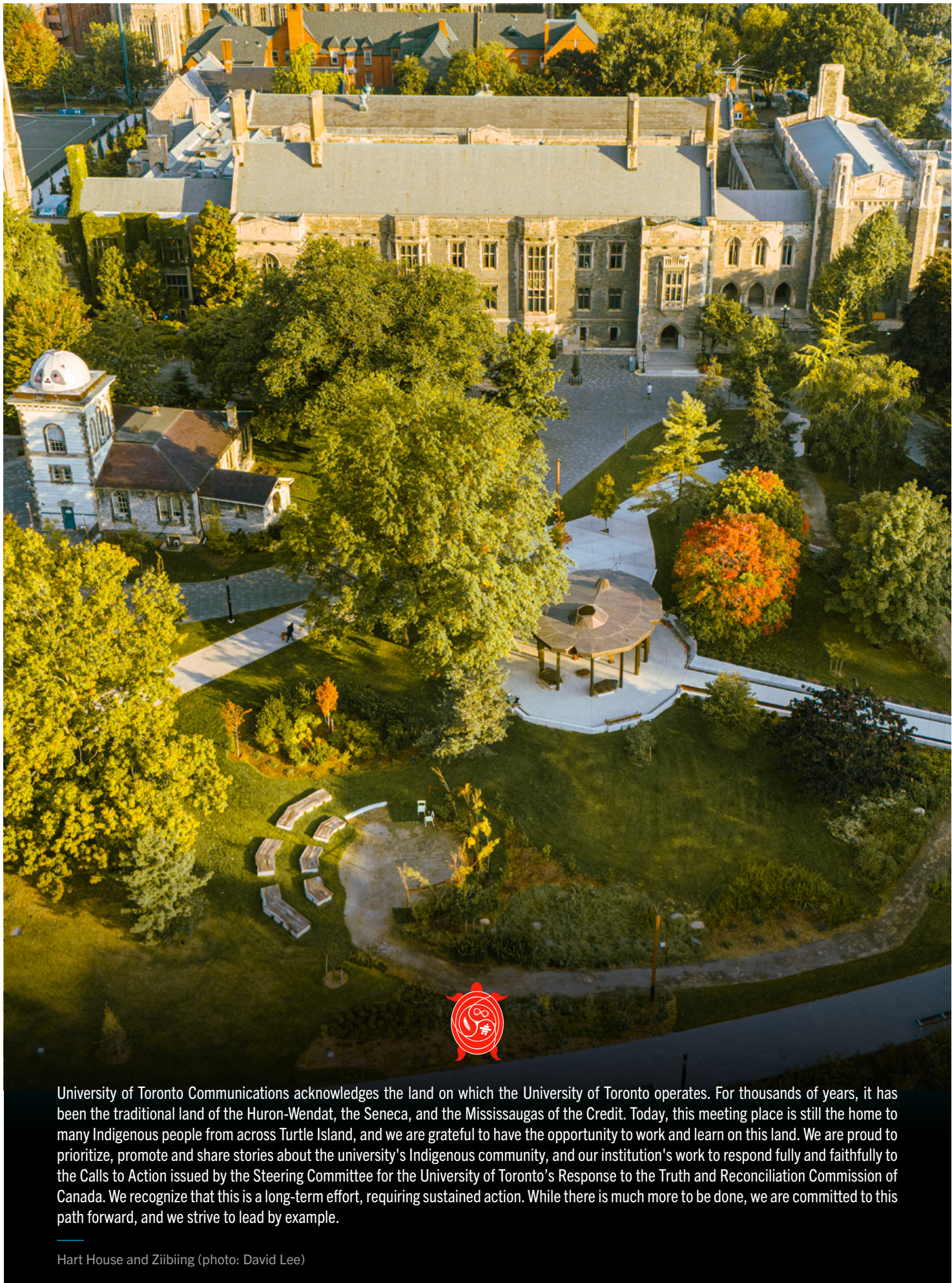
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO COMMUNICATIONS

IMPACT REPORT 2023-2024



UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO

DEFY
GRAVITY



University of Toronto Communications acknowledges the 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 the Mississaugas of the Credit. 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 and learn on this land. We are proud to prioritize, promote and share stories about the university's Indigenous community, and our institution's work to respond fully and faithfully to the Calls to Action issued by the Steering Committee for the University of Toronto's Response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. We recognize that this is a long-term effort, requiring sustained action. While there is much more to be done, we are committed to this path forward, and we strive to lead by example.

Hart House and Ziibiing (photo: David Lee)

About UTC

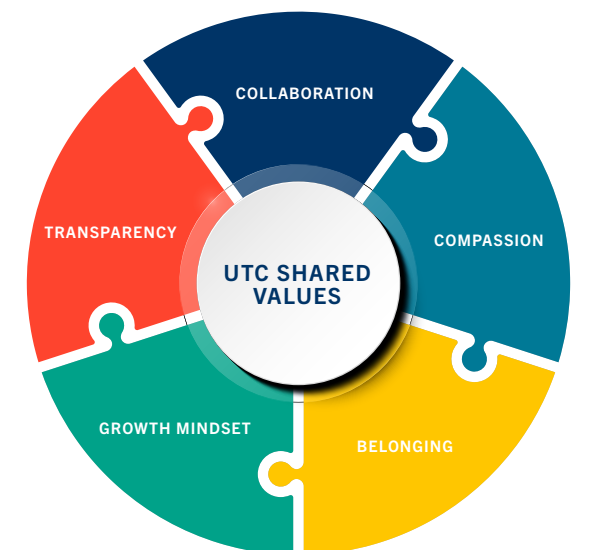
University of Toronto Communications (UTC) proudly promotes U of T's brand and reputation by sharing with the world the university's strengths, achievements and impact. We recognize that strong brand and reputation help U of T attract top talent, encourage investment and partnership, deepen alumni engagement and increase the value of a U of T degree. They also help us sustain relationships with our existing stakeholders and invite others to tell our story. Our award-winning team of marketing and communications professionals provides strategic communications counsel, brand strategy and marketing communications expertise to the university's three campuses.

UTC strengthens U of T's brand and reputation through compelling marketing and communications campaigns, award-winning publications, expert media pitching, proactive issues management and best-in-class social media. We take a digital-first approach, producing videos, podcasts, social media and web content that inspire and resonate with our audiences.

The UTC team includes award-winning public relations, communications and marketing professionals. Our tri-campus team brings deep experience in brand building and reputation management from a wide range of industries, including higher education, newspaper and magazine publishing, government, high tech, and marketing and PR agencies.

Our Values

UTC strives to uphold these values across our three campuses and in our day-to-day work. These values are in line with U of T's mission and statement of institutional purposes.





Elevating U of T's global impact

As Canada's flagship university, and one of the top 20 research-intensive universities globally, U of T brings together the brightest minds to deepen our understanding of the world, educate the leaders of tomorrow and solve some of the toughest challenges in science and society.

University of Toronto Communications (UTC) takes great pride in bringing visibility to these achievements which shape audience perception and fuel bottom-line outcomes—from recruitment and retention of talent to attracting investment and partnerships and increasing people's pride of association with the university.

We open this year's Impact Report with an infographic that captures some of our impressive results: achieving 176 million targeted brand impressions and 310,000 global news media mentions for U of T, building the largest social media following among Canadian universities, and earning 46 peer-reviewed awards for our work including a back-to-back win as Not-for-Profit Communications Department of the Year—the most prestigious global award of excellence in strategic communications—awarded by the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC).

In the pages that follow, we showcase our work that builds on UTC's historic strengths and engages colleagues across the institution to set a new path forward, as codified in our five-year vision. As a result of this energizing effort, we've adopted a two-way communication mindset and have committed to centering brand, reputation and character in everything we do. While creating an emotional connection to U of T's identity and promise will always be foundational, our new model calls on us to do more. We must routinely gather, interpret and consider the views of our stakeholders to learn how we're being received and judged, provide the context and rationale for U of T's actions to generate goodwill and support, and share how U of T consistently lives out its values and surpasses people's expectations. Such efforts help manage institutional risk, demonstrate U of T's authentic character, build trust and advance our enviable reputation for inclusive excellence.

Read further to learn how we're achieving greater consistency and alignment among distributed communicators at U of T to realize greater impact. We spotlight UTC's inaugural integrated marketing and communications plan, developed in collaboration with Simcoe Hall portfolios and our divisional colleagues. The plan outlines the priorities we collectively support such as Artificial Intelligence and Sustainability, which are also featured in this report. By harnessing effort across the collegium, U of T ranked first among public institutions and fifth among 700 institutions in American Caldwell's 2024 Global University Visibility Rankings. Our knowledge dissemination efforts also contributed to U of T being named the world's most sustainable university by QS World University Rankings in 2023.

The final section of this year's Impact Report surfaces our recent work in internal communications, including support for U of T's emergency notification system, helping establish guidelines for institutional statements, and co-sponsoring a study on student communications. We also highlight UTC's contribution to U of T's issues management process and our work to enable divisional communicators by providing structures, tools, resources, training, consultation and guidance.

We are acutely aware of the importance and magnitude of the work we do for the university. I am humbled every day by the excellence shown by this team in executing our mission-critical mandate.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Szustaczek'.

Christine Szustaczek, MCM, APR, SCMP
Vice-President, Communications

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University College (photo: David Lee)

U of T ranked 1st

among public institutions and 5th among 700 global institutions in the 2024 Global University Visibility Rankings—

success fueled by UTC efforts to share U of T's research and teaching expertise, increase news mentions, and generate public interest, our online footprint and social media reach.



Driven by a strategic communications campaign to promote the Scarborough Academy of Medicine and Integrated Health (SAMIH) and the health sciences program, UTSC achieved a

58% rise

in domestic life sciences applications.

Partnering with faculties and divisions, UTC amassed

176M+

impressions, a 76% increase from last year, on initiatives elevating global brand awareness of U of T's impact and excellence in research, teaching and innovation.

A record-breaking 46 awards

this year from global organizations recognizing communications excellence, including IABC's global **Not-for-Profit Communications Department of the Year** award for the second consecutive year.

A focus on original, amplified and user-generated content resulted in a

20.3% growth in institutional social media followers, resulting in

1.2M+ total followers

across Instagram, Facebook and X. We remain the university with the largest social media following in Canada.



In coordination with PSEC, UTC updated the university's emergency notification system with a new vendor and rolled out a rigorous communications plan that has led to over

220K subscribers

receiving notifications via email, text and/or mobile push notifications.

UTC produced 50+ pieces of content showcasing U of T's trailblazing work in AI, including "The Godfather in Conversation", which remains one of our most popular videos. It was translated into

18 languages,

and through resharing and publishing to secondary channels and sites, it has generated

4M+

opportunities for people to view, and facilitated coverage in major international news outlets like *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *Bloomberg*.

We launched a comprehensive and updated

Brand Portal

to share brand guidelines, templates and resources driving consistency across the university attracted over

70K pageviews, 10K unique visitors

in its first four months.



U of T was featured in approximately

310K global news media mentions with 1.3M+ shares across social media.

92% of coverage was positive or neutral with U of T having the greatest share of voice in national news coverage among universities.

Close to

1M

video views and over 1.1M impressions

on social media. To help position U of T as a global leader in sustainability and climate change solutions, UTC produced an eight-episode series titled "Sustainable Future: Challenge Accepted!"



YEAR IN REVIEW



UTC created

586 pieces of original content

We focused on impact this year, decreasing volume, leading to greater engagement from audiences, with pageviews climbing to more than

3.2M an increase of 60%.



A reputation-building partnership with *The Guardian* showcasing U of T's leadership and global impact in research, teaching and innovation led to a

brand lift of over 14.5%

, making it *The Guardian's* most successful sponsored content campaign.

To support faculties and divisions, we established a **U of T Communicators Network** Microsoft Teams channel that brings together more than

425 communicators across the tri-campus

to enable real-time information sharing and peer-to-peer troubleshooting.



UTM's social promotion for the launch of its first wet lab venture incubator supporting early-stage life science startups earned more than 40K social impressions.



Building a Two-Way Model for Communication

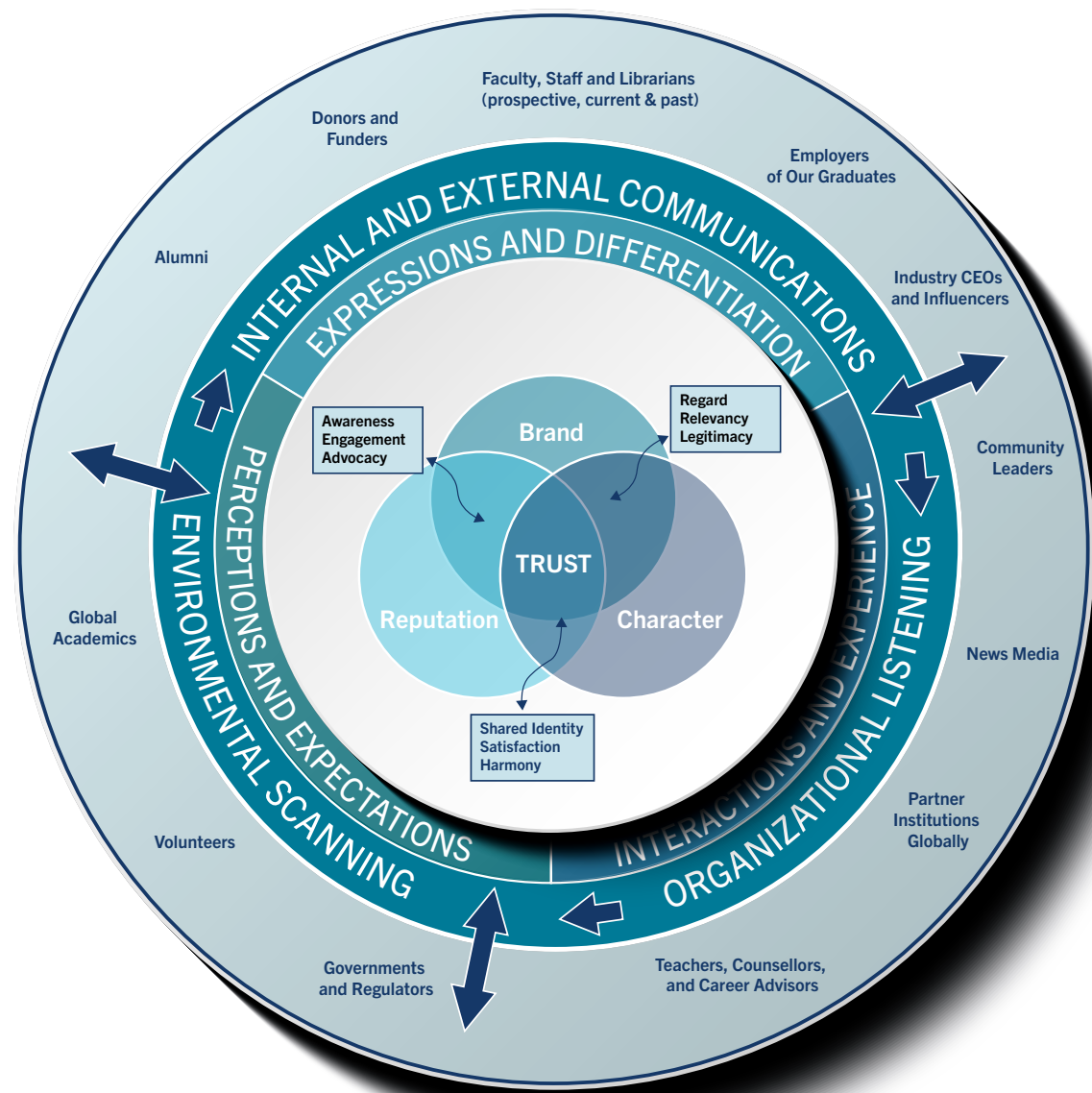
UTC'S FIVE-YEAR VISION

In FY2023-2024, we launched **UTC's Five-Year Vision**, introducing a bespoke strategic framework that balances brand, reputation and character, with a greater focus on outcomes.

This is the first multi-year vision for U of T Communications. The plan charts our evolution toward a two-way communication model, defines key

responsibilities and provides a preliminary outline of service tiers to support faculties and divisions. The aim is to transform and expand UTC's newsroom-first mindset into an integrated model for organizational communications that builds relationships with multiple audiences through various means of communication and aligns more closely with best practice in strategic communications management.

The development of the award-winning vision involved a **listening tour with 66 stakeholder interviews**, a content analysis of institutional plans that framed the vision's tone, style and substance, and a literature review. The vision was fully endorsed by the tri-campus vice-president group (TVP), and it was also presented to deans and principals, CAOs, and communications leaders embedded in faculties and divisions across U of T.



FEEDBACK FROM OUR COMMUNITY

“U of T is widely known for being the best in the business for media relations and that providing this support to journalists and producers is truly invaluable.”

– CTV News anchor

“Congratulations! You have successfully moved from a print to a digital format while increasing the magazine’s overall appeal and readability—a very rare occurrence at a time when we are being bombarded by electronic media.”

– Recipient of the U of T Magazine

“Just an additional note to say the brand portal is so good! A really excellent resource my team uses often”

– Director, Stakeholder Communications, Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering

“You guys do a great job! Please know that we use your list all the time and have used many of your experts.”

– Producer at CHCH, responding to the Breaking News Experts list

“I enjoy receiving the magazine. It makes me feel proudly a part of the U of T community.”

– Recipient of the U of T Magazine



Solar eclipse event hosted at UTM (photo: Nick Iwanyshyn)

UTC's Inaugural Integrated Marketing & Communications Plan

In consultation with VP portfolios and divisions, UTC developed a university-wide, institutional marketing and communications plan in FY2023-24.

The plan serves as a foundation for collective brand building, future ideation and planning, and introduces a more focused and business-driven approach to communications and marketing rooted in clear performance goals and metrics. This effort will foster tri-campus strategic and collaborative brand-building among all teams and stakeholders, with the goal of ensuring that U of T is top of mind to influence rankings and stakeholder decisions.

BRAND PROMOTION & STORYTELLING

UTC promoted and enhanced the University of Toronto image and identity locally, nationally and globally along the brand themes of student success, sustainable future, inclusive cities and societies, healthy lives, scientific discovery, creativity and culture, and innovation and entrepreneurship (See Spotlight sections for a more in-depth look at some of these themes).

UTC's tri-campus team of writers, photographers/videographers and social media specialists created content for institutional websites (e.g. U of T News, UTM News and UTSC News), newsletters (e.g. the Bulletin Brief, UTM Express and UTSC's Daily Update), our biannual *University of Toronto Magazine*, and our tri-campus institutional social media channels.

This year, our team experimented and innovated with new formats in content creation. **We produced a 46-minute documentary-style video featuring University Professor Emeritus Geoffrey Hinton of computer science**, following concerns he raised over the future of AI during a CBS interview in March 2023.

We also created 14 episodes of the award-winning *U of T News Now* video series, which was developed out of a desire to create short, engaging videos for social media, especially for reporting on events where it's critical to capture the emotion and excitement of attendees. Analysis showed that audiences weren't connecting with existing articles or photo galleries, so we pivoted to give our audiences what they wanted—broadcast-style videos for Instagram and TikTok. Combined, the *U of T News Now* episodes received more than 80K plays on Instagram alone.

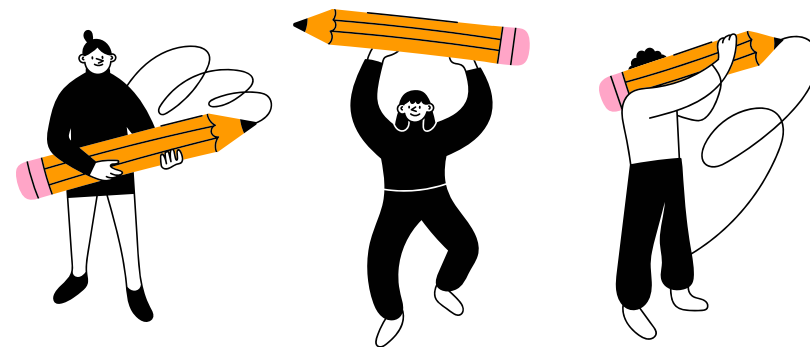
Changes to our content strategy resulted in greater audience engagement. We created 425 pieces of "owned" content on *U of T News* this year—down from 600-700 pieces of content the previous year—but our new approach to prioritize quality over quantity resulted in pageviews climbing to more than 3.2M—a 60% increase over the prior year.

Beyond U of T's owned channels, our brand marketing specialists and media relations team also seized opportunities to share the stories and assets we developed across traditional news earned media (traditional news) and paid channels,

recognizing the potential to generate greater impact.

Case in point—when the university's Director of Research Strategy identified a key moment in the ranking cycle for enhanced promotion of the university brand, we consulted with stakeholders such as colleagues at VPRI, VPI and UTE about working with *The Guardian* on a digital sponsored content series to increase awareness of our international leadership and excellence in research, teaching and innovation. Reaching readers in more than 28 countries, we strategically timed these stories to coincide with annual rankings surveys released by QS, *Times Higher Education*, and other prestigious bodies that calculate and publish university rankings.

This is our third year partnering with *The Guardian*, and each year we build on the learnings from the previous year, working with our university partners to identify researchers and topics to feature. This year we wrote about cutting-edge research into tiny robots that has spurred innovations in health care; how researchers are reducing anemia in the developing world by adding nutrients to salt and tea; a U of T solution to the microplastics problem with synthetic fabrics; and our top-performing story about an engineering startup, CERT Systems, which transforms carbon dioxide into valuable products. *Google Discover*—a personalized mobile feed that suggests articles and content based on user interests and search history—picked up the latter piece, which helped to

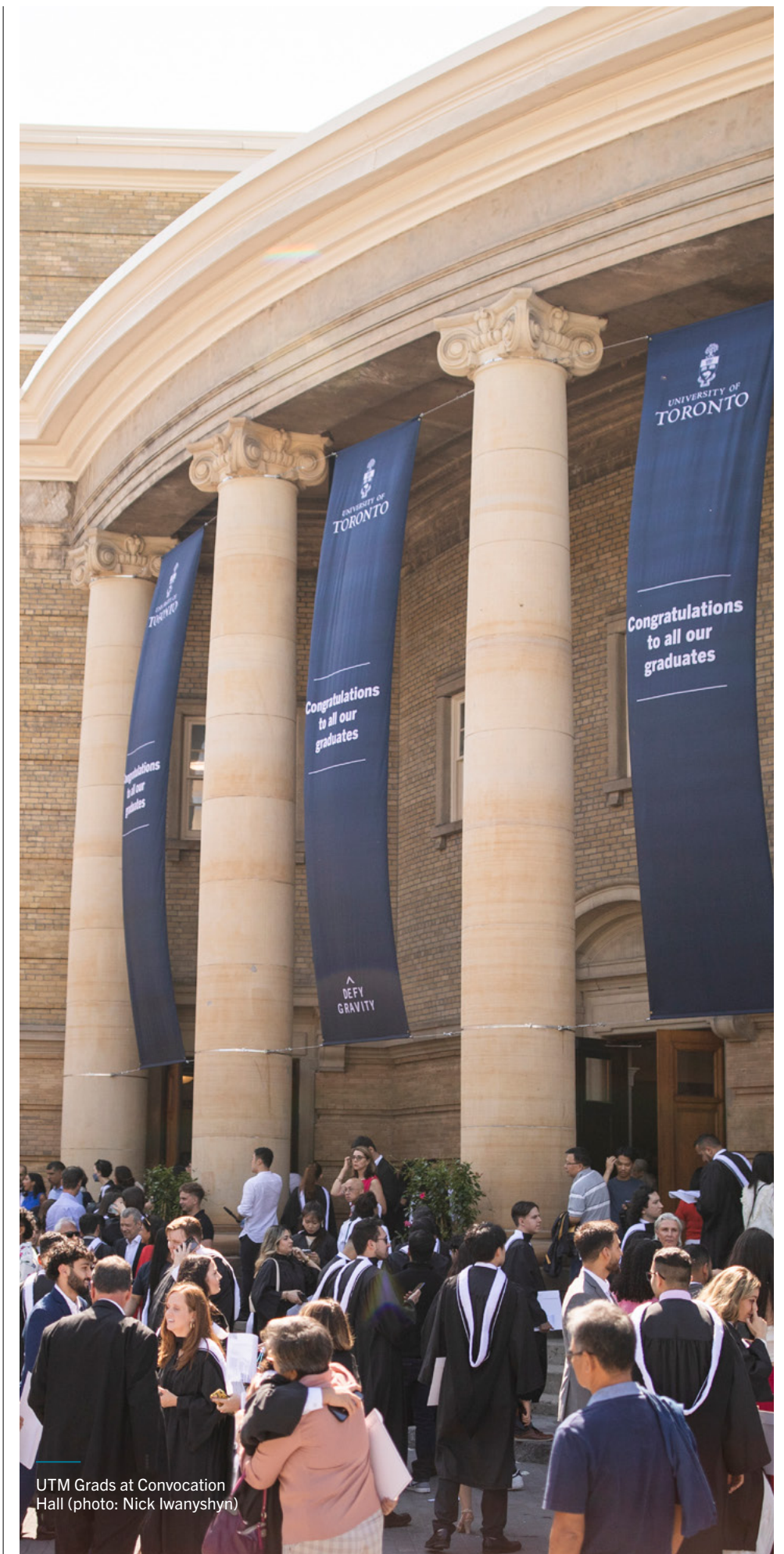


significantly boost performance. Thanks to the series, we saw a 15% brand uplift with 85K visitors. The campaign exceeded *The Guardian's* benchmarks for sponsored campaigns in terms of pageviews and time spent reading.

In May and November 2023, we participated in *The Globe and Mail's* special reports focused on Excellence in Research and Innovation, which highlighted the cutting-edge research taking place at Canadian educational institutions. This provided an opportunity to build further awareness of U of T's strengths in research and innovation while engaging with government, industry partners, investors, and policymakers.

Altogether, our global brand awareness campaign and reputation-building strategy amassed **more than 176M targeted impressions during this reporting period.**

We also landed several prominent earned media opportunities. In FY2023-24, U of T was mentioned more than 310K times in global news media, including print, online and broadcast sources. U of T captured 13.4%—the greatest share of voice—in national news media coverage among universities. 41% of these mentions, on topics reflecting our brand priorities, came from Canadian news media, with the remainder from international sources. Popular online content created by U of T was shared on Facebook, Twitter, Reddit and Pinterest more than 1.3M times.



UTM Grads at Convocation Hall (photo: Nick Iwanyszyn)

SPOTLIGHT ON

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Generating awareness of U of T's trailblazing work in artificial intelligence was a top priority this year, as we focused on building brand image and reputation locally and globally around major university-wide initiatives.

To that end, we produced content highlighting the work of up-and-coming researchers as well as high profile research and entrepreneurial partnerships, both for paid channels and owned channels like *U of T News* and *U of T Magazine*. Using short, broadcast-style videos optimized for social media, we profiled **Peter Ma, an undergrad** whose algorithm is being used by SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) in a *U of T News Now* video, as well as Brokoslaw Laschowski, an engineering professor who is researching how AI can power next-generation wearable robotics for movement assistance and physical rehabilitation.

After *The New York Times* reported that Elon Musk was partnering with one of our researchers, Jimmy Ba of computer science, on a company named xAI, we received 141 media hits with coverage in *The Washington Post*, *Bloomberg*, *Al Jazeera* and *TechCrunch*.

We also published content on the Acceleration Consortium and facilitated coverage in *Maclean's* magazine, naming Gillian Hadfield of law and Alán Aspuru-Guzik of chemistry among the most powerful Canadians shaping the field of AI.

We participated in *The Globe and Mail's* special reports on Excellence in Research and Innovation. This sponsored content featured the Acceleration Consortium, which combines artificial intelligence, robotics, and advanced computing to discover new materials and molecules in a fraction of the usual time and cost, and a story on our research partnership with Toronto Academic Health Sciences Network (TAHSN). Combined, these pieces surpassed benchmarks for views by 258%, garnering more than 8M targeted impressions, and exceeded benchmarks for time spent reading the content.

Our biggest story by far was generated by Geoffrey Hinton, a University Professor Emeritus of computer science. When he expressed concerns over the threat of artificial intelligence in a CBS interview in March 2023, we were flooded with media requests. Recognizing a tremendous opportunity, UTC staff interviewed Hinton about his work and legacy. We promoted the full 46-minute video and shorter clips with a social boost and shared them as part of our response to ongoing media requests. In one such example, for the American news magazine program *60 Minutes*, we helped secure a location for this interview and provided them with video assets and still images to augment the story and educate new audiences about its connection to *U of T*.



- **During this reporting period (until April 2024), there have been 637 unique media stories on Hinton, with UTC facilitating coverage in major international news outlets, such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *Bloomberg*.**
- **We translated the Hinton video into 18 languages, including Spanish, French, Portuguese, Korean, Simplified Chinese, Hindi and Japanese.**
- **Through resharing and publishing to secondary channels and sites, it has generated 4M+ opportunities for people to view, and has performed particularly well in Canada, USA, UK, India, Türkiye and Hong Kong.**
- **NOTE: This coverage does not include news of Hinton's October 2024 Nobel Prize win, the impact of which will be covered in next year's report.**

We produced content covering an event at MaRS Discovery District featuring Hinton and Fei-Fei Li—renowned for her work in cognitively inspired AI—on responsible AI in October 2023 and Hinton's academic talk at Convocation Hall in November 2023. The former drew widespread media interest from *The New Yorker*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *JoonAng* (a paper of record in South Korea), *NPR* and the *BBC*.

Building on the interest generated from the Hinton video, UTC also developed an AI podcast, hosted by Professors Beth Coleman (UTM and Schwartz Reisman Institute) and Rahul Krishnan (Arts & Science, Temerty Medicine and Vector). The podcast, called "What Now? AI," was launched in April 2024 and has generated 81K listens.

The President also helped support our media efforts on AI. In a June 2023 interview in Seoul with *JoongAng*, President Meric Gertler helped draw attention to U of T's leadership in AI by noting that the university attracts top talent from around the world to advance research and entrepreneurship in the burgeoning tech sector.

The opening of the first of two towers for the Schwartz Reisman Innovation Campus, a transformative hub for cutting-edge research, innovation and public engagement, focused on ethical AI, biomedicine, sustainability, education and training programs and startups, provided another opportunity to help generate media coverage, including a story in *The Globe and Mail* in February 2024, which focused on the new building.



UTC launched a cross-departmental, tri-campus AI working group in December 2023 that will guide how generative AI is used in marketing and communications at U of T. This group has completed its first draft of our recommended guidelines for the use of generative AI in marketing and communications and will continue to focus on iteratively improving these guidelines based on the latest developments in this rapidly advancing field.

Geoffrey Hinton speaking at Convocation Hall (photo by Johnny Guatto)

SPOTLIGHT ON

SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability is an institutional priority across the three campuses. This year we focused on highlighting U of T's sustainability initiatives in research, teaching and university operations.

We partnered with the President's Advisory Committee on the Environment, Climate Change and Sustainability to develop and execute an award-winning sustainability communications strategy to support their work, and to promote Project LEAP and the Climate Positive Campus initiative.

We produced more than 40 pieces of content related to sustainability, including award-winning articles, features in *U of T Magazine* and a five-episode digital video series called "*Sustainable Future – Challenge Accepted!*" that garnered more than 1.1M views. We also created a new sustainability website that highlights sustainability offerings and initiatives in curricular, research and operational domains.

“Toronto is home to the world’s most sustainable university... University of Toronto ranked top over 1,400 others in criteria evaluating post-secondary institutions based on their environmental impact, social impact and governance.”

Toronto Star, 2023

These profile-building efforts contributed to U of T being named the world's most sustainable university by QS World University Rankings in fall 2023. This recognition attracted coverage in notable media outlets, including India's *The Economic Times* and the *Toronto Star*. President Gertler and Vice-President, Research, Innovation & Strategic Initiatives Leah Cowen, were quoted in much of the coverage.



Roof Farming at Highland Hall, UTSC (photo: Don Campbell)

Canada's *National Observer* featured Ron Saporta, U of T's chief operating officer, in a story that discussed how the university is reducing its carbon emissions through Project Leap. We continued advancing the sustainability theme last winter when we worked with the President's office to include an environmental message in the president's holiday video.



For a second year in a row, UTC's sustainability efforts were recognized with Platinum Certification from the Office of Sustainability's Sustainable Change Program.

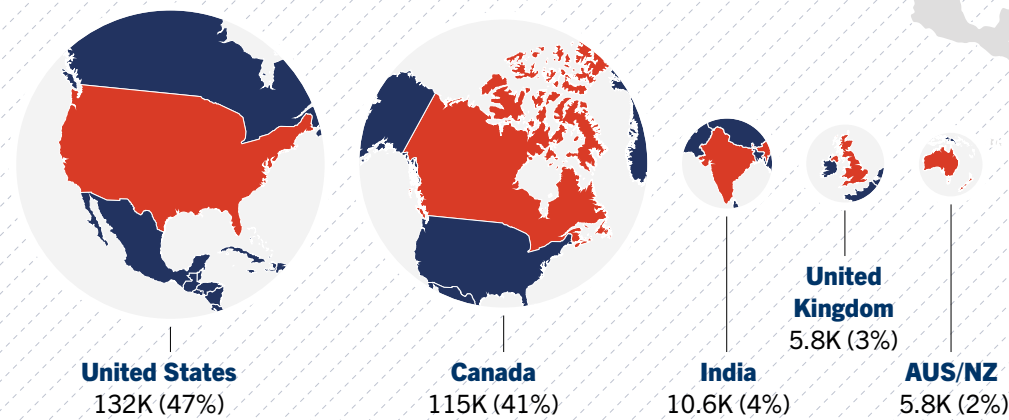
U of T Magazine included stories on sustainability in both its spring and autumn issues, including a cover feature in fall 2023. Additionally, the magazine became more sustainable by reducing its print run—and carbon emissions—by two-thirds. This initiative generated budget savings of more than \$300K per year, stabilizing the magazine's financial outlook. We also expanded the magazine's reach to Apple News and integrated metrics into editorial planning.

GLOBAL MEDIA REACH

The University of Toronto generated significant global media attention this past year, with over a **quarter-of-a-million mentions** identified across online news, radio, TV, and print platforms from May 2023 to April 2024, according to our media monitoring platform. Coverage was particularly robust in North America, with Canada and the U.S. accounting for 88% of all traditional and online news related to U of T. Amplified social sharing of online news stories across platforms such as Facebook, X and Reddit helped the university's influence reach even wider audiences. U of T captured 13.4%—the greatest share of voice—in national news media coverage among universities. Here are some of the highlights from FY2023-24.

310,257
Public News Media Mentions about the University of Toronto were published during FY2023-24.

Most Mentions (by Region)



88%
of all news media mentions were published by North American news media outlets and affiliates.

Who's Been Talking About U of T Globally?

These were just a few of the global top-tier news media outlets that published articles about the University of Toronto during FY2023-24:



91% of Global Media Mentions about U of T were Favourable*

*"Favourable" includes content tagged as Positive or Neutral.



Notable Favourable Themes

- U of T Global Rankings
- Cutting Edge AI Research
- Innovations in Clean Energy & Sustainability
- Diversity & Inclusion Efforts
- Advancements in Research & Innovation
- Sustainability Leadership
- Support for Indigenous Communities & Culture



Notable Unfavourable Themes

- On-Campus Protests
- International Student Enrollment & Housing

Source: Cision

How We Showed Up in International Media Coverage

These articles were selected due to their appearance in prominent, international news media outlets and are meant to provide a representative sample—by region—of the types of coverage that featured the University of Toronto in FY2023-24.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Study Shows Ocean Floor has Turned into 'Reservoir' of Plastic

A study by CSIRO and the University of Toronto found that around 11 million metric tons of plastic waste reside on the ocean floor, with the equivalent of a garbage truck's load entering the ocean every minute. The findings, first published in Deep Sea Research Part 1: Oceanographic Research Papers, highlights the growing concern over plastic pollution.

EFE:

Canada Will Develop Laboratories Controlled by Artificial Intelligence

Canada announced a \$146 million investment in developing autonomous AI-controlled laboratories, led by Mexican scientist Alán Aspuru-Guzik at the University of Toronto. These labs aim to accelerate scientific discoveries, such as new materials and drugs, by combining AI and robotics to significantly reduce time and costs in research.

The Guardian

Russia Launching more Sophisticated Phishing Attacks, New Report Finds

A new investigation by Citizen Lab and Access Now reveals that Russia's state security agency is using increasingly sophisticated phishing attacks, targeting US, European, and Russian civil society members, including opposition figures and journalists. These attacks, attributed to Russia's FSB, often impersonate trusted contacts to gain access to sensitive information.

Bloomberg

Startup Sees AI as a Safer Way to Train AI in Cars

University of Toronto professor Raquel Urtasun founded Waabi, a Toronto-based startup using AI to simulate driving scenarios for training self-driving cars safely and cost-effectively. She chose Toronto for its AI talent, immigration policies, and cultural openness.

The JoongAng

Silicon Valley? Maple Valley! Why Canada has Become the 'AI Mecca'

This Korean article highlights Canada's emergence as a top AI hub, with the University of Toronto playing a key role due to its strong AI research programs and influential faculty. The article goes on to highlight how supportive government policies and a diverse talent pool has helped establish Canada as an "AI mecca."

Enabling Brand Building Across U of T

PAN-INSTITUTIONAL AND DIVISIONAL EFFORTS

UTC's marketing and communications teams worked on various initiatives with our divisional and Simcoe Hall stakeholders as we continued to advance the Defy Gravity brand.

We supported two *Defy Gravity* priorities—student success and inclusive cities and societies—by promoting the appointment of Professor Randy Boyagoda as provostial advisor on civil discourse, who chairs a working group of faculty and students who are addressing this imperative. UTC's contribution aims to share the university's leadership in helping to educate and develop citizens who can debate and discuss difficult issues with respect and in a productive manner. Our profile of Boyagoda for U of T News was shared on social channels, leading to media coverage in the *Toronto Star*, a *Toronto Life* Q&A, and CBC's *The Current* and *Here and Now*.

We emphasized “people-first” stories about inspiring students and researchers, giving audiences a behind-the-scenes look at the work that sets U of T apart from other institutions in EDI initiatives and projects that empower student success.

Student access and financial support is a longstanding priority for the university. We **wrote an explanatory story** about how students can navigate U of T's improved student financial support system, emphasizing why the university made the change to account for Toronto's high cost of living. The story saw more than 4K pageviews and boosted awareness of the program. The Office of the Vice-Provost, Strategic Enrolment Management reported that the story generated such positive interest in the program that they planned to share insights with other universities.

In addition to content creation efforts for



All-Nations Powwow at UTM
(photo: Nick Iwanyshyn)

our owned sites, we worked with the Dalla Lana School of Public Health to secure Global TV coverage for the school's group-mentoring Outreach and Access program, which supports underrepresented communities.

We landed successful pitches to CBC Radio's *Here and Now* and the *Toronto Star*, featuring Shannon Simpson, senior director of Indigenous initiatives, talking about the university's new Indigenous tuition initiative. Our UTM team promoted the raising of a tipi and teaching lodge at UTM. Across the three campuses, we profiled and highlighted how we are advancing truth and reconciliation efforts.

UTM also worked with Black at UTM to amplify stories of Black excellence. We also collaborated with the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, the School of Continuing Studies, the Ontario

Institute for Studies in Education, and the Temerty Faculty of Medicine to facilitate a CBC media request on black women in leadership at U of T.

UTSC supported back-to-school and move-in day by promoting its new student residence, Harmony Commons, which welcomed 746 students in September 2023. The new facility is built to passive house standard, showcasing U of T's commitment to advanced sustainability and reducing our ecological footprint.

Our team collaborated with several vice-presidential portfolios, including the Office of the Vice-President International and the Government Relations Office, on key institutional priorities this year. We highlighted how U of T supports international students and is addressing the international student cap. We also worked with the Office of the Vice-President, Research and Innovation, and

Strategic Initiatives, as well as faculties, to create and coordinate *U of T News* and *U of T Celebrates* content highlighting award-winning research and researchers, including recipients of government funding.

Our video and online news story about the efforts undertaken by convocation readers, people who read the names of graduating students at convocation ceremonies, shed light on the efforts the university takes to honour its diverse community, garnering 5K views on YouTube and social media channels. The Office of Convocation reported that it inspired community members to volunteer to become readers as well.

Our communications and brand teams collaborated on multiple institutional campaigns throughout the year to maximize impact by leveraging our collective skills.

During Back to School, we installed welcome signage at the three campuses, developed Defy Gravity merchandise for sale at the U of T Bookstore, and updated our ***UTogether* website**. The site now provides resources, guides and messages to the community. We also generated excitement on our social channels for the new school year with student profiles and engaging posts.

To support the Collision Conference—North America's fastest-growing technology conference, we installed transit shelter ads and airport ads aimed at its 800 speakers, 1,400 journalists and 1,000 investors arriving in Toronto, and posted U of T content on TechCrunch, Betakit, Yahoo, Meta, and Reddit to enhance brand awareness. On our own channels, we profiled new startups and up-and-coming researchers. We promoted Entrepreneurship Week with social media

ads and posts, including a *News Now* video on the Desjardins startup pitch competition at the Schwartz Reisman Institute, which received 56K views.

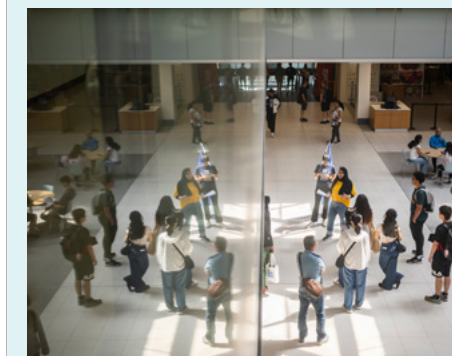
Our brand team developed the strategy and creative concept for the Engineering 150 initiative and supported it with a paid media campaign. We also created a distinctive commemorative mark for Robarts Library's 50th anniversary and a logo for the Faculty of Law's 75th anniversary.

We partnered with an external agency to conduct market research with prospective students, parents, guidance counsellors, and other stakeholders for UTSC's Health Sciences program. This study became the foundation for marketing and communications materials to promote UTSC's Health Sciences program—a key tributary for the forthcoming Scarborough Academy of Medicine and Integrated Health (SAMIH). Our team also provided guidance and support to the UTSC communications team on the paid media strategy, media plan and creative concept for the recruitment campaign. UTSC reported strong results from the campaign, with total domestic life sciences applications up by 58% over 2023.

These efforts, among others, have significantly bolstered U of T's reputation by demonstrating leadership in areas such as civil discourse, financial support for students, and equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) initiatives. Through strategic media coverage, targeted campaigns and storytelling across channels, we have showcased U of T's commitment to these priorities, reinforcing the university's position as a leader in fostering inclusive, informed and engaged communities. The coverage and amplification of these stories have not only increased awareness but also fostered trust and credibility with key stakeholders.



Communications campaigns for spring and fall 2023 convocations collectively garnered 233K pageviews on the Convocation Hub website, 201K pageviews for the 47 U of T News convocation stories, and 125K views on the 42 ceremony videos. Our social channels garnered a cross-platform total of over 3.5M impressions, reaching over 2.7M people, across 154 posts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and TikTok. UTC also created and distributed five new original videos, including the U of T Convocation Readers video, the wayfinding video and three streeters (one for each campus).



The university is striving to diversify its international student body. Enrolment of Thai citizens increased by 56% after media relations worked with a popular Thai language vlogger to create a video profile of the university, which saw 139K views and a more than doubling in traffic from Thailand to future.utoronto.ca.

Reputation Management


Another core part of our work this year focused on anticipating and managing issues to protect U of T's hard-earned reputation for inclusive excellence.

We responded to 297 reporter requests, on topics including international students (56); diversity, discrimination and Israel-Palestine issues (49); and safety and security (31). NOTE: the reporting period for this report excludes the encampment on King's College Circle, which will be covered in next year's report.

This year, we crafted messaging for various high-profile topics, including the ongoing conflict in Gaza, sustainability, the international student visa cap, research security, student housing, antisemitism, voyeurism on campus, the Ontario public-sector salary disclosure, sustainability, provincial funding, and labour negotiations.

Labour communications became a major focus of our attention this year as the university was engaged in negotiations with five bargaining units simultaneously. To ensure the continuation of university operations in the event of labour disruption, we developed comprehensive communications plans and assets with specific tactics for three stages of the bargaining process.





Our tri-campus team developed more than 50 issues briefs and numerous communications strategies to support the university's Issues Management Group, which is tasked with managing non-acute issues and risks to U of T's reputational, strategic and operational interests.

King's College Road
(photo: David Lee)

Delivering Value to Our Internal Community



ALIGNING AND STRENGTHENING INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

In FY2023-24, UTC, in coordination with the Division of the Vice-President & Provost, the Office of Safety & High Risk, and the Division of People Strategy, Equity & Culture (PSEC), updated the university's emergency notification system. For the launch of the new platform, the internal communications team developed a comprehensive communication plan, outlining roll-out strategies, key messaging, and specific audience tactics. Within a week of the launch, 13K members of the U of T community updated their contact information, and 1,249 signed up for the new mobile app. The system now boasts over 220K subscribers, who receive notifications via email, SMS and/or mobile push notifications.

This past year, we also collaborated with the Provost's Office and PSEC to establish new guidelines for institutional statements, setting an example for other universities. In January 2024, internal communications provided key support to the Provost's Office and PSEC through the development of a change management plan for institutional statements, guiding the university's approach.

As UTC continues to transform and enhance internal communications at the university, in FY2023-24, we developed and approved Terms of Reference for both the Internal Communications Table and Student Communications Table, both chaired by the ED, Internal Communications.

Both tables are charting a new strategic direction for UTC, helping to build strong and supportive relationships with senior

leaders and their communicators in the President's Office, Division of the Vice-President & Provost, and PSEC (Internal Communications Table), as well as with student communicators across the three campuses (Student Communications Table).

SUPPORTING DIVISIONS AND DIVISIONAL COMMUNICATORS

UTC continues to leverage our distinct skills, expertise and functions to foster collaboration and provide leadership to communications colleagues across the university.

We guided and coached divisional communicators to implement brand guidelines, creating consistency and alignment in how all areas of the university present its strengths and identity.

A new digital marketing team was created to further support and guide divisions on website development and digital media planning projects.

Our **brand portal**, launched in December 2023, has become a robust one-stop enterprise resource for communications professionals, faculty, and staff across U of T and we believe, is unrivaled among other universities. Featuring a wide range of strategic and creative guidelines, templates, resources, and tools, the portal has already achieved 70K pageviews since its launch.

We further supported our tri-campus communications community by hosting working sessions on brand storytelling, leading the Community of Practice for social media, facilitating media training and connecting with campus-specific



William G Davis Building at UTSC
(photo: Matthew Dochstader)

We further strengthened our partnership with divisional colleagues by launching a Microsoft Teams channel for communicators—evolving from the broadcast-style listserv email to the U of T Communicators Network.

Over 425

communication peers across the tri-campus now use the network to access information, ask questions and exchange high-level institutional updates, priority initiatives and pertinent policy changes.

communities of practice for UTM and UTSC.

Our weekly **content meeting**, which gathers 40-50 participants from across the campuses, faculties and divisions, has been a critical space for sharing best practices and coordinating upcoming owned and earned content. The UTC social media team also leads a bi-weekly planning meeting with institutional social teams, joined monthly by the alumni social team.

We continued to grow our Communications College — professional development offerings for marketing and communications

staff from across U of T. This spring, we created opportunities for staff to share best practices with peers and invited divisional communications and marketing colleagues to participate.

In March 2024, internal communications developed and distributed a divisional communications survey to strengthen our relationships with our divisional communication partners — an important goal in our five-year vision for UTC. The results from our inaugural survey, sent to 25 U of T communication leaders, will help UTC find ways to work even more effectively with faculties, divisions and campuses.

Our efforts to support divisional colleagues included sending key-messages documents to communicators in faculties and divisions to create institutional alignment and coherence on timely issues-related topics, including the Israel-Hamas war, changing international student visa rules and collective bargaining.

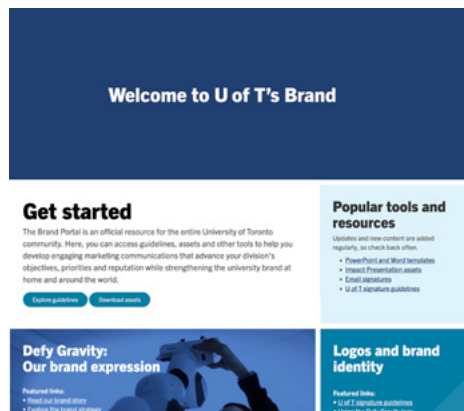
In addition, we introduced and shared Content Integrity Guidelines with communications colleagues across the university, establishing consistent standards and alignment for content creation and dissemination.

Examples of UTC's Award-Winning Work

In 2024, University of Toronto Communications (UTC) received a total of 46 awards, including 1 grand gold, 6 gold, 3 silver and 2 bronze from multiple associations including the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE), the Canadian Council for Advancement of Education (CCA) and the National Media Awards Foundation.

Most notably, UTC won a record number (18) of regional and international awards from the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), which is widely regarded as the standard of excellence by professionals in the communications industry.

These awards programs recognize outstanding work in news and feature writing, photography and video, social media, and best practices in media relations, strategic communications, and brand marketing.



IABC Ovation Award of Excellence Digital Communication/ Communication for the Web
U of T's Brand Portal

“Brilliant idea and investment to engage the audience. High quality writing. Superior production. Strong images...coming together to demonstrate the best-in-class of digital communications.”
— excerpt from the judges' comments



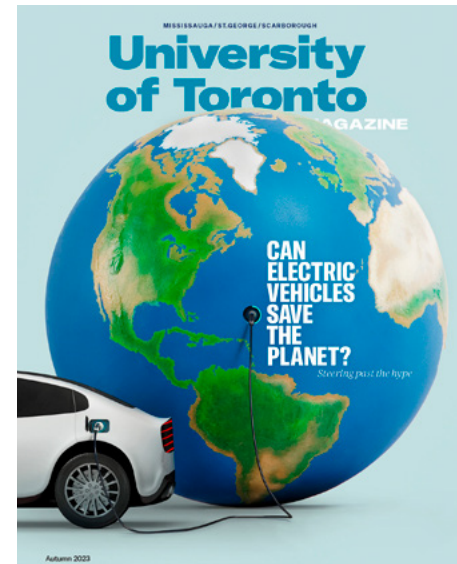
IABC Ovation Award of Excellence Communications Skills
News Now video series: A Window into the University

“You wanted to showcase a warm and welcoming community—and you did that through community reporting and innovative video clips. There's also an emotional component which encourages interaction and engagement.”



IABC Ovation Award of Merit Communications Skills
The Godfather in Conversation

“Compelling and timely content. Clean, simple aesthetic in keeping with the nature of the content.”



CCAIE Prix d'Excellence – GOLD Best Publication (print or online):
University of Toronto Magazine, University of Toronto

“The judges found the entry impressive, noting its alignment with supporting institutional priorities and strategic implementation, particularly highlighted by features such as the sustainability focus and the article on electric vehicles.”



CCAIE Prix d'Excellence – GOLD Best Feature Writing – English
Journey to Freedom, University of Toronto Magazine, University of Toronto

“Strong creativity... strong interaction between visuals and writing. Bravo!”



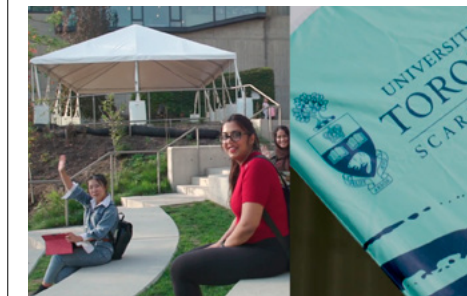
CCAIE Prix d'Excellence – GOLD Best Photograph
University of Toronto Brand Hub, UTIAS Water Channel

“Overall, it was a commendable submission that showcased strong attention to detail and strategic planning, while also delivering a visually striking representation of the campaign.”

IABC Ovation Award of Excellence Communications Skills
Joe's Basketball Diaries Season 2 Ep. 1
“Community Take 2”



“Joe's Basketball Diaries meets the stated objectives of positioning the U of T brand as innovative, it generates excitement and helps to build brand awareness for the university as an inclusive, caring community.”



IABC Gold Quill Award of Excellence Social Media
Explore “ScarbTO” Video Series

“Great and inspiring contemporary content. Fun, ‘homemade’, explanatory and engaging.”



IABC Ovation Award of Merit Communications Skills
Sustainable Future: Challenge Accepted! Ep. 1: Changemakers

“Well done! Powerful message, very high production value.”

Areas of Specialization

Communications

- Communications strategy & planning
- Internal and institutional communications
- Media relations & issues management
- Managing institutional and campus social media accounts
- Content production
- Videography, podcasts, photography
- Graphic design
- Supporting divisional communicators
- Magazine publishing
- Web development

Brand Marketing

- Brand strategy and brand architecture
- Brand awareness campaigns
- Positioning and messaging framework
- Marketing content strategy, art direction, design and production
- Web strategy, design and development (divisional support)
- Experiential marketing
- Paid media planning, buying and reporting
- Market research, analysis, insights generation
- Marketing tools, resources and templates
- Brand Strategy and marketing consulting and training

Back-to-school on St. George campus (photo: David Lee)



Contacts and Resources



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Images selected throughout this report are from the U of T Digital Media Bank and Defy Gravity curated collection — photography that reflects the brand themes and is used to tell compelling stories and connect with audiences.

Photography Credits

Cover: Convocation Hall (2024) – Lisa Lightbourn
p.2: UTSG, Hart House and Ziibiing (2024) – David Lee
p.6-7: UTSG, University College (2023) – David Lee
p.8-9: (clockwise from top left):
UTSC Students (2022) – Matthew Dochstader
UTSG, OBNS Lab (2023) – Matthew Volpe
UTSG, Convocation Hall (2024) – Johnny Guatto
UTSG, Front Campus (2023) – David Lee
UTM, New Science Building (2024) - Nick Iwanysyn
UTSG, UTIAS Space Flight Lab (2024) – Matthew Volpe
UTSC, Rendering of SAMIH – image courtesy of Diamond Schmitt Architects and MVRDV
p. 11: Solar eclipse event hosted at UTM (2024) - Nick Iwanysyn
p.13: UTSG, UTM Grads at Convocation Hall (2023) - Nick Iwanysyn

p.14-15: Geoffrey Hinton speaking at Convocation Hall (2023) – Johnny Guatto
p.16-17: UTSC, Roof Farming (2021) – Don Campbell
p.20: UTM, All-Nations Powwow (2024) – Nick Iwanysyn
p.21: UTSG, Convocation Ceremony (2024) – Polina Teif
p.21: UTM, Move-in day (2024) – Nick Iwanysyn
p.22-23: UTSG, King’s College Road (2023) – David Lee
p.25: UTSC, William G Davis Building (2022) – Matthew Dochstader
p.28: Back-to-school on St. George campus (2024) – David Lee
p.29: (from left):
UTSG, Aerial View (2024) – David Lee
UTM, Aerial View (2024) – Nick Iwanysyn
UTSC, Aerial View (2024) – Don Campbell