



FINAL REPORT

VOICES OF AUC

2017

Questioning the Academic and Soicial Culture at AUC

Contents

Introduction	4
What is Voices of AUC?	
Why Voices of AUC?	
What happens afterwards?	
Recap of previous events	
Themes of 2017	
AUC Engagement	8
Context analysis	
Concrete ideas	
Long-term transformation	
Student Life	13
Context analysis	
Concrete ideas	
Long-term transformation	
Responsibility	17
Context analysis	
Concrete ideas	
Long-term transformation	
Conclusion	22

INTRODUCTION



What is Voices of AUC?

Voices of AUC provides an equal platform for students, teachers, staff, and management of Amsterdam University College (AUC) to come together and discuss issues, concerns, and expectations and reach concrete new ideas and policy proposals. The annual event is hosted by students and staff, with the goal of creating a constructive environment to explore one another's ideas. Focusing on recurring questions and themes at AUC, the discussion allows its participants to identify key

problems and propose solutions. The event itself is a safe space to share thoughts, opinions and solutions regarding a wide array of theme which affect the way AUC behaves not only as an institution but as a multifaceted community.

Why Voices of AUC?

Voices is an opportunity for the AUC community to approach policy decisions and highlight recurring issues in an inclusive manner. The philosophy of the discussion is that of 'participatory leadership', suggesting that all layers of the institution

should be involved in bringing ideas to the table and making decisions. By incorporating the perspectives of both students and faculty, Voices facilitates effective decision-making on an equal platform. Besides, Voices is based on the belief that every member of AUC cares about their education, their community and the values with which our institution is associated. Through the practice of participatory leadership, Voices becomes an inclusive event where all members of the community come together and learn how to understand and appreciate

their individual roles.

What happens afterwards?

The outcomes of the discussion play an important role in the decisions of many bodies within the AUC structure. The findings are shared with bodies such as the Student Council (SC), Board of Studies, Heads of Studies, and AUC Management, to provide an overview of debated issues as well as providing possibilities for development. Previous reports have been used as inspiration for new policy ideas and evaluations.

Recap of previous events

Voices of AUC established itself in 2015 as a yearly platform for free deliberation between AUC students and staff in 2015, thus making the event of 2017 the third edition. While it is valuable in itself to get together and discuss our ideas and visions for AUC, the ultimate purpose is to shape such ideas and visions into concrete policies to the benefit of the AUC community. We therefore strive each year to refer back to and build on what has been said in earlier years. If we can show that some ideas

and issues are recurring topics of discussion, we can translate them into concrete proposals. Each report also outlines some goals or action points that the writers took away from the conference, so that we can have a clear impact on AUC.

VOICES OF AUC 2015

The inaugural edition of Voices of AUC was held on the 22nd of April 2015 and asked participants to discuss what they wanted to pass on to the incoming Dean. It took a three-pronged approach of *Dreaming, Thinking, and Doing*, to go from idealistic visions to action-oriented proposals. One of those proposals was to create the position of *Outreach Coordinator*, responsible for connecting with communities in Amsterdam to make AUC more open and diverse. This position is currently held by Anne de Graaf, who has also been part of the organization of Voices from the start. *The Student Life Officer* (SLO) was also an idea that was first brought forward at Voices, which position is cur-

rently held by Vinika Porwal. Additionally, the first report called for another edition of the Voices event, and an open dialogue about our notions of Excellence and Diversity.

VOICES OF AUC 2016

The second edition of Voices followed up on these recommendations, and was centered around a re-evaluation of AUC's motto: *Excellence and Diversity in a Global City*. Issues that were discussed here for the second time, such as *the desirability of a Fall Break for both students and staff*, and *an overhaul of the course evaluation system*, have been picked up and successfully acted upon by this year's Student Council. The result is that as of next academic year there will be a Fall Break, and a pilot has started with *class representatives* who give teachers constructive feedback on behalf of the class. It was again stressed here that the dialogue does not end with this Voices event: giving meaning to our motto is a continuous process, and efforts to for example incorporate such

a dialogue into the *Introduction Week* are ongoing. Finally, last year's report that Excellence and Diversity cannot be reduced to mere numbers; they are cultures and practices that every single member of the AUC community contributes to, and together we can shape whether that is negatively or positively. That is why this year, we wanted to *Question the Academic and Social Culture at AUC*.

Structural note

The following chapter will introduce you to the overarching theme of Voices of AUC 2017 and its subthemes as they were discussed during the conference. The chapters after that will each deal with one of those three subthemes. They will do so by first outlining and analyzing the issues and problems that come up when discussing those themes and the context in which they exist. This will be followed up by the presentation and discussion of some concrete ideas to work towards a solution of those problems.



Themes of 2017

The overarching theme of *Questioning the Academic and Social Culture at AUC* can be divided into the more precise categories of Engagement, Student Life, and Responsibility. If, as we said last year, we can and want to change the way we live, work, and study together in this community, then how will we do that? Does our academic and social culture provide the right incentives to be excellent and diverse, and to engage with the global city around us? How can we make sure that we do so in the best way possible? Those are some of the questions that we took away from last year, which we hoped to address at Voices of AUC 2017.

1. AUC Engagement

This theme addresses students' participation and enthusiasm. Academically, this raises the question of how willing students are to come prepared to class and actively contribute to class discussion. This includes the current system of class participation, grading and the question of whether AUC has a stimulating climate for academic engagement. Socially, discussions are structured around how willing students are to attend extracurricular activities or contribute to AUCSA committees.

2. Student Life

AUC has a unique academic and social (dorms) culture. This theme examines how students experience life within this culture. It concerns the academic pressure that many students face as well as their responsibilities in an environment such as the dorms. Questions for this theme are for example how social life at the dorms influences academic performances and if AUC should be involved in or monitor what is going on in the dorms. Especially the latter is central to this theme.

3. Responsibility

This theme covers the responsibility that students have as members of the AUC and wider academic community towards one another and towards society. It is not just about interacting in class, but also during extracurricular activities, whether they be social or academic. The theme is centered around the question "How can students become good citizens?" and the responsibilities for which students sign up when joining AUC.

AUC Engagement

The first round of discussions was centered around AUC engagement. Here discussions tended to start with identifying what constitutes as engagement and how that is present at AUC. While the structure of AUC caters for an engaging environment, with its small class-sizes and accessibility to resources, the discussion was quick to outline recurring issues.

Context analysis

Fear of failure

AUC's motto, *Excellence and Diversity in a Global City* has received consistent comments and criticism over the years, particularly outlined by Voices of AUC 2016. The term 'excellence' has tended to create an academic culture that is grade-oriented, resulting in the increase of pressure. It should be noted that the term is not limited to its negative connotation, but this particular understanding was nonetheless established as a major cause for the fear of failure.

The 'excellence' culture had a stifling impact on engagement, as students tend to feel less comfortable in participating in class discussions *due to a fear of being wrong*. When discussions, questions, and other interactive activities arise, it tends to be *the same few people that are participating*. It is reasonable that certain students tend to participate more than others in general, since not everyone is as comfortable or motivated. Nevertheless, the fear of not answering or participating in the

FAILURE IS NOT AN OPTION.

right manner further fuels the lack of participation. Whether it is the fear of being wrong or expressing a different opinion, conclusions for the discussions suggested that there needs to be a new approach to encourage participation.

While making mistakes is a learning opportunity, the atmosphere of 'excellence' sometimes fails to accommodate for this. It was noted in the conversation

that it is important *not to sugar-coat low achievements*, but rather that there should be a greater balance between the perspective of failure and the response.

Lack of preparation

While there exists a student mentality that the pressure on academic success is too high, there is also one that would suggest that it is too low. Students and facul-

ty both noted *the lack in student preparation for classes*, which has a significant impact on class engagement.

The Dutch 'zesjescultuur', in which students feel satisfied with just passing, is not unheard of at AUC. Readings are neglected as certain classes recap the content or provide no incentive to do them. The *use of summaries* around the examination period seems far more popular than consistently doing the readings throughout the course. While using summaries is not mutually exclusive to active participation, it is a major factor behind low preparation throughout the course. Of course, it is expected that not everyone will be prepared at all times, but it

ers then becomes whether to cater to those students and try to make them perform better, or to leave them be and focus their classes on the students that are prepared and motivated to work.

Lack of preparation seems to be a particular issue for 100-level courses or those within the Academic Core. The 'mandatory' or introductory element can have a dissuading impact on preparation. While the level of course changes the workload, it was discussed that there is a mentality that the first few courses do not shape the rest of the degree or have an impact on the future. However, it was discussed to be problematic as these foundation courses are mandatory or referred to as fundamental for a reason.



seems to happen more often than not that only a small portion of the class has done the readings.

Lack of preparation is facilitated when there is *a lack of discussion, assessment, or interaction with the homework material*. While the class content should not consist of merely a summary of the reading, it should incentivize students to do them. The question for teach-

Lack of prioritization

Engagement in both the social and academic realms of AUC tends to *suffer from the overflow of information*. Whether it is emails, event invitations, or other notifications, there is such an excess of information that they lose its value and lack attention. As a result, students and faculty become more disinterested in attending events

and partaking in extracurricular activities. There is constantly an endless number of events happening at AUC, causing a lack of engagement as many are unwilling or unable to prioritize. Attendance tends to be low as there is a mentality that "I will go next time". It is not necessarily the case that AUC and its community do not provide interesting opportunities and activities, including Who's in Towns and committee initiatives, but there are so many of them that it hinders attendance.

Concrete ideas

Clear expectations

Setting clear expectations regarding engagement early on in the AUC experience was seen as crucial for improving the quality of classes specifically, as well as the academic environment in general. This could take many different forms, as discussed among both faculty and students. One example brought up included a *'no reading done - no attendance'* policy for courses, as this would highlight the students' responsibility to come prepared to every class. Other means could include a more consistent overview of the learning outcomes and expectations of the class. While this has also been discussed to be a way of spoon-feeding the students, it is important to note the difference between being clear and spelling everything out for them. While we should recognize that everyone is an adult and requires some personal responsibility, better communication could be guaranteed by reminding students and faculty of what is expected of them.

Clear expectations could also be set in the social context. As discussed, low attendance to events is often due to the low priority students assign to them. While some events can be well attended,

others do not generate the same interest. To solve this, *the content and significance of these events ought to be better communicated*. Faculty, committees, and student representative bodies could take a greater role in promoting these events through highlighting the added value to the course, the relevance today, or by simply providing enough information to generate greater interest.

Discussions with more direction

The fear of being wrong is something that can easily be addressed in ways that are already being implemented at AUC. One of these methods is *to have greater faculty responsibility in making a comfortable environment*. One way is to rephrase the question if the student is obviously unsure how to answer, so rather than responding “I don’t know” the student is encouraged to think differently and to reach the answer in a more constructive way. Telling a student to “just think about it again” or “we just discussed this” is ineffective and discouraging. Contributors also noted here that although there is such a fear of failure, it is not necessary to create an environment where you ‘sugarcoat’ everything, but rather *to create a trusting environment*.

Moreover, it was said that if an active and participatory style of learning is something that students find uncomfortable, AUC may not be the best study choice. The classroom sizes and the general style here *requires more interaction than other universities*. An opportunity to further communicate this could be at Open Days.

Adding a greater element of discussion, however, may only appeal to certain students. Although the atmosphere can be made more interactive through more discussion questions, practice has shown that rather than making everyone



“Grades matter more than learning.”

more engaging, it only makes the already engaged students engage more. It is of course important to keep class activities diverse in order to appeal to all the different learning styles. And this variation of approaches to learning may

guarantee greater participation and interest at a more consistent level. *Labs, discussions, simulations, and other more interactive elements* can be added to encourage greater engagement.

To further outline the benefit

of more discussion-based classes, we can use the contribution of an exchange student from Quest University. In her home university, all classes were *100% discussion-based*. This meant that students had to come prepared and had to be engaged, or otherwise they would be left out and miss too much. This created an environment where coming prepared was the norm and students expected each other to come prepared. In a way, the peer pressure there made students feel embarrassed

to come to class unprepared. This is a format that could work for some classes and disciplines, and lecturers who wish to implement more discussion into their classes should be encouraged to do so.

Discussions may not work for all types of classes, and it is not the only means to generate greater interaction. Perhaps it may cause for engagement to feel forced, particularly when there is a participation grade. It is thus important *to establish a participatory environment that feels comfortable*.

Separated classes

Ability grouping has often been discussed as a way to encourage greater engagement in classes. This form of separating classes has also sparked some debate during the discussions and ongoing research, as it can be motivating and discouraging at the same time. Students learn a lot from each other, and this solution to engagement may have contrary effects. Nevertheless, perhaps piloting such a class-structure in certain classes, particularly those within the Academic Core, may be beneficial.

Another way of splitting classes could be *in terms of class-style rather than ability*. For example, as raised in terms of Logic, it was discussed that class hours would be for those who have questions only, while students prepare and study on their own time. However, this could result in a situation where many students who could profit from hearing the questions and answers, do not come to class because they think they will manage without going there. Other suggestions were to split the weekly classes into two different styles: *one class for lectures, another for discussion or practice exercises*. This way, there are more clear expectations, as well as a more varied approach to learning. However, it was recalled this has been tried in some Sciences courses without much success. Nevertheless, reconsidering the class structure and division and giving teachers more freedom in this regard could allow for a more fluid and engaging way of learning.

Formative assessments

To move towards a more formative way of grading, AUC should *emphasize the importance of learning rather than grades*. This could



reduce student pressure as well as encourage learning rather than encouraging grades. However, it should be noted that grades can often act as a motivating factor and the risk of formative assessments is an even lower level of participation. Nevertheless, certain forms of assessments could involve *more formative elements to make the entire process more engaging*. For example, having a formative check of a paper before the deadline encourages greater preparation, time-management, and reduces stress as it is a non-graded means of feedback. The high number of graded assessments was seen as a potential reason for irregular class preparation as students tend to prioritize assignments which are more urgent over continuous class preparation.

Long-term transformation

Fostering an engaging environment requires larger transformations. Changing course structures and the academic environment does not simply need a new course manual, but also requires a more active approach to the learning attitude and atmosphere.

Personal responsibility

Taking greater responsibility is necessary for both students and faculty. Policies can be changed in

a more institutional way, but the most important factor remains an acceptance of personal responsibility. *To increase preparation, motivation, and general efforts*, an increase of responsibility is necessary. But how can we foster this? It is after all, part of the learning process is to realize how much one should be involved and how one can be most engaged. Personal responsibility in that way, is not something that can be easily taught. However, in changing the approaches to classes and events, the importance of accepting more responsibility can be fostered as personal responsibility needs to come from within the student. The institutional changes implemented can tackle this by creating an environment where the student realizes the importance to be prepared and that motivation levels remain high throughout the semester.

A trusting atmosphere

The importance of a trusting environment was often emphasized during this discussion. By building a better relationship between students and faculty, participation can increase and engaging feels more comfortable. While it is by no means necessary for faculty and students to act as friends, it is important to sustain more personal and direct communication and feedback. While AUC is already

relatively good at this, it can be improved by giving teachers more time. A more trusting environment will also create the opportunities for students to be more honest regarding their well-being in cases when it is deteriorating. *A closer, more personal student-professor relationship* will also aid in the creation of more fruitful dialogue and will allow nurture an environment where personal responsibility can be increased.

Further improving the academic atmosphere could be achieved by rethinking formative assessments. Students showed great enthusiasm for assessments that are based on learning rather than getting a particular grade. *The importance of class atmosphere* for stimulating involvement was clear, and the participants agreed that creating a motivating atmosphere was a joint responsibility of students and teachers. *Formative assessments that encourage students to utilize the learned material and do their own research will foster a better academic environment for both the professor and the students.* Assessments which ask the students to memorize information and lack the reasoning aspect do not foster an academic environment which motivates the students to learn and conduct the transformation from classroom to real life situations.

Student Life

Students' quality of life is heavily influenced by existing academic and social culture at AUC, particularly due to the campus residence structure and small college size. Our discussions surrounding this theme covered a wide range of issues - from the institutional involvement of AUC at the dorms, to impacts of pressure to succeed both academically and socially.

Context analysis
Life at the Dorms

Participants generally agreed that the involvement of AUC management at the dorms was characterized by grey areas. Several events this academic year brought into light the unclear criteria that AUC uses to decide when an institutional response is necessary and appropriate. There was consensus surrounding AUC's involvement when it comes to safety-related issues, such as when furniture was thrown out of the common room window into the kindergarten. Since living at the dorms is obliga-

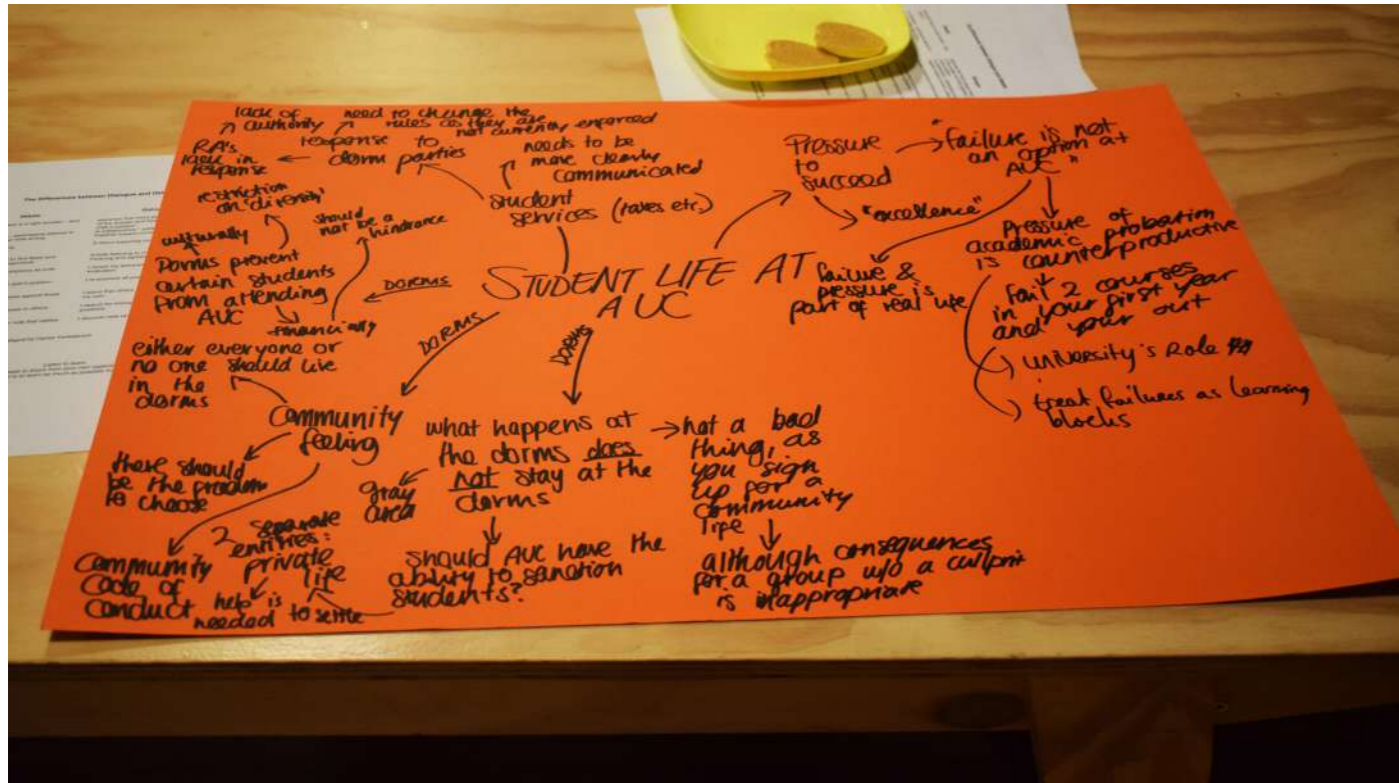
tory, it seems necessary for AUC to be committed to providing a safe and comfortable residence environment. However, the fairness and consistency of the responses has been questioned.

Discussions from last year's Voices regarding *AUC's three-year mandatory living policy* continued, which indicates that there is still a lack of consensus on whether such policy is optimal for students. Many participants thought AUC should be more flexible here, especially since the dorms do not seem to be working optimally in the status quo. In principle, it should be

easier to manage AUC dorms than other mixed student residences, since they are occupied by a close community, with its Resident Assistants (RAs), Peer Support, and Student Life Officer.

However, most of the participants agreed that rules did not seem to be respected at the dorms, as seen from many incidences of vandalism and *overall disrespect for common space and fellow students.* The latter manifests most prominently through late-night parties during weekdays and exam (deadline) periods, and the resulting mess often left for others to sort





out. It was suggested that many of the issues could be related to a [lack of a sense of ownership](#), which is potentially enhanced by the presence of DUWO, mostly seen as a careless private housing provider. There are currently no visible,

mandatory dorm residence indicated that the dorms can be the factor which prevents students from attending AUC, due to financial issues or perhaps cultural/religious differences. Financial capacity should not have to act as

activities can compromise their own individual quality. The most popular topic here was the pressure to succeed at AUC - an idea that is adequately summed up by the following expression: "failure is not an option", which can cause significant social and physical stress. This led to another discussion regarding the veritable significance of "success", whether this relates to the ability to fulfill a series of assignments, or the quality of a student's work.

Another policy that was thoroughly discussed was that of [academic probation](#). Many participants expressed their discontent with it, and referred to it as being counterproductive. In its current form probation seems to emphasize the idea that grades are more important than the learning experience, and the development of knowledge and capacities. *Failure and pressure* is of course part of life, and it is unreasonable to create an environment that does not allow for failure. However, this does require an improved treatment of failures as learning opportunities.

Finally, we discussed [mental health and the need for AUC to incorporate it in its institutional framework](#), as well as [support workshops and awareness campaigns](#). Participants of the discussion agreed that mental health issues are one of the most prominent consequences arising from such a pressurized environment, which are not sufficiently dealt with. This also ties into [the pressure of finishing the AUC bachelor degree in 3 years](#); for students dealing with personal issues, this can be problematic, and the need to propose and highlight the alternatives was brought up.

Concrete ideas Life at the Dorms

It appears that many students are unaware of the relationship between tenants, DUWO, and AUC. This needs to be communicated more clearly, so that students know how to deal with issues and where responsibility lies. [Promoting and enhancing existing resources at the dorms should certainly be a first step to take](#). Peer Support is

seen as a valuable mediator between AUC and students, and having tutors raise more awareness regarding the role of Peer Support was suggested as a constructive way forward. Similarly, the role and effectiveness of RAs should be revisited together with students. There also seems to be a need for clearer guidelines with regards to the role of AUC in ensuring the safety of students.

Beyond the existing structure, our discussions yielded the idea for a more structured community building and support system organized by students at the dorms. Such organization could consist of [elected string representatives](#) in each string, who would hold general assemblies to discuss issues at the dorms and their solutions. These representatives could be in charge of various initiatives, including organizing common room furnishing, string dinners and outings, helping first-year students move in, and so forth. Participants agreed this would be beneficial for fostering community from the string level up, as well as for

enhancing responsibility. The Student Life Officer, Vinika, suggested [such activities could be turned into community projects](#), and expressed her interest in being the supervisor for these. Preliminary discussions with the SLO, the Student Council, Peer Support, and a Management Team representative have already taken place following this year's Voices, and the initial ideas are to be communicated with students shortly.

The first step towards making the residence policy work for everyone could be [making exemptions for students who would be financially burdened by living at the dorms](#). This includes, but is not limited to, students living in or near Amsterdam, or students who can arrange hosts locally to cut down on living expenses. In the event that AUC adopts such an option, this should be communicated early on to prospective students to make sure they are not discouraged by mandatory residence policy from the get-go.

“I feel part of the AUC community.”

enforced rules and RAs have little to no authority when handling unpleasant situations. Consequently, many students feel that they have [no support system with regards to the living aspect at AUC](#). This extends to practical issues such as dealing with taxes and settling in. Despite the many concerns, the former Senior Tutor put things into perspective by pointing out that incidents used to be more common, which might go to show that dorm life has improved over the years.

A more fundamental critique of

a hindrance to AUC, and perhaps this residence policy thus acts as [a restriction on diversity](#). Currently there seems to be little consideration of such issues, which might lead to missing out on prospective students who might be a great fit with AUC.

Demanding environment
Another common issue was the pressure students felt to be active, engaged and involved in many things. This ties into the concept of [quality vs. quantity](#), whereby the involvement of students in multiple

Demanding environment

The Dean mentioned the following statement: *"It is okay to do nothing sometimes"*, which is definitely of relevance in the competitive and high-achieving environment of AUC. We looked at the distribution of assignments, and agreed it required greater balance and dispersion across the weeks. Rather than simply reducing their numbers, such a reform should be carried out to enhance the learning experience and promote challenging, yet enjoyable assignments.

Whilst learning experiences are predominantly individual processes, *the role of the tutor* should not be omitted in the enhancement of their quality. *Having tutors give more academic guidance and an overview of the interests of their tutees* would be beneficial in providing students with prospects and aid them in planning their futures after AUC. Increased consultations initiated by tutees would be thus necessary with the sole focus of helping students with such decisions. This practice would however need to be applied to all tutors and tutees which would require extra coordination.

The involvement of tutors in raising awareness with regards mental health issues would also aid in managing the pressure that can arise from the AUC environment. This entails an understanding of the different procedures students can take when they request professional help from the UvA psychologists for example. Tutors are essential in this role, because usually, they have a closer relationship with their tutees than other faculty members and have already established a sense of trust and confidentiality which is important when students seek such information and help.

With regards to academic probation, it is important to open up



a discussion with all members of the AUC community. Currently, this decision seems to reside with the Board of Examiners and teachers and students are not involved in the negotiation of this policy. Thus, a first step would be *to include students in the defining of academic probation and the reasons behind such a policy*. It was suggested that the Herring could be an interesting platform to initiate such a discussion as it has a wide reach, involving both students and faculty members. Moreover, in order to comprehend the need for probation rather than it being an "imposed" decision upon students, it would be useful *to include more reflective components within the structure of courses especially with regards to personal growth and capabilities*.

Long-term transformation

As many of the issues related to student life at AUC seem to emanate from the hybrid AUC-DUWO campus structure, creating a campus and residence policy which functions more successfully is necessary for increasing the student life quality in the long run. A

possible future setup might see AUC owning the Dorms, which might result in a better campus experience, since there would be no third parties involved in the most relevant aspects of dorm life. Such arrangement could make it easier for AUC to be more flexible with student arrangements, hence minimizing the financial costs of empty rooms, as well as the stress which currently arises if students have valid reasons for not living at the dorms, or other issues with DUWO. *However, it is unclear whether AUC is willing or able to buy, own, and manage the dorms*, and such an arrangement would need to be accompanied by a clear statement on where to draw the line between academics and social life.

In the academic sphere, the AUC community should strive to engage in regular discussions on the effectiveness of the assessment policy for both students' and faculty members' learning process and growth. The AUC experience should ideally be characterized by an inspiring learning environment which encourages quality over quantity from the Introduction Week onwards.

Responsibility

The overarching theme of responsibility functioned as the culmination of the evening's discussions. By bringing together the themes of AUC Engagement and Student Life at AUC, the theme of responsibility allowed us to think about a variety of forms of responsibility that impact and shape AUC, its community, and their experiences.

Context analysis**Responsibility to one another**

As an institution with a wide variety of academic possibilities, AUC requires different modes of responsibility. Within the AUC community, all members seem to have a responsibility to one another. This means that students have a responsibility to other students as well as faculty members, and faculty members have a responsibility to one another as well as students.

We discussed how to take responsibility for improving the academic environment. A main response to this was the need *to build an environment based on trust*.

This requires better communication with faculty and tutors to better understand student issues and create an open environment to deal with them. Some students discussed that they do not have a good relationship with their tutors, which can act as an obstacle to such an environment of trust. Not all tutors seem to have the same understanding of their role. It is not necessary for them to act as a parent, but there needs to be greater consensus on *tutor responsibility*. This further brought up the discussion of student-teacher communication. Although it is by no means necessary to become best friends with your teacher/stu-

dent, it was discussed to be greatly important to have more direct and informal communication.

One of the major issues brought up was *the complaining culture at AUC*. Discussion participants defined this as an unconstructive approach in addressing of issues and areas for improvement at AUC, which usually happens without any suggestion for change or improvement. There needs to be a greater incentive for taking action, direct communication, and framing it as a solution rather than a problem. To allow this change in framing, there needs to be more consistent feedback and a variety of platforms for constructively ex-



pressing and sharing opinions.

Furthermore, many shared their concerns with *the lack of class participation* at AUC. A significant part of the student community does not seem to be motivated to prepare for class or participate in class. This issue should be addressed by looking into the reason for this seeming lack of participation and by finding solutions for it.

Responsibility to society

AUC is an institution that prides itself on its active and involved students, not only within its own AUC community, but also in connection to the society around it, in particular the global city of Amsterdam. The opportunity to have an education in such a unique environment is a privilege that is not open to everybody and its merits should not be kept within a restricted academic community; they should also come to the benefit of society as a whole. Additionally, knowledge and theory learned in-class is only properly tested when applied and adapted to the real world. Thus, engagement with society is a valuable part of a well-rounded education.

Right2Education was frequently mentioned as an excellent example of such initiatives in which students connect AUC to society and show their sense of responsibility towards that society. AUCSA Committees such as Pangea (environment & sustainability), Dormsessions (music), and Handson (charity) have also successfully engaged with partners in Amsterdam to bring AUC to them and society to AUC.

However, a feeling among many of the participants in our discussion remained that *AUC students are not as socially active and engaged as AUC often presents them to be* to the outside. In selecting its



students, AUC highly values active community involvement and engagement, yet some contributors felt *that many AUC students have an apathetic or disinterested attitude towards the ills and opportunities of society*. The 'Bubble' was mentioned as a limiting factor here: many students put their energy into committee activities that come to the benefit of the AUC community but not to society more broadly. Additionally, because of their relative (self-imposed) isolation, students often seem to lack

the network and knowledge to set up or contribute to initiatives outside AUC. The extent to which this is true, or a valid excuse for inactiveness, was disputed by other contributors. They stressed that *the 'Bubble' should not be used as an excuse for laziness*.

At the same time, we should not forget that the decision to become an active member of your community or society is one that every student should make for themselves. AUC, just like the aforementioned student initiatives, can in this re-

gard merely act as a facilitator and provide students with the opportunity and tools to breed a sense of *'academic citizenship'*. Many contributors felt that there are improvements to be made in the way that AUC empowers and educates students towards independence and responsibility.

Concrete ideas

Responsibility to one another
Facilitating a space for constructive and consistent discussion is a multifaceted project. One way

that it could be achieved is through *class representatives*, which is currently being piloted by the Student Council. Not all students were aware of this initiative, but once it was discussed and reflected on, there was great support for the project. It allows for a more consistent approach to framing solutions and to take a more active role in improving the academic environment.

Another idea thoroughly discussed was that of *the role of responsibility in the Introduction*

Week. Most people at the table agreed that there was too much of an emphasis on rules and regulations, creating an atmosphere of restriction rather than curiosity and motivation. We considered changing the Introduction Week language and discourse *from one focusing on "sanctions" to one promoting "respect"*. In this way, students feel less "belittled" and more aware of this notion and its relevance within the AUC community. Moreover, potentially having students discuss this could be effective as peer-to-peer interaction reduces the element of authority which can sometimes lead to disengagement. These suggestions can be based on the proposal that was made last year to incorporate discussions on the meaning of excellence and diversity into Introduction Week.

In some discussions, we also found that *the workshops given by the Student Life Officer* were useful and should become a permanent part of the first-year experience, perhaps even open to everyone. We agreed that *these workshops ease the transition into university as well as provide a safe space for certain topics to be discussed*. They underline what the expected student responsibilities are at AUC, and where students can look for assistance and support if necessary.

Responsibility to society

AUC should bring its students in contact with its surrounding environment from the beginning on. Introduction Week is often the first real exposure new students get to life in Amsterdam and AUC, making it the perfect opportunity to develop this societal awareness. The tours of Amsterdam Oost and Science Park are both good starting points for such an exposure to the Global City, but could certainly be improved on

by including, for example, stops at the Startup Village, Jeugdland, the Tropenmuseum, and the UvA Roeterseiland Campus. Simply *exposing students to the other communities* that are living around them and to which they could connect gives them the opportunity to follow up and lay their own networks from the moment they start at AUC.

of responsible academic citizens should be a priority from the start. Contributing to one's community and society is furthermore not only a responsibility, it is also an opportunity to gain valuable experience and networks outside of the academic environment.

In several discussions, the importance of community projects in connecting AUC to society was

few hours a week over 16 weeks, or full-time for only one month. We believe that *introducing more flexibility with regards to their length and structure* would enable students to fully exploit their potential.

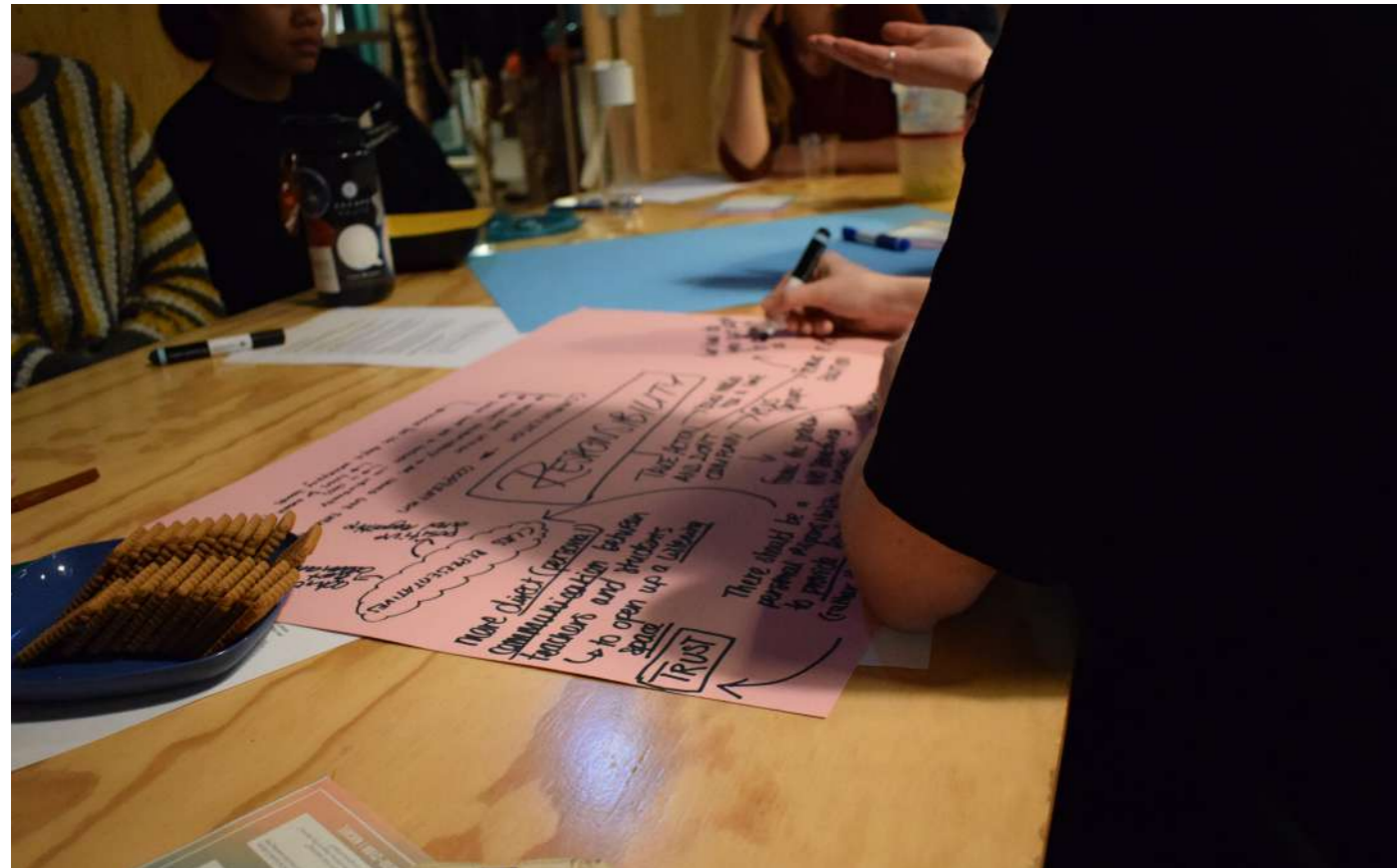
Another concrete proposal to come out of our discussion of responsibility towards society is that the AUC Community, and in particular Student Association (AUCSA) and the organizers of the Who's in Town lectures, could *reach out more to the other student associations and organizations of the UvA and VU*. Especially within Science Park, our connections to non-AUC students can be strengthened, potentially resulting not only in social events, but also engagement with the city and university-wide concerns.

On this note, we would like to refer back to an idea that sprung from last year's Voices of AUC, namely that of *making someone within AUC responsible for creating an agenda and/or database of*

brought up. As it is now, community projects already provide students with an opportunity to give back to society. However, *the opportunities for doing so are quite limited by the strict regulations around community projects*. Participants noted that few organizations are willing to take on interns for only a

“Do good students make good citizens?”

Another role that the Introduction Week could take is to make students aware of the privilege that a university education is and the responsibilities that come with it. It will of course always remain up to the student whether and how they will make good on those responsibilities, but *the education*



events, event organizers, and other relevant organizations within Amsterdam with which AUC students could seek contact. This would thus work not only to bring events outside of the 'Bubble' to the attention of AUC students, but could also provide them with the first steps towards their own network in Amsterdam. We would see this task fitting very well among the responsibilities of one of the Graduate Interns.

Long-term transformation

Responsibility to one another
Generally, the discussions pointed to a need for a more engaged community in terms of encouraging individual responsibility. In this light, it might be helpful to *generate an AUC-wide idea that classes are guidance to the class material rather than an introduction*. This could encourage a more engaging class atmosphere and better student preparation for class. This frame-

work would also underline the responsibility of faculty members to challenge students intellectually, as this seems to be lacking in some cases at AUC. Some indications of students being challenged could be: increased motivation to read up further on topics discussed, or students rethinking their approach to the material.

Responsibility to society

As mentioned, AUC selects its students partly based on their willingness to contribute to the community and society around them. If we note that that does not seem to be the case as much as some of us would have expected before coming to AUC, we should also *realize that AUC remains a relatively young institution*. There is still work to be done by students and staff to improve the academic and social community that is AUC, and as one of the participants stated, we also have a *"responsibility to help AUC develop and mature"*.

Additionally, as they progress in their studies and get more familiar with Amsterdam, students generally branch out more and become more active in society. In some sense, one could say that in their time at AUC students already do learn to become responsible citizens. As AUC itself becomes a more settled and matured institution, we expect more students to feel comfortable more quickly to go out into the city and make their mark.

However, this does require a continuous push from everyone within the community to make students take those first steps outside of the 'Bubble'. Being concentrated on a campus does not necessarily isolate us; it also fosters the community building and social experience. That also requires *the mentality of responsible academic citizenship* that can only be bred through a commitment from staff and students, from the Introduction Week until Graduation.



CONCLUSION



Voices of AUC 2017

Every year, Voices of AUC grows further, stimulates more thoughts and results in a higher number of solutions. Voices of AUC 2017 was divided into the themes of AUC Engagement, Student Life at AUC and Responsibility and addressed the academic and social culture at AUC. Bringing students, teachers, staff and management together, this year's Voices of AUC successfully facilitated discussions around the three themes. Yet at the core of the three themes is our innate desire to make AUC a better place for us and for the generations to come.

Brief summary

The overarching theme this year was *Questioning the Academic and Social Culture at AUC*. As Voices is a platform for the different levels of the community to come together, we felt the need to have a general theme that can be discussed, approached by and that was familiar to all levels. As students, we question the academic and social culture that we are part of on a daily basis. That is the reason why we are part of different bodies that aim to address and improve the system. Staff also has concerns on these topics and many of them, as tutors or members of the management team, see a different

side of what students experience. This gave the motivation to deconstruct the overarching theme into "smaller" overlapping themes that could provide a platform for fruitful discussions for all. *AUC Engagement* works in the academic and social level, engagement or motivation in classes and the participatory nature of students in extracurricular activities. *Student Life* includes both the academic side of being a student and the social aspects of it such as living in the dorms. Yet *Responsibility* can be seen as the theme that brings the previous two together. Engagement and student life are based on our responsibilities as students, peers, tutees, neighbors and people to all those around us. Our identities and labels might change from hour to hour or day to day but there is always a sense of responsibility that has to be engraved deep within ourselves.

Talking about the theme of Engagement, we noticed that there is *a fear of failure* among AUC students, mainly due to the 'excellence' culture that has a significant impact on student's engagement. Moreover, students and faculty both noted *the lack in student preparation for classes* and the overflow of information from which students regularly suffer. In order to increase stu-



dent's engagement, setting clear expectations early on in the AUC experience was seen as crucial. *More discussion-based classes* as well as a more *formative way of grading* were named as possible solutions. Everyone also agreed on the importance of realizing that it is not a shame to fail, and instead help each other back up.

When talking about Student Life one thinks of the social aspect of the AUC experience which has the dorms at its center. One of the key points of this discussion was *the grey areas in the involvement of the AUC management*, characterized by unclear criteria used by the management when it does get involved. Consequently, *a more transparent relationship should be implemented between the tenants, DUWO and AUC*. In this way, students would know where the responsibility lies, and how to deal with arising issues. In this manner Peer Support could begin to act as a mediator between the students and AUC, specifically regarding the grey areas. Another outcome of the discussion was the proposal of *string representatives* who would be in charge of fostering the com-

munity feeling from the bottom up and enhance the feeling of responsibility towards the property and each other.

The last theme addressed in the discussion was Responsibility. This theme hovered over the past discussions as it was the core issue of the dialogues. One important discussion point was how to make the academic environment a more trusting environment, and this requires better communication between the students, staff and tutors. For this, a greater consensus on the role of the tutor and the responsibilities it encompasses is required. *The workshops provided by the SLO this year* proved to be a great success and are something that should be carried on. Another dimension of responsibility is that to the society outside the bubble. Though there are several initiatives which engage students with the greater society, most students themselves are not as socially active and engaged as AUC wants them to be. By exposing students from the get-go to initiatives around Amsterdam and improving the connection between AUC, UvA and the VU the connections

with non-AUC students can be strengthened and result in better engagement with the city.

What is special about the AUC community is its ability to come up with not only creative solutions to the issues talked about in this report but to find a way to make them feasible. The AUC community is able to address and tackle the points mentioned above. It requires effort and time, but AUC students are known for *their eagerness to find solutions and openness to cutting-edge approaches*. Together with AUC's inspiring and hard-working faculty and management, the remaining challenges can be overcome. Student, faculty and management should continue *to work together* towards making AUC live up to its motto.

We would like to thank all the contributors for their stimulating discussions, fresh ideas and willingness to make AUC an even greater place. It has been a pleasure working together and seen the change that our ideas can bring. We look forward to next year's event!

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