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AUC is a community of individuals who are highly engaged with the world outside and also the world within them. This engagement takes different, subjectively varying shapes in different individuals, ranging from striving to grasp academic concepts, contributing towards the community around them by engaging in committees and student initiatives, looking at the world critically while still being able to see the potential for growth and betterment within it, or by emanating love and respect for those around them. Voices of AUC is an event that espouses to make these private forms of engagement public and transform them into collective action. As individuals voice their opinions and concerns, they often reach the realization that these concerns are not just their own, but of others’ too; simultaneously, they also interact with those who have differing views and try to reach a sense of understanding and a common ground. Voices of AUC hopes to provide just such a common ground: where different, even oppositional views can coexist and where we can collectively deliberate on the values that AUC hopes to strive towards and whether we are successful in attaining these ideals. Many of the conversations are currently being transformed into action plans and we hope to see more of them being put into action in the near future, through the effort and input of those at AUC that always want to make the space around them more inclusive, democratic and considerate.

This report covers the themes that were discussed throughout the evening, namely ‘excellence’, ‘diversity’, and ‘global city’ by assessing the analysis of the current state of AUC, followed by the concrete suggestions and solutions that emerged and then, the bigger transformations that are required to establish our values, reinterpreted meanings and guiding principles. What this report cannot fully cover is the intimacy of the moments that made the evening so special: the honest laughs and the opening up where true experiences and stories emerged, eliciting yet again the magic that appears when humans come together to share and step outside of solely self-interest based agendas. We hope to continue this process over the years and make this form of interaction, one grounded in participation of all stakeholders, a fundamental tenet of AUC life.

This year Voices of AUC was designed as a fully participatory process according to principles of ‘participatory leadership’, sometimes also called ‘Art of Hosting’ or ‘co-creative leadership’. The central aim of this body of practise is to host spaces and processes in which participants can take a lead. The process from start to end can therefore be conceptualised as a “container” for participants to come to more informed action and greater stakeholder connectedness. From beginning to end there are eight steps:

**STEP 1 - CALLING THE TEAM**

This year the AUCSC called on the participation of a number of diverse students and staff members to join the project. Initially, five students (Two in their third year and three in second year), one academic staff member, one administrative staff member and one head of studies formed the core group. They all found the call urgent and worthwhile enough to commit some of their time to forming the core team.

**STEP 2 - CLARIFYING THE CAUSE**

Voices of AUC is a yearly event but our community changes every year. The central question and format have to change with their times. In this phase “What is the central question currently in the midst of our community?” was the biggest question. Last year this question was: “A new Dean is coming to AUC. What do you think he/she needs to know about AUC?” Surely this year there had to be a different essential question underneath many of our everyday questions. In order to host a conversation that truly matters during the Voices of AUC event the team had to create a collective clarity of purpose.

The team sensed that many issues, strengths and questions at AUC somehow tied up to the institution’s motto “Excellence and Diversity in a Global City”. In many explanations the same term would be used carrying different connotations. There was a need for better understanding of the terms in AUC’s motto so that people in our community could speak the same language. Some concepts had entirely lost their meaning or were increasingly used ironically.
Thus finding a common ground of what these terms mean to us now, how they impact specific situations or issues and how we can use this common understanding as a point for a new departure – with a new dean – were seen as the central purpose for this year’s Voices of AUC event.

**Step 3 - Inviting the Stakeholders**

In the third step the team designed invitations that would draw as many members of AUC’s community to participate. PR, logistics and venue at Jeugdland were taken care of and an awareness of the event spread among the community. In this phase the team also designed the process for the evening itself. In order to prepare adequately for hosting the evening the team was trained by a participatory leadership practitioner, who has introduced various participatory methodologies at Utrecht University. This training gave the team more clarity and a better sense of how to create a safe space, guide participants during the event and simultaneously “let go” of the will to direct conversations to a certain outcome. An important principle in this process is negotiating a balance between chaos and order so that new ideas and meanings can emerge – without being directly or dismissively shut down.

**Step 4 - The Event - Meeting Each Other**

During the Voices of AUC event all team members hosted up to three dialogues in three rounds. This was the most visible part of the participatory process, in which the team opened up the ‘process-container’ for everyone to contribute to. There were three main tasks for team members to tend to as hosts of the evening.

Firstly, they had to create a safe space in which everyone abides by the dialogue rules. Sometimes they had to intervene to ensure that every participant roughly had equal speaking time – every voice and experience deserves to be heard at this event. Thus participants did not necessarily get to know the hosting team – more importantly they got to know each other.

Secondly, they had to place this conversation in the context of the overarching theme: meaning making of AUC’s motto. Practically speaking, this meant to phrase and rephrase questions that had emerged in step two and three of the process, see what participants with these powerful questions and let the participants take the conversation from there.

Thirdly, the hosts had to preserve the emergent collective wisdom by inviting participants to write down each other’s comments. Instead of contributing experiences and topics themselves they were instruments to enable new connections and energy to develop.

To carry the energy of the event into participants’ real lives table hosts asked participants to contemplate what they could do (together) to for instance reach a desired form of ‘excellence’, a new way of living and practising ‘diversity’ or the imagined ties to the ‘global city’.

**Step 5 - ‘Harvesting’ the Results**

How many rich conversations or great insights are lost because their content is somehow not recorded, shared with those who could not join in or acted upon?

This question summarises the importance of what we called ‘the harvest’. The term lends itself well to this part of the process due to a number of analogies with farming. A farmer does not prepare and tend his or her fields to then skip the harvest just as the team would not spend the energy of preparing the conference and doing nothing with its results. Even more importantly, the team has to make sure the participants of the conference have the feeling that their important conversations are processed and taken into account at later stages.

There are different angles of harvesting the results of the conference, just as there are different ways to harvest outcomes from a field. The obvious harvest from a field is the crop, but one can harvest a lot more according to one’s specialisation: a painting, poems about the field, soil analysis or a biodiversity assessment. This is the way the interdisciplinary Voices team looked at the comments of the posters. The team was dealing with qualitative data but did not always follow the strict guidelines of scientific qualitative data analysis. Rather, the harvest was an exercise of sense making, according to the frames of reference the team’s participants already knew or were learning about. During a three day retreat in the Spring break the main task of the team was to strike a balance between remaining a ‘container’ for the ideas, terms and concepts that had emerged. The team was not unbiased, but without adding any new ideas or content and conscious about the limitations of their perspectives they started to build compounds, overarching themes and a framework to categorise what had been said into this report.

**Step 6 - Sense Making and Report Writing**

The harvest was closely followed by a process of sense making, which uncovered the following: During the conference, participants had taken the opportunity to address the motto’s concepts in three distinct ways. Firstly, they related the terms to an analysis of the current situation. The main content in this category was the participants’ perception of the average views on excellence, diversity and the global city as also the consequences of those specific understandings of these concepts for the community and themselves.
Secondly, participants used the space during the conference to voice and co-create ideas on how to quickly fix some of the problems outlined in their analysis of the current situation. These ideas provide insights on how to best move forward in shaping the university according to the participants. Lastly the participants used the space of the conference to re-formulate the meaning of concepts or to augment them. In some cases they invented new language to address current analysis altogether. These parts of the documented conversations, the team sensed, were not a part of current analysis nor ‘quick fix’ concrete ideas. Rather, they are attempts at finding long-run solutions. They focus on how current problems could be prevented. Through new vocabulary configurations they expand the realm of what is ‘thinkable’. The report has stayed true to this third field of commentary by including a section on ‘long term transformation’ for all three parts of AUC’s motto.

**STEP 7 - ACT**

This is the step in which the AUC community is right now and will stay for a while. Key to this step is that people in AUC’s community cooperate to perform the actions decided on during the conversations and harvest. Ideas have spread and enthusiasm for some projects has consolidated. Most notably, almost all Voices of AUC team participants have been involved in discussions concerning AUC’s new five year strategy AUC21. Thus the opinions and experiences of the majority of Voices participants have found their way into this next process. As in agriculture, some of the ‘harvested seeds are used for next seasons’ crops’. Through the flow of information and ideas from one process into the other the team has been able to accomplish that. Reading the next chapters of the report, you might also spot ideas worth pursuing. Adding your own ideas and working with the ideas generated in this report is now up to you, as reader. Some students and staff have already taken up ideas that enjoyed broad support. AUC’s communication team initiated a multi-stakeholder brainstorm on the Introduction week which picked up the criticism, improvements and ideas related to introduction week voiced during the event. Together with stakeholders like the AUCSA, student council and tutors they are entering a new collaborative process to design the introduction week for September 2016. Similarly, a number of staff and students were encouraged by the open dialogue on diversity during Voices of AUC in their initiative to re-assess which portraits are hanging on AUC’s walls. Their aim is to open spaces for deliberating gender, racial, ethnic and other kinds of representation in AUC’s academics through the lens of how the community represents scholars on its classroom and study hall walls. As soon as they have garnered enough feedback from the community and its key stakeholders they want to enter a next phase of public discussions and dialogues From the examples given one can see how the end of one process leads to the start of a couple of new ones.

These have been started by people who want to contribute and improve the community - and not by Voices of AUC. They have most likely been inspired by the conversations and new perspectives gained during the Voices of AUC conference. Yet they have chosen themselves to call for addressing a new question. It is in this sense that Voices of AUC does not lead to any concrete projects directly. Rather, it has contributed to connectedness of stakeholders, an exchange or reformulation of meanings and vocabularies and has enabled knowledge for wiser action to emerge among its participants. What participants do with these outcomes depends on whether they see new chances for trusting other participants, collaborating with them and implementing the steps to wiser action.

**STEP 8 - REFLECTING AND LEARNING**

Reflection and learning have been key components during the entire process. Since Voices of AUC is still a relatively new forum at AUC its structures still need to be tested. What type of format works best for the conference? Which invitations attract most members of the community to participate? When does the team need to communicate the date of the conference and how does it manage the report writing process? These are ongoing questions which the team will answer and distill into a transition manual for the next team.
EXCELLENCE

DEFINITIONS OF EXCELLENCE

Many of the discussions we had at the excellence tables were focused on the definition of excellence. However, the definition was approached in two distinct ways: how we perceive AUC’s definition of excellence and our personal approach to excellence. During the discussions we concluded that these two approaches are not always the same.

We discussed that AUC’s definition of excellence seems to be very grade-focused and does not take other aspects into account, such as social skills and committee work. Many of us agreed that there is a culture that values high grades at AUC; a culture of cum laude. In this environment many students feel that academic performance is highly rewarded, rather than their other skills. We also questioned whether we should actually push so much for academic excellence if we are already studying at one of the most demanding educational institutes. This grade-focused culture at AUC and other good universities creates a culture in which community members feel like it is bad and unthinkable to fail. This mentality and approach to excellence subconsciously makes AUC students feel pressured. Furthermore, pressure imposed on students is even increased by the frequent use of excellence in our motto, without giving a clear non-pressured meaning to it. Students mentioned that they feel even more pressured by being constantly referred to as “excellent students”.

The focus on grades and academic performance also related to the high work pressure that students experience. One participant said: “I have no time to appreciate what I am learning”. And this quotation signifies that AUC students feel the pressure to perform well to meet AUC’s standards (solely defined in terms of high grades), but that this does not match with what they want to gain from their education. The pressured and grade-focused culture does not allow them to seek their own academic excellence and appreciate what they are learning. This controversy is also shown by a quote from another participant who said that “grades can be detrimental to excellence”.

CURRENT ANALYSIS

We discussed if grades could actually measure excellence and many of us thought that they cannot. Grades do not equal excellence, but to perform well at AUC, a lot depends on grades.

The problem of how to measure excellence and the grade-focused culture at AUC was also mentioned by AUC teachers. Some teachers noted that they find it difficult to measure their students’ academic performance by the current grading system. Others said that it is simply not possible to measure excellence by grades. Teachers also mentioned that they would rather evaluate an individual student’s development than grade that student in comparison to their peers. In the same discussion also the assessment structure was discussed. We noted that there are sometimes too many exams and assignments, which imposes pressure and stress on students, which in turn can be detrimental to how they perform in their courses. In other words, the culture of excellence at AUC might even counteract the type of excellence that its community members actually want to pursue.

Contrary to our perception of AUC’s definition and culture of excellence stand our personal definitions, which are much broader defined and less grade-focused. From our discussions we concluded that there are many types of excellence and that excellence is not (always) measurable. Many of us saw a clear relation to feeling well and retaining good mental health in our personal definition of excellence. We defined excellence as living to your own full potential without comparing yourself or being compared to others. In our opinion, everyone has their own definition of excellence and excellence in general is a diversity of different perceptions. Some students noted that excellence is found in balance of the academic, social, and personal levels in a person. Although in this sense our personal definitions of excellence seem very balanced and peaceful(?), we also discussed that part of the excellence culture and pressure comes from individual students themselves. We all want to do well, we have that natural drive to excel, and we do feel ashamed when we cannot live up to our own and the communities standards. And on top of that, the “AUC bubble” that we live in reinforces these motivations to perform into competition amongst ourselves and eventually it is this pressured competition that we feel as part of the negative connotation of the word “excellence”.

We discussed if grades could actually measure excellence and many of us thought that they cannot. Grades do not equal excellence, but to perform well at AUC, a lot depends on grades.
CONCRETE IDEAS  
EXTENDING PAST 3 YEARS

From the discussion it became clear that, as stated above, AUC’s culture of excellence creates a lot of pressure and stress for many students. AUC students visiting psychologists to be aided in dealing with these problems is not uncommon, and although the Student Life Officer has made a difference on this issue, the persistence of this problem requires that the AUC community remains active in maintaining the mental health of its members. Additional points were raised that stress-related issues might not be the only problems that keep AUC students from performing optimally. Be it money-related, family problems, or physical health issues, there is a wide spectrum of things that can greatly impair student performance.

For students dealing with such issues, it might be a great relief to be able to delay their studies at AUC and take a semester off. This can give them the opportunity to get better, solve any pressing issues that may desperately need attention, spend time with friends and family, and order their minds. Several of us indicated that the knowledge that you were supposed to finish your studies at AUC within three years puts extra pressure on those stressed-out students. Knowing that there is no time for delay, and that others are able to finish their studies within three years meant that there is little time for taking a break and in the long run this is not only detrimental to student performance, but also to student satisfaction.

The problem right now is that AUC provides very little opportunity for students to take a semester off. Students who fail a course need to take it again later on in addition to their normal course load, and an extension of the study past three years costs a student their honours degree. AUC has good reasons for doing this, since they get a significant government grant for every student who graduates within three years. While we recognise that AUC has a legitimate incentive to want students to finish within three years, there are significant problems with the way this is being brought about at present. Many contributors did not know whether it was possible to take a semester off and if they did, it was unclear to them what the requirements were. At two separate tables, the suggestion was raised to make it easier for students to take an extra semester. It was an important and well-supported suggestion at both tables and received a large amount of stickers during the sticker round.

At present, it is very unclear how to get permission to take a semester off or take a reduced course load and extend past three years. Whether and when this is offered is left up to the student’s tutor, and there are no clear and coherent guidelines for this process. Therefore, we propose that the AUC Management Team, in cooperation with the Student Council and other related parties, set up and make public guidelines that will make clear to all students how and in which circumstances they may apply for a reduced course load or a semester off. It will thus become easier for students to take more time, which will most likely lead to an increase in students who do so. However, it is the right of every student to take their time when they need to, and in this way we want to support them in doing so.

GIVING MEANING TO EXCELLENCE AS A COMMUNITY

The central theme of Voices of AUC this year was to give new meaning to our motto. It is often joked at, and if we want our values to be taken seriously then we should give them meaning collectively. The problem here is that a concept such as excellence has a different meaning for every single person. Practically all discussions about excellence at one point realised that there are many different ways in which one can be excellent, and something that might be seen as excellent for one, may be normal or out of reach for another. Many of us agreed that it would be invaluable to have a discussion of the kind that we had at Voices of AUC on a regular basis at AUC. There were a few specific proposals to accommodate such processes of collectively giving meaning to “excellence”.

The first of these proposals is to set up a wall somewhere in the AUC building on which people can leave their own definition of excellence or their talents that make them excellent. In this way, we hope to spark a wider discussion about what excellence is and how everybody can be excellent in their own way. An idea that is related to this is got a few stickers is to “de-individualize” excellence: to make it clear that excellence is not something created or achieved by one person, but by a community as a whole and in all its parts. The goal here is to take away the idea that the members of the AUC community compete with one another for a scarce resource called “excellence”. Instead, the wall will show that excellence is something that you achieve together. Although the idea of the wall of ideas was brought up in a discussion about excellence, it could work equally well for “diversity” and the “global city”.
The second proposal has to do with the way first years are familiarised with AUC and its values in the Introduction Week. The Student Council, AUCSA, the Student Life Officer and other involved parties had already started rethinking the schedule and activities of the Introduction Week, and some of the ideas put forward during Voices of AUC will be fed directly into this process. We would like to see that in the next Introduction Week, the new first years, their papas and mamas, their tutors, and possibly other teachers, engage in a discussion about what the three pillars of our motto mean to them, and how they think they are going act them out during their time at AUC. Besides making the new students familiar with the values of AUC, this discussion will also serve to create ownership of these values among the new students and the AUC community as a whole. Another voice suggested that we let the new students write a letter to themselves about what these values mean to them, which they can then read later on in their studies. Such discussions could be repeated regularly in tutor groups and public settings such as Voices of AUC.

**Changing Grading & Assessments**

Many of us during the discussions at Voices of AUC recognised that too often, excellence at AUC is defined in narrow terms of grading. It is, however, in the nature of education that students’ knowledge and skills have to be assessed on a regular basis to be able to judge whether they meet the requirements to pass a course and eventually graduate. A number of proposals and ideas were put forward at Voices of AUC to do such assessments in ways that do justice to a more complete definition of excellence.

One such proposal is to have more process assessments rather than product assessments. Many of us agreed that it should be seen as excellent when one takes on a difficult task, and grows in the process of fulfilling this task. Even though the end result may then be not as good as that of another student, this effort should be rewarded in some way. Process assessments are more focused on the growth of a student and their performance throughout different stages of the process, rather than on the end result. In practice, this could mean that a paper is only graded on its end result, but also on previous drafts, writing samples, and research proposals. Many courses at AUC already work with such grading mechanisms, and it could be reviewed and possibly implemented in more courses.

One discussion touched upon the possibility to introduce more problem-based learning at AUC, as is already done on a large scale for example at University College Maastricht. One discussion in particular focused on the problems with current assessment policies and what could be changed. Many of us agreed that for some courses the requirement of a minimum of four assignments is detrimental to the quality of the assessments, especially for courses taught in the intensive period. Teachers then have to choose between spreading the assessments over the four weeks (and thus starting with assessments very early), and planning the assessments all in the last two weeks. The same discussion yielded a suggestion to offer optional assignments to students looking for an extra challenge. Not all of us believed that this would be widely used by students given the workload that they have already, but it will be worthwhile to explore how we can offer extra challenges to some students. We also discussed the possibility of making some assignments pass/fail instead of grading them. Although it might not go to the benefit of students’ efforts or the quality of the work, pass/fail assessments can take away some of the pressure and competition between students.

A wide range of proposals was made in the sphere of grading and assessments, some more widely supported than others. Even if the goal of our inquiry - a system of assessment that uses a wide definition of academic excellence - was agreed upon, different contributors often had their own ideas about the means to achieve this goal. We may say that this is reflective of the fact that every student is motivated to excel in their own way. We therefore do not bring forward concrete proposals, but are merely raising suggestions for change. One thing that we did agree on, is that there is a need to rethink the way we assess one another, and that a greater flexibility in assessment would be welcomed.

**Bigger Transformation**

**Excellence in the Process and the Content**

When we asked ourselves how we would like to see excellence defined and conceptualised at AUC, a common answer was that it should be not so much about grades, end products, and individual student performance, but more about the learning process and the course content. An understanding needs to arise among all members of the AUC community that there is more to excellence than time-slices of the knowledge and skills of individuals compared to one another.

As already suggested in some of the concrete ideas, such as the proposal to introduce more process assessment, more credit should be given to students who might not achieve the best results, but do work very hard and develop the most in taking a course or doing research. A participating teacher described this brilliantly when he told us a story from one of his BRMS classes. The student in question was simply really not good at statistics, and could not seem to understand how the numbers worked and related to one another.
However, the student put in so much time and effort that he or she was eventually able to understand the material sufficiently to pass the course. “And I think that’s excellence”, the participating teacher said. We all found it an interesting and refreshing story, and it offers us some insight into a type of excellence that might not be the most obvious or easy to conceptualise, but does certainly hold some truth. This is not only something that we have to come to appreciate as a community, but first and foremost as individuals: we have to realise that even though we might not be the most vocal in class or get the highest grades, we can still be excellent in how we grow.

A way of viewing excellence that is related to this is to see excellence as “being creative and taking risks”, as one participant phrased it. Is it not a display of excellence when a student picks a course that is somewhat out of their discipline, but still does well in the course, learns many new things, develops their ideas, and acquires a new ways of viewing their own discipline and the world around it? An institution that believes in this style of excellence offers students freedom in choosing their courses – something that AUC already does to a large extent – and completing their assessments. The individual who ascribes to this style of excellence makes use of these opportunities offered, and does not shy away from getting out of their comfort zone and trying a new style of working or a whole new discipline.

This appreciation of the learning process and taking risks could also bring us closer to a more community-oriented way of seeing excellence. This implies that excellence, contrary to current experiences, does not necessarily have to come from competition, but that we can make it together. This would involve attaching less value to grades, and more to class participation and students guiding each other through the course material. Thus it is more about the content and how you internalise that content: you learn together, and while some might do better than others in terms of grades, they can bring that back to the community by helping their peers. An example of this would be a student who spends more time on helping out his classmates, and speaks up in class to share his ideas to the benefit of all others, rather than going through the learning process all by themselves. It would be a great step forward in this respect if we would appreciate that excellence is something that is we develop collectively, and if it is one of the values of our institution and our community, it should never be seen as purely individual.

**FREQUENTLY USED WORDS**

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**INTRINSIC MOTIVATION AND OUR PERCEPTION OF EXCELLENCE**

If we want to achieve excellence through focusing on our learning process and course content, we need to first assess what motivates us to pursue this goal. AUC students are in general motivated and hard-working students, but we discussed earlier that they feel that they cannot appreciate what they are learning because of the high academic pressure and workload. Furthermore, we all agreed during our discussions that people can only live their lives to the fullest and excel in what they do if they enjoy it and feel well doing it. This relates to a topic that we mentioned of which we think it is necessary to create true excellence in the AUC community. Students need and want to be intrinsically motivated and develop a natural curiosity to pursue their education. They need to enjoy their studies and be physically and mentally healthy to get the most out of their endeavours. It is especially this intrinsic motivation that we as a community should aim for. We want all our students, teachers, and other staff members to feel well, enjoy what they do, and thereby excel in their own specific ways. The phrase “feel well, do well”, was written down by one of our students and it was strongly supported by other members of the community. “Feel well, do well” beautifully encompasses our goal of reaching excellence through intrinsic motivation.

In this future scenario that all members of our community feel well and do well, we would also change our perception of excellence. Instead of viewing excellence as something competitive or something that can be measured by grades, we can change our view to be more open to all different types of excellence. In order to value everyone’s and the community’s true talents we should both value each individual’s personal way of reaching excellence and “de-individualize” excellence to value our community as a whole. Being excellent should not relate to obtaining the highest grade or be in the highest position. Every individual member of our community can be excellent in their own ways and when we recognize and truly perceive this, we can also reach excellence together, as a community.
**THEME #2 DIVERSITY**

**APPLICATION PROCESS**

*Entry Requirements*

During the Voices of AUC event, many of us expressed that the lack of diversity is embedded in institutions and social structures much before the application process even begins. Many students and faculty members felt that to be able to address some of these pre-existing inequalities, AUC needs to re-evaluate the entry requirements that it has. These entry requirements include both academic and financial constraints which perhaps privilege those who belong to specific socio-economic classes. Financial constraints include the high tuition fee but also the application fee that has to be paid initially in order to apply for AUC. For students belonging to less economically privileged groups, the application fee could act as an anti-incentive while applying for college. In addition, many of us voiced that the minimum grade requirements which seek to retain and improve the excellent nature of AUC might also be a hindrance to expanding diversity. Almost all of us thought that it is crucial to increase the number of applicants and diversify this applicant pool prior to the admissions round in order to meet the diversity goals that we espouse towards. While the Dutch, particularly the Amsterdam population is highly diverse, only specific groups apply for AUC. AUC's Admissions Policy

AUC's interpretation of diversity within its admissions policy also drew criticism and many felt that there is perhaps a need to expand on what constitutes diversity within applications. What a large part of us felt as a crucial point to further discuss is: do the admissions requirements privilege particular groups of students much more than others, and does this preferential treatment further perpetuate existing social inequalities? If so, then what are the ways in which we can attempt to address this? Hence, the demand for larger discussions is present within the AUC community concerning these and other similar questions. Most conceded that social inequalities go much beyond just AUC and exist within the Dutch and the more general global context which makes it hard to include those within the University who have been excluded from educational processes at much earlier stages.

**EMBRACING EXISTING DIVERSITY**

**CURRENT ANALYSIS**

Most of us agreed that there are limitations to diversity at AUC; lack of socioeconomic and ethnic diversity; its eurocentricity, the AUCSA Board being predominantly constituted of Dutch members; lack of contact between internal and external lecturers, etc. However, some of us also highlighted the usual dismissal of the existing diversity that AUC does have. For example, a variety of nationalities within the university is not all there is to the diversity we want to achieve, but it is still important as a source of learning different perspectives and points of view. AUCSA's multiple committees and the prominent Facebook discussions exemplify the diversity of interests and opinions of the community’s members; the recent introduction of the gender-neutral bathrooms highlights the embracing of difference our community can strive for.

**CONCRETE IDEAS**

*Recognizing Privilege*

In what ways can we embrace the existing diversity and accommodate different cultures and perspectives within AUC? At the event, some of us highlighted the need to recognize our privilege and explore what it means to be diverse on social as well as structural levels. By looking into different kinds of diversity as well as our openness to it, we – as a community – can improve how we deal with and interact with diversity.

*Making Introduction Week More Inclusive*

Introduction Week was a topic that came up often; we discussed how it can incorporate diverse approaches to integration right from the start, perhaps by setting up the Introweek ‘families’ which can also conduct a range of cultural exchange activities, minimizing the clique- ing of nationalities, and encouraging tutors to focus more on integration.
Creating safer spaces
We also agreed on the need to diversify student life; some of us talked about creating safer spaces and platforms while keeping in mind to choose discourses wisely, whether it is debate or deliberation that will bring us closer to diversity. While Facebook discussions do demonstrate the variety of opinions, many of us pointed out the need to go a step further and set up more fruitful, goal-oriented discussions that take place offline. Setting up meetings with board members and the elected body, as well as more information and transparency about the budget and committee structures, were also two favored ideas. Furthermore some of us paid attention to the need to become more sensitive towards one another and aware of how we want our student culture to be like. Hence, most of us agreed that AUC currently already embodies a fair amount of diversity but there is a greater need to actively share experiences and bring this diversity out in public to create an atmosphere that is more sensitive towards others.

WHAT IS DIVERSITY? EXPLORING THE MEANING FURTHER
CURRENT ANALYSIS

The first and fundamental question that arose as a discussion point during the event was what is meant by the term ‘diversity’? Many of us voiced that AUC is predominantly white, upper middle-class and European in its student and staff composition. The fact that tuition is non-subsidized and hence substantially higher for non-EU students also emerged as a concern which could be excluding large numbers of potential students from attending AUC. Many students said that they felt that the image concerning diversity that AUC puts forth is not the same as the reality that they experience within AUC, where most thought there were a very high number of Dutch students. However, despite this, most of us believed that excellence emerges from the existing diversity within AUC. The diversity of backgrounds that students and staff currently have aids in offering a diversity of perspectives and hence, helps individuals to go beyond their existing frameworks of thinking.

The popular definition of diversity that is usually used by universities and other institutions is concerned with representations of different ethnicities, genders, race, religions, nationalities and other axes of differentiation. What most of us saw as essential to include within the prevailing discussion is the diversity in knowledge practices and academic (and non-academic) perspectives. The current curriculum, according to many, is not as diverse as it can or should be; it is principally Western (for instance, within Philosophy and Literature) and heavily depends on the expertise of specific faculty members. A name that emerged during the discussions was that of Dr. Rafael Sanchez, former lecturer at AUC, who taught courses on Latin America within the Political Science track. Students felt that the absence of one lecturer from Latin America caused a shift in the curriculum as a large segment of the courses are no longer being taught.

Another component of diversity which was discussed was religious diversity: this was seen as an element often ignored in the discussions on diversity. A student raised an important question: “Is it safe to say you are religious at AUC?” This concern was shared by many others at the discussion table who felt that perhaps the AUC community is often exclusionary towards religious practices.

fields to gather basic information concerning where and how to go to distinct places from here.

Many ideas for implementation emerged from these discussions. A need was seen by the students, particularly those in the Sciences, concerning having more female lecturers. The Introweek was sought as a space for creating greater integration and inclusivity and generating more cultural sensitivity and recognition of privilege among the students and staff members. Setting up an empirical long-term goal, something along the lines of numerical quotas, was also an idea that emerged during the discussions. Beyond this, an exploration of the ‘informal’ benefits of diversity was also something that many students saw as crucial for the AUC community.

In the long run, it is important to also create an AUC liberal arts and sciences global brand which can help us in tapping into a larger number of international students and hence enabling in enhancing the diversity within AUC. This would additionally aid in tapping into a larger range of faculty as well and hence also facilitate diversification of the curriculum.

In addition, there is a need to discuss and decide upon what values AUC stands for and strives towards. How far or close are we from the attainment of these ideals? Are our current definitions of ‘leadership’ in line with these ideals, or do we need to rethink such terms and espouse towards distinct, new values for individual students? These were the broad themes that most of us thought were crucial to reach some form of concrete collective consensus upon, but also keep the discussion continuously going.

THEME #2 - DIVERSITY

CONCRETE IDEAS
OUTREACH

CONCRETE IDEAS

Various concrete suggestions emerged regarding the Outreach initiatives of AUC. Activities such as participation in mentoring programmes at the Weekend College were seen as highly effective and almost all of us thought that more of such initiatives and modes of connecting with the city of Amsterdam are needed. Many students also gave voice to a recurring concern within the AUC community regarding the scholarships given from companies that many deem ‘unethical’. There was general consensus that AUC needs to look into alternative sources of funding scholarships. Another idea that emerged was that more connection between students from multiple disciplines and majors and also from different years must be encouraged in order to allow engagement with a range of perspectives. A concrete idea was connecting more with alumni and having them more involved within the Open Day(s) conducted at AUC. The AUC website can also be further updated to include examples of what students do after graduating. This is also concomitant with the efforts currently being made by the Student Council to create a Masters’ Database and ensure greater internal coordination to enable students to approach our in-house experts on multiple fields to gather basic information concerning where and how to go to distinct places from here.

FREQUENTLY USED WORDS

- auc (28)
- students (22)
- different (17)
- dutch (14)
- how (11)
- from (11)
- with (10)
- facebook (10)
- aucsa (10)
- backgrounds (9)
- voices (8)
- religious (8)
- perspectives (8)
- discussions (8)
During Voices of AUC we explored what the term global city means. It is the last concept in our motto and can be approached from different angles. Why, though, is it necessary to uncover definitions of the global city? The conversations around our position in Amsterdam, the ‘global city’ in question, spanned a range of topics: Some focussed on understanding AUCs geographic place, its connections to the outside world and its location as potential for enhancing our learning at AUC. At other times it zoomed in on our individual mechanisms of placemaking, feeling at home and the constructions of boundaries between the AUC community and outside communities. The following section will showcase the biggest debates around the Global City and its impact on our experiences - All of that in order to in the following sections update AUC’s mission in its relation to ‘what is outside of AUC’ and in order to personally reflect upon our role in creating the unique AUC community.

Current Analysis

‘GLOBAL CITY’ - WHAT DOES THIS TERM EVEN MEAN?

In discussing the meaning of the global city the most fundamental question we deliberated was why we even engage with the world outside of AUC and the dorms. Why do we even have this motto and should we not just get rid of it? Some answered that it indeed just is a slogan. Others replied that the ‘Global City’ in AUC’s motto made sense because it turns expanding students’ and staff’s vision to the outside world into a central mission of the institution. We mentioned that “AUC provides a global mindset” that may be actuated locally and this happens in a city with “global qualities”. We lauded the large expat community and accessibility of Amsterdam for English speakers; some of us remarked that those qualities and the proclamation of Amsterdam as a Global City is done as a marketing tool. Harnessing Amsterdam’s global fame indeed seems to work in attracting international students, as AUC has one of the highest rates of international students of all Dutch University Colleges. The multitude of nationalities and its sheer super-diversity in terms of inhabitants, we assessed, were key factors for the city’s openness to new people and new ideas. Frankly, the city and the AUC community share many similarities, such as its high degree of internationals. The city thus is seen very positively by us, but we question how much we are a part of it. Like the tourists that visit Amsterdam briefly and then leave, to what extent are students at AUC ‘educational tourists’, obtaining a degree and then leaving again? This question was explored extensively in the conversations that followed. One of the key terms that emerged in those conversations about our relation to the city was ‘the bubble’. Is our distinction from the city for which we use the term ‘bubble’ a good thing or not? In our ‘interaction with Amsterdam’, are we “introverted? A bubble?”

Readings of the Bubble

From the mind maps created during Voices of AUC it is clear that there are both positive and negative readings of the bubble. One of us remarked that ‘AUC is a bubble so not a big part of the city as much; [There is a] conflict between AUC culture and the global city.’ Within this community the ‘high GPA culture’, the high levels of motivation and the 3 years of housing experience were defined as ‘making AUC special’. For some students the focus on a high GPA ‘could be a limiting factor for being involved in a global city’. Our position in between the VU and UvA and our physical location, just outside of the city, at Science Park lead some of us to the perspective that we are ‘disconnected from the rest of the student population’ in Amsterdam. In general UvA students are seen to be more part of society than the ones AUC. This ‘reduces learning opportunities’. Also, some of us noted that they don’t have a lot of interaction with locals. The website and the motto suggest a host of opportunities in the Global City waiting to be reaped. A student remarked: ‘I didn’t see opportunities “lying out there”’. On the opposite end of the spectrum some of us voiced that ‘right now, most initiatives that bridge the gap between the AUC community and the city come from students or instructors’. From this perspective engagement with the city is a personal choice. ‘Excellence’, someone reminded us of, ‘is more than grading. It can also show itself in someone’s interaction with the city.’ Whether that is thanks to or despite AUC’s courses and policies was a point of debate. Some voiced that they had not
experienced many social or academic activities centered around the global city organised by AUC.

There remains much to be deliberated and discovered in terms of our involvement with the city. Four points clearly crystallised during our conversations. Firstly, ‘AUC people group together’. Secondly, there is a sentiment among these people that ‘we should not take cool things at AUC for granted. i.e. the Bubble in itself is valuable’. This then thirdly led many to the realisation that our community could also take the motto as an opportunity to recurrently, in- and outside of the curriculum, explore AUC’s identity and its boundaries. Why do we create a bubble? How can we use the bubble for an individual, collective or societal advantage? And when does the bubble inhibit us in engaging with ideas and people outside of it? Luckily, there was a consensus that ‘we do not necessarily need a big change to access this global city’. In the following chapter this report will show which changes we thought are possible and desirable in the short term to live up to the promise of living, working and studying in a global city.

CONCRETE IDEAS

The following section will focus on concrete ideas about how we can better exploit the potential Amsterdam has to offer. Students and teachers generally agreed that personal engagement is crucial to explore the multitude of opportunities our city has to offer. Yet most of us also consented that there are still many things that can be further improved on an institutional level at AUC to facilitate this.

CLEAR INFORMATION PROVISION

Music festivals, internship fairs, art exhibitions, and many other interesting events happen in and around Amsterdam on a daily basis. Our city offers a vast amount of possibilities to engage with its citizens, initiatives and firms – be it on a cultural, academic, or professional level. Many students, especially the new residents of Amsterdam amongst them, complained that they are missing a starting point that allows them to dive into the local life; a lack of information about events, programs, and other happenings was often stated as a problem.

One possible solution, which was frequently echoed, is to further expand the information provision by AUC and its community. For example, a weekly newsletter, or an online agenda about upcoming events in and around Amsterdam could be a helpful step in this direction.

EXPAND AND MAINTAIN NETWORK

Every semester students and teachers build valuable links to companies, institutions and initiatives for internships, committees, research, or their personal projects. So far, these contacts are usually not shared and get lost after the engagement by the student, or teacher is ended. In our discussions, we agreed that it would be a good idea to maintain and share these networks, so other members of the AUC community can also draw on it. Amongst other benefits, this would allow us to expand our pool of internship and community project opportunities as well as to facilitate the coordination of co-operations and research outside of AUC.

Setting up an online database to maintain and share these contacts was an idea that repeatedly emerged during the discussions. This platform could also be used to document and exchange our experiences, and by this simplify the process of acquiring important information about existing contacts. Hence, by this we could improve the overview of possible opportunities, share and maintain our network, and in the best case build sustainable relationships with individuals, institutions, and companies on an institutional level in the long run.

INTENSIFYING RELATIONSHIP WITH UvA AND VU

We also agreed that strengthening the connection, both academically and socially, between AUC and their mother organisations, UvA and VU, is important to further the integration of our college in Amsterdam. On an academic level, many students would be prone to complement their curriculum with courses at the UvA, or VU, for instance to learn from a different didactic approach, or deepen their field of interest. However, it was often deplored that there is only little encouragement and support by AUC to enrol in external courses. Although AUC took first steps to work on this problem, there was general consensus that the institute should provide more information about and improve its guidance in the process of enrolling in off campus courses. This particularly demands for greater transparency about how external courses can be implemented in the AUC curriculum, for instance answers to questions such as does this course fulfil my major, or minor requirement should be easily accessible.

Another idea was to make a minimum of one external course substantial part of AUC’s curriculum. Furthermore, many students would welcome a greater involvement of AUC in discourses around and the decision-making processes at our mother institutions, such as the current debate about the decolonization & diversity commission. Whilst we agreed that this has to largely happen on an individual level, we also agreed that AUC could help to shed more light on issues concerning all students. In order to integrate in the wider student life of Amsterdam, many Voices participants...
believed that the AUC community should try to connect more with the student bodies from other universities. Most ideas revolved around encouraging more co-organized initiatives such as educational, sport, or social events. This could be particularly beneficial for our committees, because collaborations with UvA or VU students could increase their outreach, allow them to draw on a larger network, and help them to acquire more resources.

Further integrating the global city in our curriculum

As stated before, Amsterdam offers many great learning opportunities ranging from illustrious museums, over acclaimed research institutes to innovative projects and companies. Many teachers as well as students think that AUC’s curriculum has not exploited this great potential to the fullest yet. AUC’s courses should embrace these opportunities offering students the possibility to apply their newly acquired knowledge. To encourage this engaging learning, most of us agreed that more field trips, excursions and research collaborations should be included in the courses.

Engaging with the local neighbourhood

Another question that arose in the discussions was how AUC can become an active and productive part of our neighbourhood. Many voiced concerns that AUC, as an university of rather privileged students, does not contribute enough to the local community. Although everybody recognised that existing projects such Jeugdlab are important initiatives in the right direction, most people agreed that AUC could build more bridges to its environment. Ideas included more committee engagement, and opening as well as promoting AUC events to the public.

Bigger transformation

Long term trends and wishes that were voiced during the conversations dealing with the global city mainly dealt with three topics: Designing a framework of methods for engaging with Amsterdam, formulating the institution’s obligation to send students into the city and thirdly specifying very personal reasons and benefits for engaging with the city. All three are more abstract than the proposals in the preceding chapter. They deal with how the AUC community at large and its people very personally deal with stepping out of that community and connecting to, collaborating with and learning from other communities and institutions.

Methods to reach out of our community

One table took the time to formulate a framework for engaging with the city:

1. Don’t force it
2. Channel/curate with students and lecturers - they have ownership
3. Get out there & bring people back in
4. [Reflect:] (learn/deliberate/write about) different concepts of what global city is

In all of these steps it seems important for us to guarantee transparency. By removing hierarchies of access to information involvement could be increased. Network and mobility sharing becomes key in that context. The more relevant contacts are shared, the more likely a match between course content and external institution or student and internship position can be made. We felt that lecturers’ level of involvement could be higher if the global city is to play a major long term role in AUC’s future. Of course, the level of their involvement, some staff replied, depends on how much time they can allocate to building new relationships for their courses. These long term, stable relationships, lastly, seemed to be a consistently recurring theme. It sounds obvious: Invest in long term relationships between people in our institution and community and people from other communities. While this already happens naturally it is worthwhile exploring how we could support each other more in this vital practice.

AUC’s obligation to send students into the city

At AUC on campus housing is mandatory for all students. Many of us feel that this rule creates a demanding bubble. There are many positive sides to the bubble but some of us ask: ‘Does AUC [through this rule] prevent students from reaching out into the city?’ Of course it is up to every individual student whether they want to engage in the rich cultural, scientific, sports or community life Amsterdam offers. Yet sometimes one needs a nudge to even explore or gain access to specific networks created by trusted long term relationships, some of us argued. If so, then getting students into the city should be a part of AUC’s mission as to compensate for mandatory housing. The curriculum already provides room for this exploration through the course named ‘Global Identity Experience’ and the mandatory internship or community project. A clear long term communication of and and focus on ‘getting students out there and bringing people back in’, engaging them and exposing them to new experiences may help to resolve the divide felt between the dorms and the city.
Our personal obligation to reach out to the city

One of our main conclusions on engaging with the ‘global city’ was that ‘people should feel motivated themselves to link people on facebook to events’ and spread their networks. ‘This builds the community’, according to another participant. We should all be aware of the opportunities to learn by living in a global city. Long run transformations in the way we understand excellence and deal with diversity will help reinforce our engagement with the city. For instance, if you cherish ‘values of curiosity rather than only excellence’ this might inspire a lot more people to explore beyond the bubble. Ultimately, personal engagement with city, a lot of people felt, is undertaken in order to expand your vision: students studying at AUC with that aim as their central motivation seems like a worthy long term goal for us all to work towards.

Frequently used words

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<th>Word</th>
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During this year’s Voices of AUC, we wanted to address our motto, “Excellence and Diversity in a Global City”, what it means to us, and what it could possibly mean to us. We started out not from the idea that the motto had to change, but from the idea that it contains values that we, both as individuals and as a community want to see reflected in ourselves, and to some degree already do. The goal was to provide ideas and guidelines that will help us in giving meaning to our motto, and we believe that in this respect we have had an exceptionally productive discussion.

We found that excellence is not something that one achieves individually, measured in grades, social activity, or any other single parameter. In the ideal world, the excellent community is one that is curious, motivated, not afraid to take risks or be creative, and at the same time cares for the mental health of its constituents. We should look critically at how, what, and how often we grade, and we should realise that it is not a shame to fail sometimes, and instead help each other back up.

We found that diversity is not something that can be easily measured in quotas and defined according to axes of differentiation. More than a number, diversity is a practise, a way of working as a community that is inviting to anyone and that accommodates the widest possible range of needs. The Diversity & Outreach Team has already made significant headway in opening up AUC to a wider public and its efforts should be lauded, yet at the same time we should not forget that diversity is also found in how we interact with one another in AUC, and what and how we learn.

We found that actively living and studying in a Global City is not something that happens by itself, especially not for a community so strongly grounded to the ‘Bubble’ of AUC and the Dorms. While we should not forget that this tight-knit community gives us unique opportunities and experiences, we should also realise that the Global City brings with it chances and responsibilities. Chances to expand our horizons and learn from others, and responsibilities to engage and to give back. We should stay close to our parent universities UvA and VU, inform each other about opportunities and events, and as a community set up and maintain networks with the city.

One proposal that connected all three of the themes was that for a wider, recurring discussion on our motto and what it means to us all. The Introduction Week was flagged by many as an excellent opportunity to teach new students about our values and struggles, and we too can learn from them as they come here for the first time. The Introduction Week is the time where we can evaluate how we as a community want to achieve excellence, diversity, and a healthy connection to the global city of Amsterdam. Tutor group discussions, sticky note walls, and self-reflection are only a few ways in which we could spark this dialogue. We can only take our motto – and by extension ourselves – seriously, when we give everyone the chance to contribute to giving meaning to that motto. The deliberations on 21 April specifically gave students and staff room to reformulate terms, give them new meanings and create a new shared vocabulary. In the long run, widening the ways we can understand these concepts or narrowing them down towards new meanings on personal, institutional and societal/academic discourse levels will enable us to grow and adapt to changing times.

Here, then, lies the potential of the AUC Community: we are relatively small, open to change and new ideas, and do not fear to speak up and have our voice heard. When we say that we want to have recurring discussions about our institutional ideals, goals, and values, we do that because we believe that we can, and that such discussions will be meaningful. We have seen an example of this during Voices of AUC, an open dialogue leading to this report full of new ideas and ambitions. We the writers/organisers, and we hope others with us, will take up these ideas and see that the best of them are implemented. We would like to demonstrate that the AUC Community can grow and be self-reflective, that it is ready for the future. We would like to thank all the contributors to your refreshing, enlightening, and challenging ideas, and we hope to continue the dialogue with you next year.

Much love,
The Voices of AUC 2016 Organising team:
We would like to give a special thank you to:
  Organic campus for their lovely dinner
  AUCafé for hosting us
  Danielle and Stijn for participating as table hosts
  All participants for coming
  Anne's husband Erik for printing our posters