

# Universal Washrooms Consultation 2019

## Final Report

### Origins

UVic is among many public institutions, including school districts, universities and government, that recognize the need to update its approach to washroom facilities in response to growing social obligations for inclusivity, safety and acceptance.

This project began at the request of the Vice-President Finance and Operations to develop a campus-wide approach for inclusive washrooms at UVic, for both renovations and new building projects. Currently, UVic has more than 70 universal single-user washrooms, as well as multi-stall universal washrooms located in the Student Union Building and Fraser Building.

The Advisory Group drafted recommendations after reviewing work at other institutions and consulting with units at UVic. A broad cross-section of the UVic community provided feedback on an early draft of principles and guidelines. Further work produced final recommendations that will be considered, adapted and used by UVic to support:

- Design for new projects
- Design for retrofits and renovations
- Assessing immediate gaps in washroom access
- Creating longer-term plans for supporting universal washroom access

### Survey quotes:

“... they’re not just good for transgender and nonbinary individuals, but also for people with disabilities, people with children, and elderly people. ... this isn’t a movement to rob women of their safe spaces, but to give more people the same opportunity for a safe space.”

“... this is an issue of safety and equity—a lack of safe bathrooms means a lack of access to public space, which isn’t acceptable for a public institution. All people on campus should be able to access bathrooms, regardless of gender.”

The Advisory Group was very glad to hear from people across and beyond campus with widely varying experiences and perspectives on universal washrooms. The ideas and concerns raised have influenced the design guidelines and recommendations in this report.

## Consultation process

The consultation had high levels of engagement. Around 170 people attended in person and 930 people took the online survey. Half of the respondents were students, 30% were staff, and 8% faculty, along with 12% other affiliations (e.g., alumni, parents, community members). 29% had experience with barriers to washroom access, including barriers associated with disabilities, lack of inclusive facilities, safety and privacy, and many others. Some identified a need for more washrooms for women. The findings are discussed in more detail below.

## Findings—Terminology

**Universal washrooms** was the favoured term with a score of 3.17/4.

**Inclusive washrooms** was second at 2.90/4.

Other terms suggested included “all-gender washrooms” and simply the term “washrooms.”

## Design implications

The group recommends use of the term “universal washrooms” where needed, and simply “washrooms” in most contexts.

## Findings—Need for universal washroom spaces

**When asked about their experience with or need for universal washroom access,** a majority of respondents emphasized their positive feelings about universal washrooms. Many said that everyone deserves a safe and comfortable washroom experience. Others emphasized that though they don’t need them, they know they are important for others and they are happy to use them.

Some respondents said they are not comfortable with universal washrooms. Concerns included worries about violence or trauma associated with encountering males in washroom spaces, preference for sex-segregated or women-only spaces, and cultural and religious concerns.

The value of single-user washrooms was emphasized by many as addressing a wide range of personal needs. Many respondents spoke about the need for accessibility for persons with disabilities.

## Survey quotes:

“As I am androgynous looking, people tend to be uncomfortable with me in either washroom. I’ve been stared at, teased, told I’m in the wrong place, asked about my genitals, etc.”

“I am gender non-binary and find having to choose a gender to go pee to be psychologically damaging.”

“As a trans person, I find myself often having to choose between what variety of discomfort I want to experience: using a bathroom that does not match my gender, or risking verbal or physical violence.”

“My religion requires me to have single-sex space.”

“As a woman, I am fearful of men entering these spaces, and want to be protected from male predators.”

“I have had uncomfortable experiences with men on campus, and I sometimes feel the washrooms can be a safe space to remove myself from such situations.”

“I have a non-obvious physical handicap that makes heightened privacy and in-stall sink access important to me.”

## **Design implications**

For those who are not comfortable using universal spaces, a good proportion of gender-segregated spaces will be maintained. An increase in single-user washrooms, where feasible, is recommended. Women’s washrooms will be maintained at least in the same proportion as men’s washrooms. Where retrofits of multi-stall washrooms occur, only those that have five or more stalls and are in public, central areas will be converted. Universal multi-stall washrooms will only contain toilets—not urinals—to ensure that everyone can use all stalls in the washroom.

## **Findings—Principles for universal washrooms**

The top three ranked principles to guide washroom decisions were:

- Right to access washrooms
- Privacy
- Diversity and inclusivity

## **Design implications**

A combination of washroom types will meet everyone’s rights to washroom access, while supporting diversity and inclusivity across campus. Privacy features such as full-length stall doors and walls will be built into universal spaces through the design guidelines.

## **Findings—Washroom ratios**

When asked about the recommendation that a minimum of 60% of multi-stall washrooms be gender inclusive (open to all genders), 20% for men and 20% for women:

- 56% felt this ratio is too low or just right (among students, 64%)

## **Design implications**

Recognizing that a lack of access to universal spaces has created access problems for many people, it is recommended that 50% of washrooms in new buildings be universal. Recognizing that there are those who prefer sex-segregated or private spaces, the group also recommends that 20% of remaining spaces be for men's and 20% for women's washrooms, and 10% be universal single-stall washrooms.

The group also recommends that the university undertake a separate review of the current status and needs for change rooms and locker rooms to ensure that these services are appropriately reviewed.

## **Survey quotes:**

"I have never personally had any issues; it is a little odd at first but I got used to it after the second time using them."

"I am transgender and most of the public can tell. I have been politely told I'm in the wrong bathroom before, been pointed at, had people think they are in the wrong bathrooms after seeing me, and I was even chased out of the bathroom before. While most of my experiences using bathrooms have been uneventful, I can't help but bring that anxiety with me every time I need to use a gendered space. Inclusive washrooms make it so I can focus on school, my work or the other reasons I'm at UVic, rather than my panic."

"I am non binary so washrooms that are labelled with binary genders are very unwelcoming for me."

## **Findings—Design and signage**

Respondents had a number of suggestions about design features that would make the washrooms more usable, such as:

- Full-length doors and walls
- No cracks in doors
- Clear signs indicating washroom features
- Clear signs indicating which washrooms are universal or single gender
- Wayfinding signage so that people can find the washroom options they need

## Survey quotes

It should be “very clear whether a bathroom is inclusive or not before users even reach the door ...”

“I want proper doors on stalls!”

## Design implications

Universal spaces, full-length walls and doors are recommended. These come with a higher cost, but also will create truly usable spaces. Develop a signage approach that is clear and helps people locate the various washroom options.

## Findings—Priority areas

Respondents identified many specific buildings in need of universal washrooms, with some referring to “all buildings” or the entire campus. Some respondents said that they did not think any funds should be spent on this initiative. Overall, the major areas mentioned were:

- Common areas (e.g., libraries, University Centre)
- Classroom buildings and labs
- Gyms, recreation and health centres

## Design implications

This list will be reflected in facilities planning and priorities. A priority work list will be created that will consider a wide range of factors, to maximize the impact of any funds available for renovations. While some funding will be made available to address the most significant access gaps, most of these renovations will be integrated into upcoming work and building design, to minimize significant renovation expenses.

## Survey quotes:

“I’m a straight white male. The current system is built to serve me. This is not acceptable.”

“Everyone goes to the washroom so why shouldn’t it be inclusive?”

“I am gender nonconforming and I have other gender queer and trans friends and we have all at one point in time felt unsafe in or unable to use gendered washrooms. This is a huge university with very few neutral washrooms. You don’t realize how much of a privilege it is until you don’t feel safe to even go pee.”

## **Findings—Other recommendations**

Respondents also raised the need for additional facilities to meet the needs of multiple groups on campus, such as better shower rooms for cyclists, and infant/child feeding areas for new parents. While these topics are beyond the scope of the project, these recommendations will be provided to the relevant campus offices.

### **Moving forward**

The consultation findings helped the Advisory Group clarify the diverse needs, hopes and concerns within the community. The finalized recommendations will be reflected in planning and design considerations. They will be used in planning new building projects, and for regularly scheduled renovations as the campus continually updates older buildings.

We are eager to see how these changes, over time, increase access for those who don't have access and create up-to-date spaces for every member of the community.

As this work progresses, we all share the responsibility to create respectful washroom and locker room spaces in both existing and new spaces. We can all make spaces welcoming and inclusive by using the facilities for their intended purpose and respecting others' boundaries within the spaces.

### **Survey quote:**

“Everyone should feel safe when fulfilling a basic human need.”