AUC STUDENT COUNCIL

Policy Plan

2020-2021
Dear Reader,

We are pleased to present you with the AUC Student Council Policy Plan of the academic year 2020 – 2021. This document serves to guide you through our priorities, plans and ideas. Throughout the upcoming year, we want to ensure that AUC responds effectively to the challenges that were presented last semester. In addition, we also aim to create positive, lasting change that allows us to leave our institution better than we found it.

As Student Council, we want to represent the voice of students. This requires us to be approachable, transparent, proactive and engaged. Especially in a time when COVID-19 poses challenges to our academic career and students have become more vocal than ever to call for social change, we want our policy to reflect the concerns of students. Therefore, we want to thank you for entrusting us with this responsibility.

While reading our policy plan, we hope that you find our ideas to adequetly represent your interests. Hopefully, it even takes away some of the stress you might be feeling in regard to all the current events and how they might affect your time at AUC. However, more than anything we hope that this document allows you to hold us accountable.

Love,

Preksha (Co-Chair), Jules (Co-Chair), Laura (Student Affairs Officer), Ange (Communications Officer), and Karla (Public Relations Officer)
Our focus areas

Covid-19 Response

The COVID-19 crisis has deeply affected AUC’s community: the academic building closed, lessons shifted online, and some community projects and internships were cancelled. Furthermore, concerns about the health of our friends, family and community alongside the struggles of social distancing and isolation have affected the mental health of students and staff alike. As the new academic year begins, we want to make sure that the health and safety of our community is held as a top priority. Additionally, we want to make sure that this crisis has as little negative effects on students as possible. As such, the Student Council will:

- Demand an effective response from the Management Team to the COVID-19 crisis in the upcoming academic year, with an emphasis on frequent and clear communication.
- Urge AUC’s team to include updates on regulations from the Dutch government and promote resources such as the University College Utrecht’s translation of the NOS website, which is an essential communication tool for non-Dutch speakers.
- Collaborate with relevant bodies, such as the Works Council, to encourage teachers to record their lectures. This can help ensure that students who are unable to come to class due to symptoms of COVID-19 are not at a disadvantage of falling behind in course content.
- Closely work together with AUC’s governance bodies on the review and smooth implementation of the AUC Contingency Plan. This plan considers scenarios such as the closure of the academic building or the infection of a significant portion of the community. It will be revisited frequently as the pandemic develops.
- Advocate for investment in online learning materials such as premium video conference services, free student softwares, and extra materials and support for courses based on practical experience, such as lab courses.
- Collaborate with the Heads of Studies and Board of Studies to ensure that teachers meet the learning outcomes of courses.
• Strictly review with the Management Team and Board of Studies which courses benefit most from on-campus teaching and allow those to have priority.

• Design and promote a Health & Safety awareness week in collaboration with AUC’s Student Association.

• Advertise the health and safety regulations within the Student Body and open the conversation about how to keep one another safe and hold each other accountable.

• Encourage a change to the AS&P in which taking a seventh semester on top of six consecutive semesters due to coronavirus difficulties will not result in the loss of the honours status of the degree.

• Enhance AUC’s excellency and diversity motto by drafting an active and concrete Diversity Policy plan before the 1st of February 2021. This plan will include short-term and long-term goals for the coming years based on research and reports. Some of the measures to be proposed are to:
  ○ Stimulate the development of diversity-rich courses via curriculum scans.
  ○ Collaborate with the Diversity Commission to educate current students about diversity.
  ○ Advocate for the increased presence of people with minority backgrounds in visible positions and representative bodies.
  ○ Work closely with the Board of Studies to review our curriculum towards a more inclusive and less Eurocentric content.
  ○ Enhance awareness of the historical role of Amsterdam in colonial times.
  ○ Open the discussion about decoloniality and intersectionality.

Diversity, Inclusion, and Representation

The AUC community is known for being politically active and engaged. As such, it came to us as no surprise that during the time of the Black Lives Matter protests, AUC students found ways to hold their own institution accountable and call for lasting change. We want to make sure that this call is heard and enable change. Consequently, the Student Council commits to:

• Urge the Management Team to have transparent goals. Furthermore, we aim to hold management accountable for future developments, deadlines and updates on projects surrounding diversity.

• Connect to the UvA diversity unit (UvA Meldpunt Discriminatie, Discrimination Office) for tackling problems, registering complaints, promoting a culture of diversity awareness and offering support from specifically trained and dedicated counsellors.
Support and Guidance for International Students

AUC prides itself on being an international community. However, international students struggle when it comes to settling down in the Netherlands and participating in the Dutch system. Most of the important information is only available in Dutch and communication with government organisations in English is limited or not even possible at times. While AUC, as an institution, does not hold the power to bring change on that level, we do hold the power to offer substantial support and guidance for our international students to ensure a smooth transition. The Student Council will:

- Participate in the active promotion and creation of online resources regarding diversity and discrimination.
- Encourage the Management Team to increase the diversity of opinion in line with AUC’s social code of conduct. We aim to create a space in which all members of the AUC community can express their opinions freely and respectfully.
- Critically review AUC’s Policy, protocols and procedures for instances of harassment, discrimination and sexual misconduct, as well as review the implementation of these policies.

- Ensure the accessibility of information for students living in the Netherlands including, but not limited to:
  - A step-by-step plan on how to apply for tax exemptions.
  - An overview of the different kinds of insurance and when you need them.
  - An explanation of the DigiD and BSN number and what you need it for.
  - An overview of relevant organisations and institutions, what exactly they do and how to get in contact with them (e.g. Belastingdienst and Gemeente Amsterdam).
  - Recommendations for telephone providers, insurance companies and banks.

- Designate a contact person/team to provide extra support to new students in the months of August and September.

- Advocate for the application process to take into account whether students of Dutch nationality need help settling into the Netherlands. If that is the case, the student should be registered as UvA first, since UvA has more resources and support for international students than VU.

- Promote the role of the Student Life Officer and Peer Support as possible sources of information and help.
Accommodation for Students with Learning Disorders

The term Learning Disorder, as taken from the DSM-5, is a difference in information-processing that prevents a person from learning in the same way as most students. Even though most students at AUC with Learning Disorders (e.g. dyslexia) do not necessarily perform worse than their fellow students, we believe that AUC currently does not offer enough help or accommodation for them. This motivated the Student Council to:

- Push for clear guidelines on where to go and whom to talk to when a student wants more accommodation for their Learning Disorder, or wants to get tested for one.

- Work with the Student Life Officer, Peer Support, and the Management Team to offer more guidance when a student wants to get tested. In particular, we want to be able to offer a recommendation list of qualified institutions.

- Propose to the Management Team the possibility of using MYQP budget to cover the costs of students that want to get tested in case it is not covered by their insurance. Currently, in order to get extra support you need a diagnosis, which you can only get at a private clinic.

- Participate in the creation of a manual for teachers and tutors on how to help students with different Learning Disorders. Additionally, the manual would refer to extra resources to further educate themselves on the topic.

- Collaborate with relevant bodies to design and promote a Learning Disorder Awareness week.

- Encourage teachers to have students with extra time take their exams in a different room than the rest of the students, if possible. That way, they won’t get interrupted during their own exam which is especially important for students who struggle with concentration.

Mental Well-Being

A study by the UCSRN in 2019 showed that 50.4% of University College students struggle with mental health issues. AUC is no exception. The Student Council believes that AUC should not add to create unnecessary stress or mental duress for its students. Furthermore, we also believe that AUC should offer students guidance and support if they struggle with their mental health and that students’ well-being should be one of our highest priorities. Consequently, the Student Council will:
• Urge the Management Team to invest in hiring an on-campus psychologist, as part of the MYQP budget, since UvA’s and VU’s services are insufficient. This would be accompanied by clear guidelines on how to use this service.

• Contribute to a more consistent promotion of the Well-Being team around campus.

• Continue to collaborate with Peer Support on creating the Mental Health Guide and Mental Health Awareness Week. Specifically, the Student Council aims to start a conversation about the more stigmatised mental health disorders on campus.

• Advocate for Mental Health information sessions training for students to be included in the first year and alongside the more active promotion of mental health resources (such as the Mental Health Guide).

• Start the conversation about the so-called AUC “stress culture”. Specifically, we want to focus on how we as a student body can promote a mentally healthy environment. We want to pay special attention to this problem during the time of midterms and finals by approaching students with resources and spreading awareness.

Graduate Futures

According to a 2018 survey, alumni were the most dissatisfied with the way in which they were prepared to continue with their careers after AUC. Thus, we believe that AUC should take a more proactive stance in teaching students how to leverage their Liberal Arts & Sciences degree. Furthermore, we also aim to create more awareness around Masters programs within AUC. With these goals in mind, the Student Council will:

• Push for the possibility of having AUC students employed as Teacher Assistants. This would help students improve their resumes as well as to enhance teachers’ education by alleviating their obligations.

• Continue working closely with AERO (Alumni and External Relations Officer) and FNWI (Faculteit der Natuurwetenschappen, Wiskunde en Informatica) Datanose, as well as all other relevant stakeholders, towards the soonest possible publication of a Master’s Database. The Master’s Database would allow students to both research about different programmes and possibly contact alumni for questions.

• Encourage tutors to plan a meeting in which they discuss their tutees ‘Master’s Timeline’ at the end of their third semester, so they can plan their second and third year with their career goals in mind.
• Play an active role in the promotion of all the various resources available to students surrounding the topic of graduate futures. Specifically we want to design and organise a ‘Life after AUC’ awareness week.

• Advocate for AUC to hire a Student Careers Officer, using MYQP budget, to guide students in their preparation for their future careers.

Course Registration

Being able to register the right courses in an efficient and timely manner is a vital aspect of our education. The new course registration portal was an important step in the right direction, but there is still work to be done. To further improve the registration process, the Student Council will:

• Ensure that basic requirements are met before the course registration period starts. This includes: preliminary course manuals, name(s) of lecturer(s) and updated course descriptions.

• Create clear guidelines on how to register for off-campus courses.

• Continue the (online) course market. We also want to use this as an opportunity to strengthen staff-to-student relations, as this is a good moment for the both of them to engage in informal conversations outside the classroom.

• Invest in the AUC portal to add on new features, including but not limited to:
  ◦ An option to bypass course prerequisites at the consent of the lecturer.
  ◦ An option to add ‘priority’ to any course and explain the student situation (i.e. oversubscribed course, graduation requirement, cancelled course, important prerequisite, and so on). The objective is to avoid unnecessary study delays.
  ◦ The possibility of waiving a course if the student can prove sufficient knowledge of the subject. The aim is to help students enrol in courses they find challenging.

Teaching

One of the main strengths of our university college is the quality and expertise of its lecturers and academics. We can further take advantage of this by fostering connections between students and staff and by adopting some teaching practices that will enhance education at AUC. To make this a reality, the Student Council will:

• Organise (online) thematic borrels and conferences where students and staff can network, as well as highlight and promote professors and their work.
• Design and promote a **Meet your Lecturer week**, where we showcase lecturers, their expertise area, and availability for being an internship or Capstone supervisor.

• Encourage the relevant bodies to require lecturers to should be required to publish **necessary course materials** 5 working days before the start of the course to ensure students are well-prepared before the course begins.

• Propose to include a **review** of the course description in the course evaluations to indicate whether the course met the student’s expectations. This review can then be used to improve course descriptions.

• Maintain a healthy and strong relationship with the **Works Council** to advocate for the interests of both staff and students.

• Advocate the importance of having a **short break in every class**, especially in the case of three-hour long classes.

• Propose to the Head of Studies and Board of Studies to make it mandatory for teachers to **notify** their students when they are **not able to grade their assignments** within the required time period after submission.

• Discuss with the Board of Studies and Management Team the possibility of **prohibiting** the practise of having **more than two final assignments on the same day**.

• **Push for consequences when a professor is structurally late in grading** and providing feedback to student examinations.

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**Academic Core**

The Academic Core was designed to develop strong academic skills in a number of essential areas and to prepare students for their choice of theme and major. However, students and staff alike have expressed their dissatisfaction with the current structure, content and execution of these courses. Thus, the Student Council will proceed to:

• Continue the conversation with relevant stakeholders on how the **Academic Core** can be improved. By the end of the year the Student Council will create a detailed list of recommendations with specific changes that could be made to create a better and more relevant curriculum for all majors.

• Propose to the Board of Studies to **evaluate** to what extent courses with two levels (e.g. BRMS I and BRMS II) **overlap** and how they could be better integrated with one another. Specifically, the Student Council aims to make sure the knowledge acquired in the lower level course is relevant for the higher level course.
Sustainability

The AUC community is engaged and passionate about fighting climate change and its lasting impact. Consequently, we believe it to be of utmost importance that AUC as an institution lives up to our values in regard to sustainability. To do so, the Student Council commits to:

- Build stronger relationships with the Sustainability Commission, Pangea and the Green Office, a student-led initiative. In doing so, we want to raise more awareness on sustainability among students and staff members in their day-to-day life and to promote initiatives led by students.

- Establish a 5% annual reduction in energy consumption and CO2 emissions from the AUC building in consultation with the Sustainability Commission and the Management Team.

- Urge the Management Team to publish a yearly report on AUC’s results on reducing carbon emissions, improving energy efficiency and on responsible choices in delivery services, catering and research platforms centred in climate change.

- Work together with the canteen and catering services on reducing food waste.

Tutor System

The tutoring system is designed to establish and maintain an individual connection between each AUC student and a member of the AUC teaching staff serving as their tutor. However, many students have expressed their dissatisfaction with the system. We believe the situation could be improved if all parties were aware of what is and is not expected of one’s tutor, and if students would be better equipped to hold their tutors to these expectations. For these reasons, the Student Council plans to:

- Make sure both students and staff have a clear understanding of the role that tutors have within the AUC student experience, through the publishing of a list of mutual expectations to be upheld within a tutor-tutee relationship at AUC.

- Give students the opportunity to evaluate their experiences with their tutor and the tutoring system as a whole on a yearly basis, as to make sure expectations are upheld, and that tutors might further improve their tutoring skills.

- Create clear guidelines for how and under which circumstances students can change their tutor.

- Advocate for AUC to offer tutors mandatory training and workshops in the areas of Diversity and Mental Health.

- Follow-up with the Tutor Handbook project.
Transparency

The need for transparency within the AUC community is increasingly apparent, especially in light of the COVID-19 crisis and the call from the AUC community for institutional changes. We need to give AUC students the information they need to hold both us and the AUC Management team accountable. Furthermore, we believe that all relevant information in regard to their education should be more clearly and effectively made available to students. Motivated by this, the Student Council will:

- Hold the Management Team of AUC accountable for their promises and actions by ensuring every commitment made by them comes with a clear and detailed timeline accessible to the entire student body.
- Urge the Management Team to make detailed announcements about their projects and progress at least every two months. We encourage focus groups and other forms of discussion hosted by the Management Team to ensure students can comment and express their opinions as well. Otherwise, the announcements can be followed by a Q&A session where students can ask questions. This can be in the form of the real time session or via a discussion forum on Canvas.
- Create a website to centralise all our relevant information.
- Create one-page summaries of documents (AS&P, Capstone Guidelines, to name a few) to highlight important information. This will not replace the original document under any circumstance but would merely act as a way to ensure more students have read and are aware of the contents of these documents.
- Publish an end of term report where we clearly state the percentage of goals achieved and explain our results to the student body.

Absence Policy

The Absence Policy has been a source of stress for many students. It is important to note that AUC has already committed to changing this rule to accommodate for the COVID-19 crisis. However, the Student Council still believes in pushing for lasting institutional change in regard to this policy. To make this a reality, the Student Council will:

- Work with the Board of Studies to adjust the current absence policy. The objective is to avoid the automatic failure of a course and need for a Board of Examiners appeal if the student has a valid reason to have missed more than 5 classes. In this sense, we would also push for a clear list of extenuating circumstances.
• Propose to the Management Team, Board of Studies and the Board of Examiners to make it possible to apply for an extra absence before this absence would be needed (e.g. when a student knows they will have a sixth absence due to a hospital appointment).

• Advocate for the ‘Extraordinary Talent’ measures to not only allow for course load reduction, but also circumvention of presence requirements. Additionally, we want to urge the Management Team to create more clear application guidelines for ‘Extraordinary Talent’ distinctions and possibly extend the rules for who could apply for this distinction. Lastly, we aim to more actively promote the possibility of getting an ‘Extraordinary Talent’ status on campus.

• Make sure to be more transparent in our decision-making process for the selection of our voting advice, including more of the positive and negative aspects of each candidate which swayed our decision.

• Continue promoting the elections with as much vigor as possible, hoping to surpass previous voter turnout of 33%.

• Integrate the most successful aspects of last year’s online campaign into our on-campus campaigning plan, including but not limited to the student council elections website.

• Strive to be prepared for the possibility of an online- as well as an on-campus campaign.

Elections

We want to express our gratitude to our predecessors for their tireless efforts to make the elections we participated in as fair as possible, despite them unexpectedly taking place exclusively online. As such, we hope to host even more successful elections in the next academic year. One thing our predecessors received some criticism from the student body for was the lack of justification for their selection of candidates in the voting advice. To make sure that next year’s elections will be even fairer and more engaging to students, we will:
We invite students and staff alike to join forces to make this policy plan a reality

Student Council 20–21

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