VOICES OF AUC

DREAMS AND THOUGHTS INTO ACTION

https://myauc.nl/voices
Voices of AUC has been created as a new platform to facilitate dialogue between current AUC students, AUC staff and AUC alumni. The Voices of AUC conference in April brought together around 60 people from these differing groups. The aim for the conference’s participants was to provide the community, and the incoming new dean in particular, with an overview of the hopes for AUC’S future.

The cross-section of shared experiences, stories, dreams, opinions and solutions covered an astonishing number of aspects in the fields of AUC’s identity, community, institution, management and academia.

Some of the most notable contributions include the wish for a better balance between academic achievement and personal development at AUC, how we feel about excellence and diversity and our desire to create and sustain more connections between AUC and the rest of the world. For instance, the word diversity was written down 33 times. Interdisciplinarity was mentioned 22 times. Above all, the participants expressed a wish for more interaction within the AUC community, and a desire to establish our direction and values in dialogue.

This report summarises the conversations of the conference. While it highlights the community’s dreams and suggestions for improvement, it is by no means the end of the process. The conference raised as many questions as it answered, all of which deserve to be deliberated in the future.

Note: In the theme chapters the writing team uses the pronoun ‘we’ to refer to the participants of the conference. We have tried to represent the conversations of the day to the best of our abilities, although we cannot claim exhaustive representation of the conversations and opinions of the day.
Why Voices of AUC? 1
Practising dialogue

About the process 2
Learning to host
How did the conference work?
How did the team analyse the data?

The outcome: four themes 5

THEME 1: Excellence and Pressure 7
High Workload
A broader concept of excellence
Failing is also learning
Class readings/engagement
Questions to continue the dialogue
Quotations from participants

THEME 2: Participation & Communication: 11
Empowerment of all stakeholders within AUC
Increased Communication between students, teaching staff and administrative staff
Improved participation and feedback processes within courses
Questions to continue the dialogue
Quotations from participants

THEME 3: Making AUC a more diverse place 15
Welfare fund
Outreach programme
Admissions and bridging programme
Student community efforts
Questions to continue the dialogue
Quotations from participants

THEME 4: Increased collaboration and connections for a wider perspective 19
Questions to continue the dialogue
Quotations from participants

Dreams for 2020 23

The next Voices of AUC event
WHY VOICES OF AUC?

The approach of Voices of AUC is grounded in a belief that everybody at AUC cares about the education, the community, and the Liberal Arts and Science values of AUC. It is a place where - together - we work, learn and live. Everyone involved in these aspects of AUC thus also carries a stake in the success of AUC. What would it look like if we all materialised our stakes? We would learn about each other’s roles in the community and institution, understand each other better. From there we could collaboratively build common visions. These broadly supported visions could then be translated in specific ideas and lastly into concrete action. These processes need a space in which everyone can voice their thoughts, share their unique experiences and speak their minds. Voices of AUC facilitates this space. In the past year the Voices team created this space in two main ways: in the form of a conference with many participants and in the form of a report filled with the recorded and summarised voices of that conference.

PRACTISING DIALOGUE

Practising dialogue methods is becoming an increasingly relevant governance practise, in- and outside of AUC. Apart from the value that dialogue skills have in creating mutual understanding and uncovering common purpose to tackle a broad range of the most pressing global issues (for instance the integration of refugees into Western European societies or the formulation of climate goals at the Paris climate conference in 2015), we also see dialogue as a valuable tool and learning opportunity for the AUC community.

Both the face to face exchange during the conference and this report are equally important for the Voices team. There is an intrinsic value to people coming together from all ranks and corners of our community to talk about the things that truly matter to us. Many of us already talk about the topics mentioned in this report: at the coffee machine, during our lunch breaks, in board meetings and tutor sessions, in the dorms and on Facebook. The conference offered a space for these conversations to coalesce, enrich each other and be recorded for later use in this very report.

The double process of organising a dialogue conference (also called ‘deliberation’) and condensing its results into this report offers a new way to find clarity for big and complex questions in our community and institution - and we can all learn from it in the process. Contrary to Facebook discussions the dialogue was inclusive for everyone and offered a safe space for the exchange of views under the trained guidance of dialogue moderators. The exchanged perspectives and practised skills strengthen an essential tool kit of soft skills that AUC students need for effective collaboration within organisations that will shape our future.

This report presents the collective intelligence of the roughly 60 participants of the conference. As you can read in the methodology section of the report the structure of the conference allowed for both small, practical ideas and big, all-encompassing visions to emerge. Thus this report provides a snapshot of the community in April 2015. Some of the content of this report has already been realised in the meantime - with astonishing speed.

The pace at which changes occur within our institution and in the outside world necessitates us to update our direction, projects and long term vision periodically. The public scrutiny of our core values during the Voices of AUC conference effectively applies the critical thought we are taught in this institution. It lets every member of our community feel ownership since what we are doing is realising our stake in our community through word and action. In the end it makes our core values stronger and will distill a set of values for this young institution that will create conditions for wiser action and will stand the test of time.

Essentially, the conference opened a new space for learning. Within AUC’s context the Voices of AUC conference offers a forum to develop, practise and demonstrate, among other AUC learning outcomes, “leadership skills, including a willingness to engage in constructive public discourse, to accept social and civic responsibilities and to speak out against prejudice, injustice and the abuse of power”.

1
ABOUT THE PROCESS

LEARNING TO HOST

In the past year a team of 15 people worked relentlessly to make the conference possible, harvest the conference’s information and draft the final report. In the course of this period we learnt a lot about team cooperation, process design and participatory leadership. The deliberation during the conference fits within a broad range of hosting methods.

Fundamentally, hosting is about inviting people to contribute so we can confront big questions or complex situations with our collective intelligence.

HOW DID THE CONFERENCE WORK?

Dreaming, Thinking, Doing - this structure was at the heart of the Voices of AUC conference. The conversation from the start was very open because the team did not prescribe any topics for deliberation. Everyone was asked to start simply with the question: what would you like AUC to be like in 2020? This meant that the dialogue was on the whole very constructive and positive.

The team only set a structure which addresses the questions ‘why’, ‘what’ and ‘how’ in the course of three 45-minute rounds. Participants arrived at the AUCafe building on the night of the conference, were welcomed, asked to write themselves a name tag and join one of the tables. A Voices team member was present at every table to facilitate, all of whom had received a training beforehand. Every participant was asked to switch tables in between the different rounds.

Especially in today’s complex and high speed environments multiple styles of leading and learning are necessary. Often the crowd knows more than a traditional ‘expert’ leader.

The method we used during the conference is anchored in a growing field of participatory leadership and co-creative leadership practises that are revolutionising how organisations work.

Prior to the conference the Voices of AUC team had a workshop by VU researcher Dr. Peer Smets who has conducted extensive sociological research into deliberative democratic assemblies such as the G1000 and Burgertop initiatives in Belgium and the municipalities of Amersfoort and Amsterdam. We learnt about the differences between a discussion or debate on the one hand and a dialogue or deliberation on the other.

Leading the latter delicate process is an art that we could learn about in theory but could only truly grasp and improve during practise - at the conference itself.

Dreaming, Thinking, Doing - this structure was at the heart of the Voices of AUC conference. The conversation from the start was very open because the team did not prescribe any topics for deliberation. Everyone was asked to start simply with the question: what would you like AUC to be like in 2020? This meant that the dialogue was on the whole very constructive and positive.

The team only set a structure which addresses the questions ‘why’, ‘what’ and ‘how’ in the course of three 45-minute rounds. Participants arrived at the AUCafe building on the night of the conference, were welcomed, asked to write themselves a name tag and join one of the tables. A Voices team member was present at every table to facilitate, all of whom had received a training beforehand. Every participant was asked to switch tables in between the different rounds.

Prior to the conference the Voices of AUC team had a workshop by VU researcher Dr. Peer Smets who has conducted extensive sociological research into deliberative democratic assemblies such as the G1000 and Burgertop initiatives in Belgium and the municipalities of Amersfoort and Amsterdam. We learnt about the differences between a discussion or debate on the one hand and a dialogue or deliberation on the other.

Leading the latter delicate process is an art that we could learn about in theory but could only truly grasp and improve during practise - at the conference itself.

Dreaming, Thinking, Doing - this structure was at the heart of the Voices of AUC conference. The conversation from the start was very open because the team did not prescribe any topics for deliberation. Everyone was asked to start simply with the question: what would you like AUC to be like in 2020? This meant that the dialogue was on the whole very constructive and positive.
MOST FREQUENTLY WRITTEN-DOWN WORDS:

96 more
85 student(s)
56 AUC
52 course(s)
34 teachers
33 diversity
22 tutor(s)
21 interdisciplinarity/
interdisciplinary
17 pressure
17 majors
17 community
16 teaching
16 science
16 less
16 academic
15 international
15 socio - (economic)

14 staff
14 focus
14 flexibility
14 excellence
11 class
10 time
10 liberal
10 intensive
10 humanities
The second round focused on coming up with ideas that might realise these dreams. This thinking process addressed the question of what is great at AUC and what needs to be changed. It ended with a selection of the best ones, to be explored in terms of practical implementation in the final round; the question of ‘how to do it?’.

At each table, big sheets of paper and writing materials were available on which participants were asked to write down the different dreams, ideas and implementations. These were read by the new group that formed at the table during the next round and were used by the Voices team to write this report.

At the end of the final round, participants were asked to summarize their main ideas and display their poster. Everyone could then walk around, read all the different dreams and solutions, and vote, using stickers, for ones they particularly liked.
HOW DID THE TEAM ANALYSE THE DATA?

The challenge for the data analysis process was to condense a flood of qualitative data (28 sheets filled with sentences, catch phrases, doodles and mind maps!) into this report while staying true to the original voices of the conference’s participants.

Firstly the team transcribed all comments into a document. Very soon the following categories became clear: Community, Identity, Academia and Institution & Management. The team ordered every comment according to category. Many comments had to be ‘cross-listed’ since the four categories are linked in numerous ways.

The team followed thoughts on these categories from the dreaming stage through the thinking stage until the doing stage. This gave the team the opportunity to link concrete ideas back to the dreams that had sparked them. Once all information was ordered in the four categories the team’s next challenge was to operationalise the content in a meaningful way. Categories by themselves do not say much about the direction of AUC nor of the participants’ dreams or their ideas for concrete action.

That is where the themes came into the picture: The team noticed that there were a couple of truly interdisciplinary themes that re-appeared throughout the categories. It was difficult to draw boundaries between them. As you might notice while reading the report, excellence and pressure are linked to participation and communication in many ways just as diversity is linked to internal and external collaboration and connections. With the themes in mind the team started writing the different chapters.

THE OUTCOME: FOUR THEMES

So many ideas were voiced during the VoA conference, that it would be impossible to give a main idea that summarizes them all. However, it is possible to find connections between the different ideas. In this report we have tried to come up with the underlying themes that unite different dreams and ideas. In these themes some of the many practical suggestions that were made are mentioned, but we also tried to capture the underlying intentions and dynamics of what people were saying and writing. Why did they make certain suggestions, what intention did they have and what were they perhaps missing on the whole? In this way, the report is meant as a summary of the facts and reflections that were shared, but also of the more dynamic information of what people feel is needed, what is lacking or what is out of balance.
The fourth theme discusses the wish for more collaboration both within AUC and with the outside world. We recognize that different connections and perspectives can enhance the learning process. Furthermore, we want to connect what we do at AUC with the context and developments going on in the world around us. Making these connections will help us find a clear direction in what we want for AUC as an university, as well as in our own personal developments.

It is worth highlighting again that these themes are by no means the end of the process, they raise just as many questions which deserve to be deliberated in the future. But perhaps the strongest message that has come out of this conference is that most of us really enjoy studying at AUC and that we want to be involved with all of the developments, problems and solutions that come with it.

Note: In the theme chapters the word ‘we’ will refer to the participants of the Voices of AUC conference, the writing team will be referred to as the Voices team.
EXCELLENCE & PRESSURE

Many ideas and practical suggestions were voiced that concentrate around the idea that excellence should be pursued in different areas rather than in results alone. We believe that life at AUC could be even better if the pressure on results would be loosened. The word pressure was mentioned 17 times on conference sheets - it kept emerging in different contexts. Main themes in this dialogue are the high workload for students, working towards a broader concept of excellence, and providing the opportunity to fail as an essential part of the learning process.
Care more about people than results

It’s okay to make mistakes - you’re learning :)

[In 2020 AUC will provide] information of the planning of exams.

An AUC student should be open to participating in the community.

We’re already competitive, don’t push it further.

Loss of ambition due to pressure.

Students feel burned out by the end of year three.

[Create an] option for additional 4th year.

Create balance between academic achievement and personal development.

More credits for students, more hours for teachers.

[Create] more time to engage with student politics and committee leadership.

Get rid of the excellence list.
HIGH WORKLOAD

A lot of comments were made concerning the high work load at AUC; everybody wants to work hard and perform to a high standard, but the AUC experience can be overwhelming at times. The AUC community is full of active and enterprising people, but the intensity of the workload may at times limit our ability to explore this ambition, essentially limiting our opportunity to engage in issues and projects. The high intensity of AUC’s academic program, which remains consistently high for the duration of the semester, leaves little opportunity to take a breath or focus on other interests every now and again. This applies to students and lecturers alike - in the case of lecturers this valuable time could be used for independent academic research. There is a lot of pressure on our time, calling for constant time management but also leading to stress and, in some cases, even the feeling of being burned-out after three years of studying (or teaching). The following list contains some of the practical ideas suggested to bring us closer to the dream for 2020 of more balance between academic achievement and personal development:

Fourth year (9 votes*): A big topic was the introduction of a fourth year into the AUC curriculum. This could provide us with the space to look for a broader definition of excellence as well as create room to make mistakes. It would loosen the pressure on students to pass every single course, which could be a valuable thing: learning by failing is also learning. Also, it would give the opportunity to make optimal use of the benefits of the liberal arts system: students would have more chances to take courses that do not directly contribute to their major.

Communication between courses concerning workload: The workload at AUC can be high and also unevenly distributed. A clearer insight into the total workload, also for professors, might help to remedy this.

Fall Break: A reading week is already introduced for some courses at AUC, but a fall break for all courses and all students would help a great deal to get through the tough fall semester. A break like this could help loosen the pressure on students and lecturers to perform continuously.

More credits for students, more hours for teachers (8 votes*): Another way to give students (and staff) more time to breathe would be to give more credits for the 16-week courses, so as to have more holidays afterwards. The courses at AUC might be intensive enough to do that; they might take more than the 160 hours required for 6 ECP.

*A at the end of the conference participants had two votes to award to their favourite proposals.

A BROADER CONCEPT OF EXCELLENCE

What do we understand by excellence at AUC? And how much do we identify with the current concept of excellence that is on the flag in front of AUC’s entrance? This was a topic of intense dialogue at the Voices of AUC event. The discussion surrounds two arguments: can “excellence” be determined by GPA alone, and: do we really want to focus so much on this type of excellence? In general, we want to focus less on results and more on people; we have a strong desire to expand the interpretation of excellence. The idea to abandon or change the excellence list was voiced eight times during the event, and it was suggested that we could focus more on values such as dedication, intrinsic motivation, academic curiosity, academic engagement, social responsibility and human flourishing. This is a topic that can only be resolved through a conference such as the Voices of AUC, because coming up with shared values for our community can only come out open dialogue between everyone involved.
Pressure was described as a big issue during the Voices of AUC conference. A lot is expected from us and we also expect a lot from ourselves. On top of that there are the expectations from family, society and possibly requirements for master programs. “We’re already competitive, don’t push it further” is a quote from the conference that voices this feeling very clearly. The pressure to constantly perform to a high standard can also undermine the learning process itself because it does not allow for failure. Making mistakes is part of the learning and exploring process, but we do not always feel that we have the opportunity to do so. For example, if an assignment is graded, immediately the focus shifts towards what is expected, and sometimes this means that our own interests cannot be explored. Furthermore, the strong focus on grades as a measure of result and excellence can lead to a very result-oriented way of learning. This could lead to students to see failing not as part of the learning process but as a personal failure, something to be avoided at all costs.

Here are some practical suggestions that were voiced:

**Change in continuous assessment:** One of the reasons why AUC can be so stressful for many students, is the continuous assessment system we have. Because of the strong focus on results and getting good grades for every single test, independence in learning and planning skills sometimes suffer. One of the reasons for continuous assessment, is to compensate for the lack of retake exams at AUC. Perhaps we could look at how to balance this in a different way. In any case, we think that changing the continuous assessment system might contribute a major part to a relief of pressure on AUC students. One suggestion that was voiced, was to reduce the amount of assessments that is required.

**Life support officer:** One idea which has already been realized is the life support officer, who started working at AUC in October.

### CLASS READINGS/ENGAGEMENT

Preparatory class readings have a big influence on the effectiveness of class participation, which is an integral part of liberal arts and science concept and the small classroom philosophy at AUC. Hence some courses include a system to grade it. Nevertheless, the number of readings that gets done tends to drop during the course of the semester, with student focus moving solely to the next deadline they have. A more carefully balanced workload could enable students to read more, but the underlying question is how we can create an environment in which students are engaged in such a way that they are motivated to read. Is focussing on grading the way we want to achieve this?

### QUESTIONS TO CONTINUE THE DIALOGUE

1. How can we achieve a balance in the workload, so that there is the opportunity to do graded as well as ungraded coursework, as well as being able to explore individual interests and projects?

2. To what extent does ‘excellence’ represent the AUC community as a value and how do we interpret it?

3. How can we achieve a balance between academic achievement and personal development?
A strong message that came out of the voices of AUC event was our desire for more communication and involvement on a number of levels. Above all, everyone likes having their input acknowledged and taken seriously. We dream of the university college becoming more collegial in 2020, a university making use of its small scale intensive programme more fully. In places in which the UvA’s or VU’s bureaucracy are unnecessary due to AUC’s small size, the university college should not emulate its two partner organisations but find procedures that fit with its smaller and at times more motivated student and staff population. We value the engagement and motivation of students and staff and from this close involvement and identification with the university stems a desire to be granted more responsibility and involvement in joint decision making processes.

The dreams and thoughts on this subject could be categorized into three distinct yet interrelated sub-themes: Empowerment of all stakeholders within AUC, improved communication between students, teaching staff and administrative staff and finally on the level of the classroom: improved participation and feedback processes within the courses.
[Before 2020 I want AUC to] start a new creative phase. [For me this means] teaching on all levels.

[Before 2020 we will have to] rethink positions of teaching staff.

[AUC is a university in creation, it should continue to define. Be a dynamic university rather than static.]

[Before 2020 we should be able to] remove inefficiency in administrative procedures (e.g. course enrolment, internship/cpi applications).

[We are] leaving the building phase. [We should] keep innovating own classes.

Class energy is mutual, teachers share motivation with students.

“[How can we create] more effective evaluation (from and to teachers)?

Death to blackboard: it isn’t 1995 anymore.

More dialogue and continuous assessment of AUC (such as Voices of AUC)

AUC as a real independent faculty. [This means] not under science as AUC is more than just science. Decisions concerning AUC have to be decided on by AUC members.
EMPOWERMENT OF ALL STAKEHOLDERS WITHIN AUC

The AUC community is a very active and committed group of people, a lot of whom want to be involved in shaping and improving it. At the Voices of AUC conference we expressed the wish for more opportunities to participate in the organisation of AUC as a whole. A lot of people have ideas and solutions to make AUC an even better place to study and work. In order to utilize this great potential the institution needs to facilitate open communication and provide everybody the opportunity to be heard and be involved. At the time of the conference, a distinct lack of empowerment was expressed; a feeling that a lot is asked of students and staff, which is not matched by an equal voice in the shaping and creating of the AUC environment. A number of concrete ideas were recorded which may change this situation to resemble more closely the dreams that we have for AUC in 2020:

**Staff representation:** An appropriate form of staff representation to complement the student council is an essential part of increasing empowerment of all groups at AUC. While Student Council represents student interests and the college council is a forum for an exchange about AUC on the highest institutional level, teaching staff (and especially core faculty) lack a formal body of representation that advocates their interests.

**Co-creation of essential rules:** We desire to be involved in (co-)creating rules of the institution and want to carry the responsibilities that come with it. The student council’s focus groups are a great example of how students are working towards an improvement of the university and a similar model could invite staff, management and students in joint efforts to scrutinise the existing rules.

INCREASED COMMUNICATION BETWEEN STUDENTS, TEACHING STAFF AND ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

Our deliberations produced a strong call for more communication: to have an opportunity to make a contribution as well as to bring students, teachers and staff closer together and to find a set of shared values that define us as a community. Discussions included creating more effective evaluations and feedback opportunities and organising meeting opportunities between students, staff and faculty. The opportunity the Voices of AUC conference offered to share ideas and listen to input from others was greatly appreciated. The Voices team has listed a couple of practical ideas that came out of these dreams:

**Crash course for external faculty:** For many external staff it remains unclear how to relate to AUC students. They may either have excessively high expectations or use teaching methods more appropriate to large audiences at the VU or UvA. This mismatch often creates confusion at best or a lower quality of instruction at worst. A simple way to overcome this problem is a ‘crash course’ for external faculty. This course should clearly communicate how AUC’s liberal arts and sciences curriculum encourages class participation, how faculty can incorporate interdisciplinary content and how much coursework is appropriate per course (relevant since AUC does not specify beyond a baseline how much readings a given course should provide - professors should judge this for themselves). For new teaching staff these judgements may be difficult to make. The exchange of this type of knowledge from core faculty to external faculty can make our education better.

**Open Dialogues centered around the notions of “Excellence” and “Diversity”:** During the conference we recognised a need for a clear debate on what AUC’s motto “Excellence and Diversity in a Global City” means for the AUC community. The open dialogues around these two terms could open up the notion of excellence to a greater variety of interpretations (e.g. extracurricular excellence, collective excellence, community excellence, role models of...
excellence etc.) and could serve as a way to formulate a clear diversity policy with a common understanding and support by all stakeholders.

Another Voices of AUC event: The format in which the Voices of AUC event enabled all stakeholders to express their dreams, opinions and formulate achievable goals was appreciated by all participants. The call for organising more of these events therefore arose during the evening. A popular suggestion was to organise this type of event on a yearly basis.

IMPROVED PARTICIPATION AND FEEDBACK PROCESSES WITHIN COURSES

For AUC’s classrooms we articulated a desire for more participatory and interactive learning and more effective feedback as well as a desire for more collaboration between faculty and students, based on shared energy and motivation. A couple of questions raised on this topic were: How can we create/maintain a balance between lecture and activity within each class? How can we encourage faculty who encourage active class participation more? How can we appreciate creativity of students more while upholding the guidelines of course manuals? The following concrete ideas were mentioned:

Evaluation of course evaluations: We do not only value course development, but also want to be a part of this process. We want to be involved not just informed, bridging the gap between management, faculty and students. A good illustration of this would be the recently returned outcomes of the course evaluations of the spring semester 2015, which mentions the phrases: “student evaluations have been instrumental in prompting these important adjustments” and “considerable effort has been made to provide courses that are attractive and relevant”. Although these efforts are greatly appreciated, many of us would like to be more involved in the actual process of evaluating raw data or devising complementary ways or questionnaires to evaluate our courses.

Students as teaching assistants: Students have a wealth of information and experience to bring in when it comes to improving courses. One practical idea to make this possible mentioned during the conference is to ask a few students, having completed a course, to stay on as teaching assistants and collaborate with the professor on improving the course for the next semester.

More freedom for faculty to set assignments/goals: Faculty are often bound by predetermined conditions and course schedules such as the rules regarding continuous assessment. This may well limit their creativity in the classroom. Furthermore, if they cannot be creative and flexible, they also cannot extend the resulting energy to students.

QUESTIONS TO CONTINUE THE DIALOGUE

#1 How can we become a more collegial college in 2020?

#2 How can our small college capitalise on its small scale without importing bulky bureaucratic procedures?

#3 What does fair staff representation at AUC look like?

#4 How can we make course evaluations more effective and transparent?
Diversity was one of the most discussed topics during the conference, not least because it is an essential part of our slogan ‘Excellence and Diversity.’ Did you know that the word was written down on conference sheets 33 times? At the conference we articulated major benefits of having students and staff with more diverse backgrounds at AUC. Especially in smaller classes we are convinced that people with differing backgrounds have the power to enrich the learning experience and bring in a variety of perspectives beneficial to all.

A more diverse composition of the student community has a direct influence on every student, as it is compulsory for students to live together on campus. In other words, the more diverse we become as a community the more we will influence and enrich each other’s views inside and outside of the classroom.

As students and lecturers alike we felt during the conference that AUC is not as culturally or economically diverse as it claims to be or as we would like it to be. We would like to put more effort into increasing the intake of international students, as well as students from different economic, educational and cultural backgrounds. Feedback also indicated that some of us feel the university is somewhat elitist in its selection process and needs to reach out more to less privileged schools rather than making “safe” choices from the higher class.
[In 2020 we hope to] really appreciate a student community who have not come straight from highschool, [but already] have some life experiences.

[In 2020 we will have] diversity throughout all levels of staff and teachers. [This means] diversity not only within students but also staff/teachers.

Dorms are an important part of the AUC community feeling.

Bring back interviews to the admissions procedures to provide applicants with the opportunity to prove themselves.

Affirmative action/quota for minority students (controversial?)

Respectful discussion → open discussion → more proactive acceptance of people with more extreme beliefs

Bridging years for high school students from disadvantaged backgrounds. AUC students could mentor them as they learn the skills that bring them up to par for AUC. More interaction with ‘less privileged’ high schools.

Adapt teaching to diverse audience/student body.

Keep the dorms! good for social atmosphere. Go outside the bubble ! ! ! Students could form a group for outreach/promotion. Student research to be linked to real life issues/organisations to make them applied.
WELFARE FUND

At the conference we voiced a desire to look how we could make studying at AUC for students from a lower socio-economic background a more attractive option - especially in times of disappearing student benefits. In looking at ways to lower the costs of studying at AUC a couple of questions surfaced: Should exemptions from the on-campus housing programme be possible in special cases or do we want to strictly adhere to our identity as campus-based university? Could we all agree on a reallocation of AUCSA or ASF finances in order to create a welfare fund? In fact, AUC already has the DAP awards programme, which extends scholarships to Dutch students with a minority background. Maybe this topic surfaced so strongly because of DAP’s low visibility.

OUTREACH PROGRAMME

Promotion of scholarship opportunities for talented and dedicated students can offer opportunities to people of more diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Students and staff acknowledged that more funding should flow into scholarship opportunities. Apart from this general perception we raised a number of questions which we should answer in the coming year: How can we use student ambassadors and our community’s existing networks to promote AUC at more (diverse) high schools? How can we advertise AUC to students who are pressured by parents to find a conventional job as soon as possible, especially if they might be wary of a programme that is new to them?

ADMISSIONS AND BRIDGING PROGRAMME

The admission process could be made more creative by, for example, including the submission of a lab report, essay or art work/story for the respective majors. The interview process was also discussed. Some believed it should be brought back whilst others argued that the interviews reflect little on the quality of the students, although we cannot say whether this was a comment on the way that interviews are conducted or rather their overall merit. Apart from the interview debate, there was a broad consensus that admission standards should not be lowered. A number of suggestions voiced during the conference offered solutions to bring certain disadvantaged students ‘up to par’ with the programme. They involved AUC students mentoring students from disadvantaged backgrounds to meet AUC’s entry requirements in a bridging programme. This programme could lead up to the admissions process.

STUDENT COMMUNITY EFFORTS

A lot of us are willing to invest more time into making AUC a more diverse place. In the time between the conference and the publication of this report the efforts of the Right2Education student group, AUC faculty and management in providing Dutch language lessons for guest students (refugees) have shown what the AUC community is capable of. Student and staff efforts were facilitated by the institution; a multi stakeholder working group published a commitment to opening up AUC to refugees. What if these efforts continue to spread among the student population? What are we capable of?
QUESTIONS TO CONTINUE THE DIALOGUE

#1 How can we become a more diverse and inclusive college in 2020?

#2 How can AUC become a more obvious choice for academic high achievers in high schools all across the Netherlands?

#3 What do we need to do in order to make people with minority backgrounds feel safer and more appreciated at AUC?

#4 How can we mobilise our community (students, staff and administration) to engage in outreach and diversity projects like Dutch A1 courses for guest students?
In a world that is increasingly complex and interdependent, breadth of perspective is of great importance - breadth that goes beyond traditional boundaries; beyond our own cultural understanding of the world and beyond our academic disciplines, no matter how passionate we may be about them.

The students, faculty and staff that attended the Voices of AUC conference expressed a strong valuation of this breadth in perspectives. They recognise that combining different points of view and making connections outside of their usual spheres will lead them to a better and more complete understanding of the world.

Discussions included interdisciplinarity and open communication between everyone at AUC, more connection with outside world, and increased diversity in the AUC community. This section is about our desire to advance understanding not only by gaining a holistic academic understanding through collaboration with other majors, but also collaboration between different levels of experience and expertise - undergraduate, alumni, faculty, industry, and between individuals from different world views and standpoints, whether they be from a different class, a different type of education, or a different country.
Equality of majors. This means: three strong departments.

Ranking vs other UCs - at the top by 2020!

Co teaching between sciences, social sciences, and humanities teachers.

[In 2020 the] institution will be more principled and maintain their position on interdisciplinarity, [maybe with an] interdisciplinary dean[?]

Specialized interdisciplinarity → tutor as role model to show the right spirit and ideas of the AUC curriculum (to guide students)

Specialization vs. liberal arts: how liberal should it be? Get to the essence of your discipline in liberal arts. [We need] organic interdisciplinarity instead of a top down application.

[I believe in] 'noblesse oblige' [For me this means to go] from dreams/knowledge to ideas [and] from academics to society.

The capstone topics in 2020 will be a good illustration of interdisciplinarity at AUC.

Cross listed capstones.

Connect with local staff, students - such as more courses at UvA and the VU - and future employers.

More intercollegiate sports events.

An increase in research internships and courses.

[Re-arrange] theme courses as knowledge platform to create a knowledge market. [It would be a] theme course facilitating the meeting of students, teachers, initiatives, organisations [through] contact persons.
COLLABORATION WITHIN AUC

We would like to create more interdisciplinarity, to overcome what many described as too strong a divide between the different majors and disciplines in the present situation. There is a strong call to encourage academic sharing and increased interaction between students from different majors - a desire to work together rather than focusing on individual goals.

Co-teaching and cross disciplinary courses: One way to facilitate increased collaboration between the different disciplines and majors could be creating new interdisciplinary courses, co-taught by lecturers from different majors - or by incorporating guest lectures from faculty from different disciplines into existing courses.

Student collaboration between different courses: In the whole of AUC we have a wealth of expertise across a wide range of disciplines. It could be very beneficial to combine these when working on projects or assignments. This might benefit students planning and teamwork skills as well as enhancing the learning process.

Equal funding and focus for Humanities, Social Science and Science: AUC markets itself as the ‘science university college’. However, this does not necessarily reflect the views of the community, which feels rather that every field has an equal value and deserves equal focus.

COLLABORATION BETWEEN AUC AND THE OUTSIDE WORLD

Connecting activities at AUC more directly with the outside world was also frequently mentioned. Participants expressed the wish to collaborate more with outside organisations and connect their studies and work more closely with the context of the issues or research projects they engage with. AUC as an institution and the faculty members could play an important role in supporting and facilitating this connection. Furthermore, the extended network they have may be of invaluable use in this respect.

Within the courses themselves, there might be the opportunity to connect them more with the outside world, through research-based teaching and linking student research to real life issues/organisations, to make them more applied. Outreach from AUC, and students or alumni involvement in this, was also mentioned several times. It is apparent that many of us are very involved with the problems and developments happening around us and in society as a whole. We want to connect what we do at AUC more closely with these interests.

Interdisciplinary collaboration is an important reason for many of us to be at AUC, something that liberal arts and sciences has at its core. But the overall impression is that we want to go further, and many ideas on how to do so have been provided.
Outreach to the Neighbourhood: Participants stated that they would like to make more efforts to build a relationship with the local communities surrounding the campus. Many approaches can lead to closer cooperation between the institution, community and academic programme and the surrounding society. Some courses at AUC already incorporate a degree of ‘experiential learning’ into their curriculae. Since the Voices of AUC conference in April 2015 AUC has already taken steps towards consolidating the scattered efforts in this field by creating a new position called the ‘Outreach Coordinator’.

More guest lectures from people with practical experience: One way to get a better connection with different organisations and initiatives is by inviting more guest speakers in. Quite a lot is already happening through Who’s in Town lectures and many courses include a guest lecture. But perhaps this could still be improved, for example by involving students in selecting and approaching guest speakers. Furthermore, by focussing more on people with practical working experience, students can get more of an idea of what is currently happening and what a professional career in such a field might look like.

Connecting courses and assignments with real life issues and initiatives: Many of us have broad interests and are very passionate about making a contribution to the world. At AUC, students can learn the theory that will lead them to a better understanding of their interests. However, there is a wish to connect the theory more closely with the the issues and the real life context of these issues. This calls for more creativity and student input when it comes to assignments and course structures, as well as establishing new connections and establishing working relationships with different organizations and initiatives.

QUESTIONS TO CONTINUE THE DIALOGUE

#1 What does true interdisciplinarity look like and how can we achieve it?

#2 How can course innovation be made more transparent?

#3 Why do we engage with the outside world and what are the criteria for an outreach strategy?

#4 Which existing courses and initiatives are existing links across disciplines or communities and how can AUC students, staff and external stakeholders benefit from them?
The AUC voices conference provided an opportunity for students and staff members to freely speak about what their dreams for AUC in 2020. These dreams did not have to be feasible or practical yet in any way, but only to represent what they would like to see or felt that was missing. In this way a shared long term vision was sketched, based on our values and aspirations, by and large this was a very positive vision. In this section some of the most fundamental dreams are mentioned, together with some of the questions that may help us bring them closer to reality.

Apart from dreaming and thinking how to improve AUC, a lot of satisfaction was expressed as well. We like the community we live in and the opportunities it offers. The fact that so many students and staff were interested in coming together to talk about the future of AUC is a testament to the commitment and enthusiasm we have for AUC and for each other. It is also a clear indication that we want to be involved with all the developments, problems and solutions that affect our community and university.
We hope that at AUC in 2020, we will find a balance between academic achievement and personal development. AUC is currently academically very strong and people are proud of this. We have also seen that this focus, occasionally, may be a bit too strong, leading to personal difficulties regarding pressure and time management. A more creative mindset may help us get closer to this balance. We want creativity in the organisation and in goals we have at AUC. We hope to be able to adjust these and adapt them to more closely fit the shared needs of students, staff and the organization as a whole.

- How can we achieve a balance in the workload, and a balance between academic achievement and personal development?
- How can we create more openness and creativity in the structure and organisation of AUC?

Another dream for 2020 is creating more opportunities for interaction within AUC. In the second theme, a number of difficulties were mentioned that were encountered and have their origin in a lack of interaction. There is a strong desire for more connectedness in various ways, academically, between different majors but also between students, teaching staff and administrative staff. The lack of interaction is currently leading to confusion and misunderstandings. Creating new opportunities for interaction will help bring together the AUC community and will allow it to benefit from the energy of everyone in it.

- How can more interaction within the AUC community be facilitated?
- How can we create more connection between different majors and courses, thus creating more interdisciplinarity?
- What role can a Voices of AUC conference play in facilitating interaction?

Diversity is an important topic within the AUC community. There is a strong awareness that learning happens not only academically but also from each other. We wish to have a diverse community that is as diverse as possible because we feel it enhances our community and learning process. To achieve this, we could focus on inclusiveness. To reach out to and be more accepting towards the needs and potential contributions of people from all sorts of backgrounds and welcome them into our university.

- How can we change the admission requirements to increase the diversity of students?
- Are there any rules or regulation that prevent certain groups from enrolling at AUC?
- How can we reach out to different groups?

Finally, in the future we hope to find a clear direction in what we do at AUC. Where do we want to take AUC academically and as a community? How do our studies relate to our ambitions and hopes for life after AUC? How do we drop or fully realise our claim to Science-focused college? During the conference, the wish for collaboration was mentioned a lot, we want to work together and be connected with all sorts of different people and initiatives. We want to connect and be a part of the context of what we are studying or working on, and this means establishing more connections outside of AUC. To make these choices we need to chart our common values.

- How can we connect our studies at AUC more with the outside world?
- What are the common values that represent everyone at AUC?
The next Voices of AUC event is planned for April 2016. We hope to make this deliberation a yearly recurring feature in AUC’s calendar.

The Voices event/report writing team:
   Carolin Layla Vahar-Matiar
   Ewoud Labordus
   Iwan Peter Gerbrands
   Lia den Daas
   Maaike Sangster
   Marieke Bigg
   Michael Vermeer
   Michiel van der Padt
   Victor van der Brug
   Bram Jaarsma
   Stijn Wilbers
   Tara Elsen
   Tim Moolhuijsen

Report designed by Lisa Maier.

Special thanks to:
Dr. Anne de Graaf
Dr. Peer Smets (VU)