



PROPOSED  
NEW  
STUDENT  
BUILDING

JULY 23

2012

---

FOCUS GROUP REPORT

## Prepared by:

Federation of Students,  
University of Waterloo

## Authors:

Andrés Fuentes  
Christina Romualdo  
Elizabeth McFaul  
Jesse McGinnis

# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	3
PROPOSED TIMELINE FOR THE NEW STUDENT BUILDING .....	3
CONSULTATION PROCESS .....	3
USE OF DATA.....	4
BACKGROUND .....	4
METHODOLOGY.....	5
DATA .....	6
QUESTIONS.....	6
What would be required for students to be comfortable voting in a referendum?.....	6
What is an essential student service? .....	8
What new services, businesses, and operations should be included in the building? .....	9
What pre-existing services, businesses, and operations should be included in the building? .....	11
What features should be included in the building? .....	12
What type of space is required for events and activities?.....	14
CONCLUSIONS.....	15
THE PROCESS .....	15
THE RESULTS .....	15

## INTRODUCTION

The University of Waterloo (University) and the Federation of Students (Feds) have begun to actively investigate the need and desire for a new student building on campus. As part of this, Feds has begun an extensive consultation process to determine what undergraduate students are looking for, with regards to student space.

The proposed location is west of RCH and south of Physics, as approved by The Board of Governors on April 5, 2011.

The cost of the building is expected to be divided between undergraduates, graduates, and the University. Cost distributions will be dependent on what types of space are included, and will be determined through negotiations between the University, Feds, and the Graduate Students Association.

## PROPOSED TIMELINE FOR THE NEW STUDENT BUILDING

All stages are dependent on student opinion and approval. Students will guide the entire process.

### *Phase 1 – Data Collection and Proposal Creation, June – July:*

1. Quantitative and qualitative data collected through focus groups, a survey, and other consultation methods.
2. A draft proposal and two town halls the week of the July 23rd.
3. The completed proposal is expected to go to Students' Council on July 29th for their approval.

### *Phase 2 – Negotiations and Discussion, August – September:*

1. Utilizing the Students' Council proposal, the Student Building Negotiating Team (SBNT) will negotiate, with the University administration, on behalf of students.
2. Subsequent phases are dependent on a signed preliminary agreement between students and the University.

### *Phase 3 – Secondary Consultations, October – November:*

- Feds, the University, and the Graduate Students Association will refine the proposal, based on the signed preliminary agreement, and consultations with students on campus during the Fall term.

### *Phase 4 – Feds' Facilitated Referendum, February 2013:*

- The expected date for a Feds' facilitated referendum is February 2013, aligned with the annual Feds election. This referendum will not be held if the proposed agreement is not meeting student needs.

## CONSULTATION PROCESS

Consultations occurred throughout the month of July 2012. The consultation process encouraged undergraduate students to voice their opinions on the various topics surrounding the potential new building proposal, along with any concerns around student space and student services in general. The methods were:

- **Focus Groups:** small group discussions for all undergraduate students, with a few special sessions for event planners.

- **Unconference:** a participant-driven conference on Grad House Green, where topics of discussion about the building were decided by students.
- **Build Your Own Building:** participants at the focus groups and the unconference were provided with an exercise to complete about space allocation in their ideal student building.
- **Online Survey:** a 15-20 minute survey sent to all undergraduate students and linked on the Feds website, covering student opinions on a wide variety of topics relating to student space and the new building.
- **Town Halls:** a large-scale, question and response style, informal public meeting where students will have an opportunity to provide feedback and guide our new student building proposal.

## USE OF DATA

The data was compiled and analyzed by the SBCC and released in the form of several reports:

- Proposed New Student Building: Focus Group Report
- Proposed New Student Building: Unconference Report
- Proposed New Student Building: Build Your Own Building Report
- Proposed New Student Building: Survey Report
- 2010 Services Survey Report
- Feds Study Space Report

These reports are based on the direct expressions and opinions of the consultation participants. As such, we cannot guarantee the accuracy of some of the statements received during the consultations. Data for the first four reports was generated from the recent consultations. The Study Space Survey Report and the 2010 Student Service Building Survey Report were based on previous reports by Feds. This data was used to create the initial proposal, and will drive the SBNT negotiation between the University, Feds, and the Graduate Student Association.

## BACKGROUND

Focus groups provided students with the opportunity to explore their opinions of a new students building in detail. We ran three focus groups for event planners and four for students in general. The event planners' focus group included two additional questions regarding event space usage.

Our intent with the focus groups was to give students the opportunity to provide in-depth analysis of the issues in a smaller setting, and note their personal opinions and concerns about space and services currently on campus. Their opinions, and those expressed in other consultations, will guide the direction of the proposal.

## METHODOLOGY

Participants were specifically invited to the event planner sessions. Participants in these sessions included Society Executives, Federation Orientation Committee members, Orientation leaders, and Club Executives.

The general sessions were advertised through an Imprint advertisement, posters, social media, SBCC members, and emails to specific student groups, such as clubs and societies. Students were encouraged to sign up on the Feds New Building website, but there were some students who showed up on the day of a focus group. Each session ran approximately 50 minutes and participants were provided with a \$5 gift card and a pizza dinner for their efforts.

Overall, we had 32 attendees to our focus groups. The event planners focus groups had 18 participants and the general students' focus groups had 14 participants.

At the start of each focus group, participants were given the Build Your Own Building (BYOB) exercise to complete (See the BYOB report for the results of this exercise). Participants then explained how they built their ideal building and provided their reasoning. This discussion laid the foundation for the rest of the session.

The facilitators asked the group six questions, and gave each participant a chance to answer. The questions were:

4. In order for you to feel comfortable voting in a referendum on a student building, explain how much information and the quality of information that you would desire.
5. Out of all the buildings you have been in, in the entire world, pick one that you like.
  - a. Why do you like it?
6. Describe what you would consider a student service.
7. Describe what you would consider to be an *essential* student service.
  - a. Please list current student services which you would consider essential.
8. What services, business, or operations would you like to be provided on-campus that currently are not?
9. Considering that the new student building is expected to be a central hub for student services, what do you believe should not be included in the building?

Facilitators asked two additional questions in focus groups for event planners:

3. What type of event space do you need to run events? (Large events, small events, medium events, etc)
4. What facilities do you currently use for events?
5. How effective are each of them?
6. What needs to change?

The facilitators moderated the resulting discussion, and asked follow-up questions to allow participants to expand on a specific point or answer. The facilitators recorded each focus group session, and took individual notes. To analyze the data, we looked for trends in the responses and common themes. We also noted any significant outliers, such as a smaller group of students with a unique perspective or opinion.

## DATA

### QUESTIONS

#### *What would be required for students to be comfortable voting in a referendum?*

#### RATIONALE

This question was asked directly in the focus group to determine what information must be included in the referendum and the preliminary agreement that is signed between the University and Feds. This question was also asked in order to determine what would make students reject the proposal and the referendum in order to guide the proposal creation and the negotiations.

#### TYPES OF RESPONSES

Students indicated that the following items would be *necessary* in order to vote in the referendum:

- *Demonstrated Need*: Students need to know what problem this building is solving.
- *Cost*: Students need to know the monthly fee to be levied, and for how long.
- *Building Breakdown*: Students need to know the space allocation of the building to ensure they get their return on investment.
- *Confidence of Ownership*: The recent situation with Federation Hall has left students with concerns that a similar situation will arise with this new building.
- *SLC Outcome*: Students are concerned with potentially overlapping with services provided in the SLC, as well as the future sustainability of the SLC.

Students also indicated that the following items would be *beneficial, but not essential*, to assist in making a decision about the new building:

- *Floor Plan*: Students expressed a desire to have a floor plan, but with an understanding of the high-costs, many students stated that merely a building make-up would be sufficient.
- *Visuals*: Students expressed desire to have visuals of all types, ranging from the style of the building to architectural renderings.

Students expressed concerns about items that would make them reject the proposal, including:

- *Lack of Information and Transparency*: Students need to be kept fully informed throughout the entire process.
- *Lack of Accountability*: Students will not approve a fee for a building that does not match its final product.
- *Lack of Value*: Students will not fund a building that does not meet their needs.

#### SIGNIFICANT OUTLIERS

Students expressed concerns about the fact that the students approving the fee are not the students that are using the building. They were concerned about the surrounding accountability, as there is no recourse for future students. Some current students did not feel comfortable making this decision and imposing it on future students.

## RESULTS

Students need to know what value the building will provide to them. This includes knowing what sections of the building they will be directly funding, key building features, space use, and the intended atmosphere of the building.

Students expressed a desire for as much information as possible, and in various formats, in order to make an informed decision on the perceived value of the building. They were not willing to spend excessive funding on this information.



## *What is an essential student service?*

### RATIONALE

In order to determine the best use of the space in the new building, we must assess student perceptions of service usage and what is considered a student service. Student perceptions on what are considered essential student services will help to determine which existing services could move to the new building to better serve students, or which new services could be developed.

### TYPES OF RESPONSES

Students defined a student service as one that “serves students” and “focuses on the improvement of student life”. Student services need to be accessible to students, and “have students as their target market”. Some students felt that “student services should be run by Feds”, as the “University administration doesn’t know or care about students”. They expressed concerns about university projects that focus on idea collection from students, where suggestions were not implemented or actioned. These students felt that Feds should be collecting and implementing student suggestions but they have no power.

When asked about the services they found to be essential on campus, students identified Food, Health and Counselling, and a 24 Hour Information and Help Hub as being essential services to their success.

### RESULTS

Students believe a student service primarily strives to serve and meet the needs of students, in an accessible way. Essential student services include services that provide Food, Health and Counselling, and 24 Hour Information and Help.

## *What new services, businesses, and operations should be included in the building?*

### RATIONALE

During the focus groups, students were provided the opportunity to brainstorm any services and businesses they felt were missing on campus. This question was asked in order to determine what new services, businesses, and operations should be included in the new building. Students were also encouraged to discuss what should and should not be included in the building, in order to address some of these suggestions.

Data to answer this question came from the following discussions in the focus groups:

- What services, business, or operations would you like to be provided on-campus that currently are not?
- Considering that the new student building is expected to be a central hub for student services, what do you believe should not be included in the building?
- Discussions about student services during the “Build Your Own Building Exercise.”

### TYPES OF RESPONSES

Students discussed the possibility of including a dollar store within the new building. Advantages included low prices, items that last for shorter terms, and the ability to purchase common household items on campus. There were concerns about a potential dollar store competing against other businesses, like Feds Express or retail services. Students also expressed concerns about the promotion of unhealthy eating through dollar store offerings, and the challenge of following ethical standards at low prices, as well as promoting mass consumerism and waste.

Most focus groups highlighted the lack of spaces to unwind on campus. They suggested including gaming rooms, including ping-pong and foosball. Some of the focus groups mentioned the possibility of including a post office and a movie theatre (or similar projection room) as additional new operations.

### SIGNIFICANT OUTLIERS

One focus group discussed the idea of having cross-campus advisors that can assist students in switching programs, and focus on general information about multiple programs that are on campus. Students in this session focused on the fact that a number of students switch programs in their first or second year due to changing interests or academic challenges. These advisors would assist students in this process.

Another focus group had a suggestion of having a media centre in the new building. There were concerns about Imprint's current out-of-the-way location and its impact on finding both volunteers and news items. Students felt that moving Imprint to the new building would increase its presence on campus, and make it possible for the newspaper to present other types of reporting from their new location between issues.

Other ideas included on-campus laundry facilities, student-run coffee shop, a bike garage, and a mini grocery store. There was strong opposition to having a McDonalds on-campus, in some of the focus groups.

## RESULTS

Potential new businesses could include a dollar store and a sit down restaurant. Students would appreciate new spaces on campus where they could relax and socialize.

Students expressed desire for a number of services that already exist on campus, such as a print centre, and a computer repair shop. This indicates that students are not aware of some of the services and businesses on campus, and they could be better promoted.

## *What pre-existing services, businesses, and operations should be included in the building?*

### RATIONALE

In order to determine the best use of the space in the new building, we must assess student perceptions of service usage and what is considered a student service. This question was asked in order to determine which services, if any, should be moved to the new building.

Data to answer this question came from the following discussions in the focus groups:

- Describe what you would consider to be an *essential* student service.
- Please list current student services which you would consider essential.
- Considering that the new student building is expected to be a central hub for student services, what do you believe should not be included in the building?

Discussions about student services during the “Build Your Own Building Exercise” were also included.

### TYPES OF RESPONSES

Most students recognized that some important services on campus require more space in order to effectively serve students. Students focused on the fact that not all services should be moving to the new building. Students addressed concerns about moving services that require confidentiality, such as counselling services or GLOW, without accommodating for the privacy considerations. Students felt that the SSO and OPD were hard to access, but that the new building is not the correct place for them.

Students discussed the importance of avoiding overlap between the new building and SLC. Students felt that only some services that should be replicated, like a Turnkey-style information hub. There was a concern about placing office space in the building. Students felt that any office space in the building should be those that are student-facing, and not administrative. Students discussed the possibility of moving the Feds office, but were concerned about how much space that would require.

### RESULTS

Most students recognized that some important services on campus require more space in order to effectively serve students. Students feel that the services that end up in the new building should be services that interact with students more frequently, and would benefit from increased traffic. Students want to make sure that the new location of any service meets its own needs, as well as the needs of the students they serve.

## *What features should be included in the building?*

### RATIONALE

This question was asked in order to determine student perceptions on the general design of the building, and key architectural features. This information will help to determine the overall look and feel of the building.

Data to answer this question came from the following discussions in the focus groups:

- What is your favourite building and why?
- Considering that the new student building is expected to be a central hub for student services, what do you believe should not be included in the building?

Discussions about building features during the “Build Your Own Building Exercise” were also included.

### TYPES OF RESPONSES

Students in the focus groups mentioned having a building with open space, lots of windows, and natural light. Students discussed the importance of having well-organized space, where things were logically placed and easy to find. Signage within the building was identified as a necessity. They suggested having an events board that indicates what activities are going on in the building and where they are located.

Students mentioned having forward-thinking technologies in the building. They stressed balancing an innovative design with not dating the building. Students suggested piloting new technologies for the building elsewhere on campus to ensure that they meet the needs of students. Students identified the need for more accessible and numerous power outlets on campus, and that there should be an abundance of outlets in the new building.

Students felt that there should be limited administrative space in the building, in order to encourage a social feel in the building, and promote interaction between students. Students in this session felt that incorporating school spirit into the building would help promote this atmosphere. Students also suggested having a distinctive feel to each floor in the building, and having the building as a distinct landmark on campus.

### SIGNIFICANT OUTLIERS

Two focus groups discussed the idea of having services in the building organized in a mall layout. This would allow each service a front-facing operation that could promote their activities to students. Students appreciated the clean look and the ease of access of this layout. For services where students require privacy and anonymity students discussed the idea of having a central front for multiple services, so that students accessing the service could be going to any one of the enclosed services. They also suggested having back entrances for services these services. Students stressed that although they agreed with the idea of a mall layout, they did not want an actual mall with commercial businesses. There was also discussion of this mall layout being underground.

## RESULTS

Students want a building that is well organized and easy to navigate, with ample signage to indicate the building's spaces and services. Students value having a building that focuses on social interactions amongst students, as opposed to singular study spaces. Students feel that services could use more student-facing space to improve their operations.

## *What type of space is required for events and activities?*

### RATIONALE

Event planners require different types of space in order to run their events. They may experience different challenges with the available space on campus, or run certain events off-campus due to space constraints. The event planner focus groups included two additional questions to address their unique needs and priorities in terms of student space.

### TYPES OF RESPONSES

Students indicated a need for space that serves multiple purposes. Students mentioned the need for bookable conference rooms for meetings and open spaces for larger club events. Having audio-visual equipment access in rooms would also be beneficial. There was also a request for a space with good acoustics for performances, such as an auditorium or movie theatre space that could be booked through Feds. Students recognized that there is limited space on campus for club offices, and some students suggested including rotating office space (office space that could be shared among several clubs) to address some of the existing space challenges. Many club executives also highlighted a lack of storage space for club materials and equipment.

Event planners indicated that having doors with Watcard access could make accessing bookable rooms easier and more convenient as well as increase the level of accountability. Finally, they also suggested including a large event board that can explain what events are happening in the new building and where to help promote events.

### RESULTS

Student event planners require a variety of spaces in order to facilitate their events. Students recognize that there are limitations on the space available, and stressed having adaptable, multi-purpose rooms that can cater to multiple events. Club space continues to be a concern.

## CONCLUSIONS

### THE PROCESS

The focus groups allowed students to share their opinions about the new building, and address any questions and concerns they had. Students were engaged, and eager to share their opinions. Discussions tended to stay on topic, and students generally were able to answer the focus group questions. Overall, the new building focus groups were well-attended.

One session for the focus groups had a larger turnout than expected, and we needed to split into two separate groups. In this case, we had only facilitators instead of both a facilitator and a dedicated note-taker. Although the majority of the focus groups were moderated by the same facilitator, there are three focus groups with different facilitators, whose style could have altered the results.

The nature of a focus group meant that the answers of some students were affected by the answers and opinions of other students, but there were instances where groups took differing opinions and proceeded to have an more in-depth discussion about the topic. There could also be bias in focus groups where members of the administration were present.

### THE RESULTS

Students define a student service as one that strives to serve and meet the needs of students, and would be of interest to a large population of students.

Students want a building that is well organized and easy to navigate, with ample signage to indicate the building's spaces and services. The building should have a variety of spaces to address the multitude of student requirements on campus. Students will not support a building that does not meet their needs.

In order to support the creation of a new building, students need to know what value the building will provide to them. They need to know what sections of the building they will be directly funding and what the building will incorporate in its design. Students expressed a desire for as much information as possible throughout the process, and in various formats.