Amsterdam university college

AUC

AUC NEXT

Five-year strategy 2022-2026

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University of Amsterdam

VU Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

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Five-year strategy 2022-2026
Amsterdam University College

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Following the Council of Deans' approval of the strategic education policy outlines on 26 October 2022

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Preface

AUC NEXT presents the direction that AUC intends to take in the next five years. As a strategic plan, it has a double purpose. It is a description of what we consider to be the key features of our institutional identity and position in the wider educational landscape, as well as a statement of the priorities and choices that follow from this and that will guide AUC's future internal decision-making. AUC is doing well.

We can take pride in the success and quality of our programme as well as the many accomplishments of our former and current students. AUC NEXT does not, therefore, constitute any radical departures from our existing direction. However, in order to continue to remain relevant and at the forefront, we do need to set out clearly how we will respond to the pulse of the world around us.

This means, first and foremost, that with AUC NEXT we acknowledge the essential role that higher education institutions can play in improving our understanding of, and responses to, the societal and global challenges that we face. We emphasise the important contribution that a Liberal Arts and Sciences programme can make to meeting these challenges. Second, and as part of our wider responsibility, AUC NEXT articulates our understanding of what it means to be an international undergraduate honours programme. This concerns our appreciation of individual excellence, the observation that diversity is not a given but an ideal, and the need to embed ourselves firmly in the academic and local community of which we form an integral part.

The preparation of AUC NEXT started in October 2020. The plan is the outcome of an extensive process of deliberation in which input has been received from many stakeholders: students, core and partner faculty of AUC, our parent universities the UvA and the VU, our Council of Deans, the 2022 accreditation mid-term panel, and AUC's International Advisory Board. We hope, and expect, to be able to draw further on the advice and input of all members of our community in the implementation of AUC NEXT. The success of a strategic plan depends on the details of the manifold decisions that follow from it. It is for this reason that we view this document to be the beginning of AUC NEXT, not its completion.



The NEXT Mission and Values

The value of AUC's Liberal Arts and Sciences (LAS) programme is even more obvious today than when AUC was founded in 2009. The climate crisis, the spread of misinformation, health risks, datafication – these are just a few of the many important issues and challenges that require citizens who can apply different academic approaches and take different perspectives, and who are civically engaged and socially responsible. Because of its special position as a joint initiative of two large research universities in Amsterdam[1], AUC is particularly well suited to provide the comprehensive and interdisciplinary training of such citizens.

'Excellence forms the outcome rather than the starting point of an educational journey'

As a small-scale and intensive undergraduate college, AUC offers education that is highly valued by students and peers. The academic, institutional, and social aspects of the LAS programme at AUC are interrelated and express two key values of AUC: individual development and social engagement. LAS at AUC is a programme of excellence, and we consider excellence to refer to a process of individual transformation: to excel is to develop and exercise one's talents to their full potential. Excellence therefore forms the outcome rather than the starting point of an educational journey. To achieve this outcome, it is essential that students have the freedom to create their own personal study programme from a rich and coherent set of course offerings. This freedom is embedded in the college environment: students are part of an academic community, which is itself part of a wider context that affects one's choices and gives meaning to them. For this reason, we consider individual development and social engagement to be inextricably linked.

An important part of this wider context is the city of Amsterdam and we will therefore expand the educational initiatives and activities in the city, as well as strengthen the ties with our parent universities. The connection between individual flourishing and social engagement is also reflected by the importance that we attach to diversity and pluralism, and the acknowledgement that further steps need to be taken to realise the ideal of an academic community that is open, diverse, inclusive, and that reflects and values cultural, moral, political, and religious pluralism.

From its inception AUC has emphasised the relevance of science in studying and addressing the challenges that we face[2]. We will continue to do so. We also recognise that the study of the ethical, legal, cultural, and behavioural dimensions that the humanities and social sciences offer is equally indispensable. This combination ensures that our programme truly represents the ideals of the Liberal Arts and Sciences.

1 University of Amsterdam (UvA) and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU).
2 In this document the term "science" refers to the natural and formal sciences. To avoid misunderstanding, we thus also speak about our "science major" (instead of the usual "sciences major").



Implications

- We will continue to value the personal and academic development of each individual student within our academic community.
- We are committed to staff and students working together to generate questions, insights, and knowledge on complex issues.
- Students will be trained to obtain an integrated understanding of complex issues.
- We will employ plural pedagogies inside and outside of the classroom.
- We are committed to situating the various disciplines within their broader societal context and consider them as complementing each other in this.
- We will further develop educational initiatives that will strengthen our position and visibility in the city of Amsterdam.
- We continue to express our commitment to policies of diversity and inclusion and put these into action. This will include taking further measures to promote, support, and facilitate greater diversity of the student body and of our staff. Furthermore, we aim to participate actively in the (inter)national debate on policies of diversity and inclusion and their relation to academic freedom and to ideals of moral and political pluralism.
- To reflect our new understanding of excellence and to avoid the suggestion that we have already successfully realised our diversity objectives, we will seek a better way to articulate these features of our mission than our current motto allows.
- In order to enable everyone to develop their talents to their full potential, we will strengthen our support structures for students from groups that are currently underrepresented at AUC.



The NEXT Curriculum

Based on our core values and the profile of AUC in which the natural and formal sciences play a special role, we plan a number of adjustments to our curriculum. Social engagement is an important part of the profile of both the UvA and the VU. Key ingredients include the international classroom, our diversity and inclusion policy, and community service learning. Content-wise, it entails a focus on societal challenges – both global and local. The emphasis on individual development not only means that students can build their own personal study programmes, but they also become aware of the academic context of the knowledge, skills, and understanding that they achieve within their own fields of interest. This applies to both the philosophical and methodological presuppositions underlying their understanding, as well as the ability to look beyond their own major and to employ interdisciplinary research approaches.

'The emphasis on science is central to the foundation and organisation of AUC'

The emphasis on science is central to the foundation and organisation of AUC and we continue to aim for an enrolment of at least 50% of our students in the science major. We specifically acknowledge the role science can play in understanding the complexities we face as academics and citizens, in addition to the perspectives of the humanities and social sciences. It means that in the programme's discipline-transcending elements, we attach particular importance to connections with science. Given the importance of the perspectives from all three majors, the various disciplinary elements of the majors continue to form a vital part of our programme.

An emphasis on science will also be reflected in our course offerings and the acquisition of skills. It allows us to bolster the social engagement feature of our profile, given the importance of science for a comprehensive understanding of the challenges formed by, for example, developments in artificial intelligence, public health hazards, or climate change.

The small-scale and intensive nature of our programme allows us to develop new interdisciplinary courses and pioneer new pedagogies more easily than large programmes. Making use of these possibilities, we will strive to function as a platform for educational innovation.

Constellations

AUC offers an LAS programme that speaks to global and local societal challenges. These challenges require students to achieve both depth of understanding within each major and opportunities to experiment with communication, collaboration, and the sharing of insights across majors. Our focus on science encourages this experimentation: it gives students access to scientific languages, methods, and practices in a way that complements their disciplinary interests. Our aim is to create more dynamic and effective pathways to interdisciplinary collaboration, knowledge formation, and problem-solving. One of these pathways is the introduction of six course constellations. Each constellation will be an ensemble of courses from all three majors, corresponding with the research themes of the UvA and the VU and addressing important societal challenges. The constellations and associated topics of enquiry will be:

- Cognition and Imagination: Nervous system, the senses, consciousness, media, arts.
- Digital Worlds: Information systems, artificial intelligence, digital transformations, games, privacy and security.

- Energy and Climate: System earth, climate change, energy transition, governance and legislation, scenarios.
- Health and Society: Human health, (international) public health, bioethics, health technology assessment.
- Human Development: Evolution, anthropocene, social and cultural change, migration, urbanisation.
- Order and Complexity: Stability and resilience, cybernetics, origins of life and universe, material worlds, networks.

The constellations do not serve as mandatory packages nor are they meant to cover all topics taught at AUC. They will form natural foci for students when they are building their study programmes and will further strengthen the internal coherence of the curriculum. The development of new courses within the constellations will be stimulated, including involvement of core staff, partner faculty (academic staff from outside AUC) and students. The constellations will also help to shape the organisation and coordination of specific elements of the curriculum, such as capstone projects, and community projects and internships (CPIs). Furthermore, they will guide us in our collaborations with external stakeholders, the selection of sponsor initiatives, as well as the involvement of partner faculty.

'Constellations will be ensembles of courses from all three majors and will form natural foci for students when they are building their studies'

With the introduction of the constellations, students will no longer be required to take two theme courses. Instead, students will be required to take two courses in each major outside their own. The existing theme courses will be either phased out, or transformed into regular courses. We will further emphasise the responsibility of academic researchers to reflect upon the values that guide their activities and on the role that academic research has in society.

The tracks

The tracks within the three majors form an important organising principle of the curriculum and they will continue to do so. Each of the tracks will be associated with one or more ((sub) disciplinary or interdisciplinary) graduate programmes, and will help prepare students for admission to those programmes. Possible admission deficiencies for these programmes can be overcome either from AUC's own course offerings or via the elective part of the AUC programme, in particular off-campus courses and study abroad.

Experiential learning and team science

Experiential learning refers to a pedagogy in which students 'learn by doing' and by their reflection on the experience. It already features in our curriculum in our field and lab courses and we will further stimulate lecturers to adopt possibilities for experiential learning in their courses. A sub-category of experiential learning is community service learning (CSL), which enables students to use their academic skills to contribute to societal issues. CSL helps express AUC's core values of individual development, civic engagement, and social responsibility. Furthermore, by relating the various projects and initiatives to the constellations, experiential learning can help strengthen the research ties with the UvA and the VU, and our presence in the local environment. The importance of cooperation between researchers is well established within science, especially where lab research is concerned, but is also becoming increasingly important in the humanities and the social sciences. Community projects will also be employed to offer experience in 'team

science', in which academics with different disciplinary backgrounds collaborate in project teams to address research questions from multiple perspectives.

Measures will include

- We will design a learning line for writing skills across the curriculum, including a possible reorientation of the academic writing courses.
- We will work with the UvA and the VU Faculties to consolidate possibilities for AUC students to take advanced (disciplinary) off-campus courses or minors.
- We will investigate possibilities for small, elective courses that address current academic or societal issues, or specific skills, and explore the possibilities of certifying the learning outcomes with microcredentials.
- To strengthen the interdisciplinary elements of our programme in a way that matches our science emphasis, all students will take a course in algorithmic thinking.
- Because of the importance of securing sufficient choice elements in the curriculum and flexibility for the students, taking language courses will no longer feature as a graduation requirement. We will explore how AUC students can continue to follow language courses, for example by redesigning our language offering to meet student demand or by developing new partnerships with the UvA and the VU language programmes.
- We will connect our Dutch language programme with educational programme elements, e.g. CPI, aimed at the local environment and local organisations.
- We will require that all students take at least two courses in each major outside their own.
- We will specify the (sub)disciplinary and/or interdisciplinary graduate programmes to which the tracks help prepare students for admission.
- We will establish study abroad opportunities specifically aimed at overcoming potential admission deficiencies for graduate studies.
- We will increase our liaison with graduate programmes of the UvA and the VU to better prepare our students for success in the selection and admission procedures of these programmes.
- We will expand opportunities for enhanced community service learning within existing courses of the AUC curriculum.
- Where possible we will connect CPI projects to the constellations.
- Elements of, and training in, team science will be implemented.
- We will seek long-term collaboration with external partners in the organisation and formulation of community projects.
- We will actively explore the possibility of introducing new forms of experiential learning, such as design-based learning as a pedagogy to promote team science.



The NEXT Students

Our mission and values determine the kind of college that we want to be and thereby also the kind of students that we aim to attract. We repudiate a narrow understanding of excellence that focuses on the intellectual accomplishments achieved before students enter higher education. Instead we view excellence as the outcome of the complete educational path a student follows and which also comprises social and personal aspects of a student's development. As an undergraduate college, AUC forms a crucial part of that trajectory, but for most students it is not the end of it. For our admissions process, it means that in assessing a student's eligibility for AUC we will pay extra attention to their development potential. Furthermore, the emphasis on science will be reflected in the process.

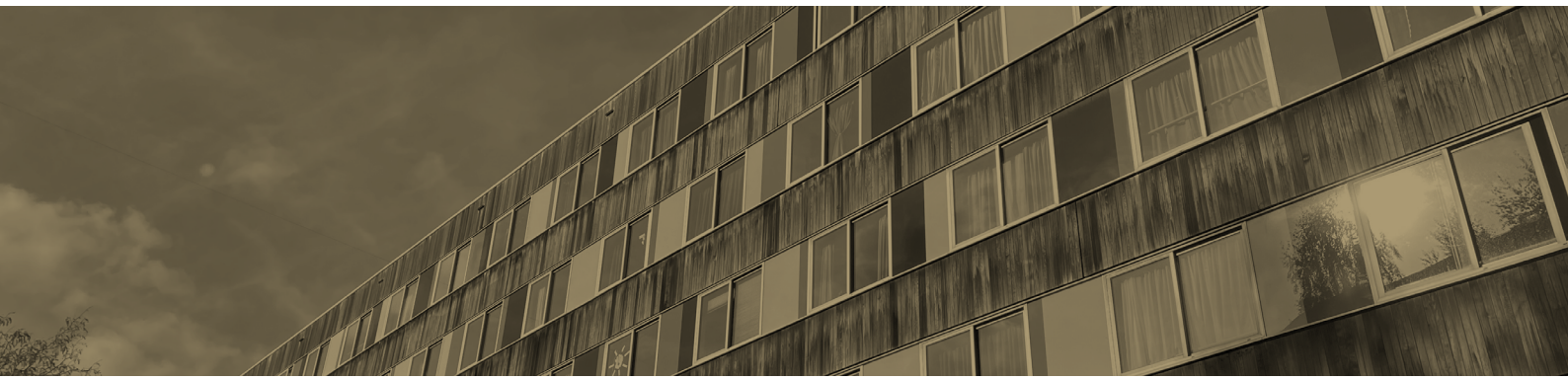
'A more diverse student community will benefit the learning of all students'

A more diverse student community will benefit the learning experience of all students and will better position AUC as a higher education institute in one of the most diverse cities in the Netherlands. In our outreach and admission policies, we will take further measures to increase the diversity of the student body. Particular attention will be given to the enrolment of first-generation students[3] and of students with migration backgrounds.

The LAS colleges in the Netherlands have witnessed a decrease in the number of Dutch students in recent cohorts. We see it as part of our objective of engagement with external stakeholders to actively strive to attract more Dutch students, and we will focus in particular on students from the Amsterdam region.

- We will re-define the mandate of the Admissions Committee to include overarching responsibility for the full range of activities from outreach to recruitment and admissions.
- We will evaluate our admission criteria and procedures in light of our understanding of excellence as an outcome rather than starting point of personal development.
- We will continue to steer the composition of our student body towards a balance of approximately 50% science majors, 20% humanities majors, and 30% social sciences majors.
- We will make the ideal of a diverse and inclusive academic community an integral part of our admissions process, our sponsor initiatives, our scholarship programme, and our student recruitment.
- We will intensify initiatives that combine fundraising and targeted scholarships, such as the Amsterdam Talent Fellowship, to recruit students from groups that are underrepresented at AUC.
- We will involve alumni more in our recruitment and outreach activities.

3 Understood here as first generation in their family to go to university.



The NEXT Student Support

Student support and services directly affect students' health and well-being, contributing to the quality of their learning experience and their academic success. They also promote a sense of belonging and inclusion in the community. They are therefore a crucial element in our College. We will take several initiatives to further enhance the quality of our activities.

- In the organisation of our support services, we will further integrate the various aspects of academic guidance, mentorship, social management of the student residences, and support to students in their learning trajectory as well as their personal well-being.
- Together with students, we will organise an annual series of events and workshops on well-being.
- Where possible and desirable we will further automate administrative services.
- We will increase awareness of AUC's complaint procedures and how complaints are dealt with.
- We will actively support student endeavours that strengthen AUC's position in the local Amsterdam community.
- In collaboration with the other teaching programmes at the UvA and the VU we will explore opportunities to change the academic calendar in a way that reduces the work pressure on students and lecturers.
- We will improve how and where relevant information for students can be found.

The tutoring system is an important resource for our students as they become citizens of an academic and learning community, navigate and plan their studies, discover their interests, develop academically and personally, and find potential post-graduate pursuits. The tutor–tutee relationship is one of the foundational relationships at AUC, and contributes significantly to the success of the College as a whole. As all students experience the tutoring programme, and all core faculty are (in principle) tutors, these interactions are immensely influential to the sense of community at AUC. We will:

- Further improve administrative and systems support for tutors that allows them to focus on face-to-face guidance, developing communities within their tutor groups, etc.
- Promote opportunities for tutors to engage with members of the broader AUC community (alumni, academic networks, non-academic partners).
- Complete and implement a revised hour allocation for tutoring activities.
- Examine the possibility to involve partner faculty structurally as 'graduate advisors' for specific graduate trajectories and for career advice.



The NEXT Institutional Focus

AUC aims to be an academic community in which students and staff members share fundamental values and pursue their academic ideals in close collaboration with each other. It does so in awareness and recognition of the institutional context of which AUC forms part, and of the responsibilities this creates.

The Amsterdam Universities

AUC is a collaboration of the UvA and the VU. This allows AUC to offer a rich and diverse programme in which we draw upon the expertise and facilities of the two universities. Conversely, because of its small scale and intensive education, the universities can make use of AUC for the development of new courses and for pioneering new pedagogical methods.

Measures that will be taken to support and intensify these mutual benefits:

- We will stimulate further involvement of partner faculty in the development of our curriculum.
- We will make opportunities for educational development at AUC available for partner faculty.
- We will involve the management of Master programmes of the UvA and the VU in the formulation and development of our disciplinary tracks.
- We will encourage the UvA and the VU Faculties to offer possibilities for AUC academic staff to participate in their teaching, programme development, and research activities.
- We will make more use of (back office) support services from the UvA and the VU.
- We will further facilitate access for AUC students to UvA and the VU (off-campus) courses and minors.
- We will seek to enhance our collaboration via student and staff exchange with other small scale and intensive UvA and the VU programmes, and with other LAS programmes in the Netherlands and abroad.

External partners

AUC is a part of various national and international academic networks. We will continue to be actively involved and where possible will seek expansion of our involvement. For our study abroad programme, we will explore the formation of an international network of partner LAS programmes with which we can collaborate for both staff and student exchange.

‘We will aim to strengthen our ties with Amsterdam municipality, secondary schools, companies, and NGOs’

The commitment to social engagement means that we will embed AUC more significantly in the various local, national, and international non-academic networks of which we form a part, and we will also actively reach out for new forms of collaboration with external partners. The stakeholders will range from local neighbourhoods in Amsterdam to international NGOs. We will aim to align the various activities on the basis of the constellations, which will serve as the framework for the selection of partners and the nature of the collaboration that we seek. The stakeholders with which we will aim to strengthen our ties will include the Amsterdam municipality, secondary schools, companies, and NGOs. Collaboration with external partners can include, for example, their involvement in experiential learning (community projects, internships, capstone), and sponsoring of the AUC Scholarship Fund.

The NEXT Research

The interconnectedness of research and teaching is a defining feature of university teaching and thus crucial to AUC's identity as an academic community. As an undergraduate college, AUC has no research tasks other than teaching-related. The constellations allow us to connect to the research themes of the UvA and the VU, and so ensure the interconnectedness of our education with research. We will promote research activities as part of professional development and in so doing we will aim to become a centre of expertise for small-scale teaching.

In collaboration with students and partner faculty, we will organise series of events around the strategic themes.

- We will promote research facilities on the pedagogy of small-scale teaching in general, and LAS in particular.
- We will integrate the existing facilities for scholarship and research for our core staff.
- We will invite partner faculty to participate in the development of the curriculum constellations.
- We will examine and encourage the possibilities for research collaborations with the UvA and the VU Faculties.
- We will organise colloquia on constellation topics together with partner faculty.



The NEXT Residential College

AUC's residential nature is a significant characteristic of our educational concept and of major importance in our functioning as an academic community. It allows the AUC learning experience to combine academic, cultural, and social life in a diverse, international, and intercultural campus community setting.

- AUC does not operate the student residences ("dorms") itself but collaborates with the student housing association DUWO for this. AUC's interaction with DUWO and other aspects of the residential nature of AUC will be further integrated into our student support services.
- We will continue to encourage the use of the communal living rooms in the dorms for community and group activities.
- We will explore possibilities to use other spaces around the campus (outside the dorms and Academic Building) as AUC community 'hubs' and to host community events.

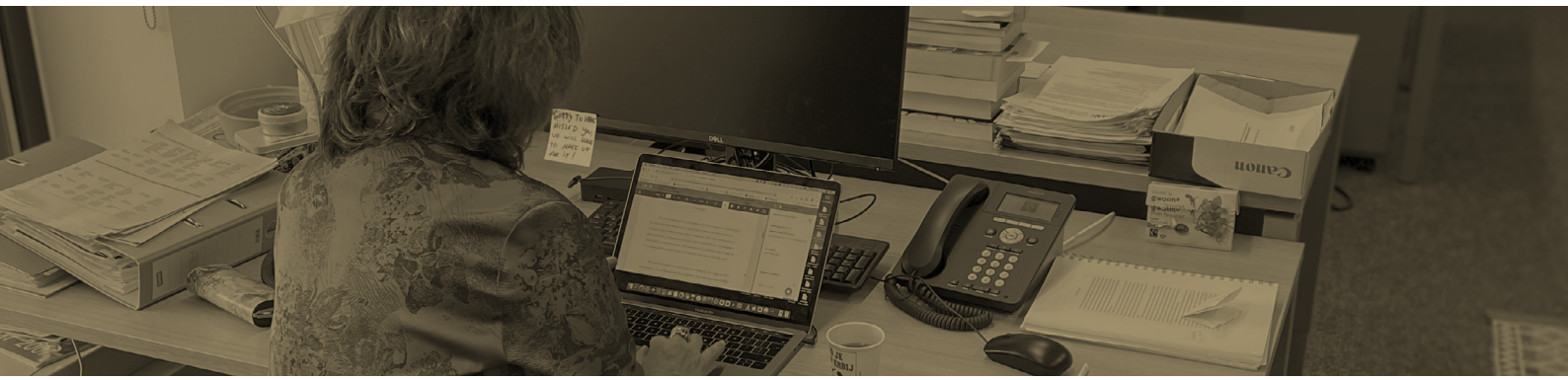
The residential nature of our programme also elicits questions on how it affects the accessibility of our programme and the diversity of our student body. For this reason we will examine the feasibility and implications of a relaxation of the residential requirement, allowing for exemptions from the requirement for some groups of students or for some parts of the studies; any such relaxation should be compatible with existing arrangements with DUWO and should thus not affect accommodation currently available for AUC students.



The NEXT Employer

Now that AUC is well-established, we will complete our transition from a pioneering organisation to one that is characterised by a well-defined and transparent delineation of the roles and functions that employees and management have, and by streamlined internal decision processes that follow that delineation. We will develop a strategic workforce plan (*formatieplan*) that will be the reference framework for our hiring and staff development decisions. It will incorporate the following elements:

- Establishment of the desired staff allocation over the four academic departments, with attention to the desired staff to student ratios.
- Measures to increase the diversity of our staff composition.
- Determination of career trajectories for support and academic staff in collaboration with the UvA and the VU.
- Simplification of the hour allocation system for committees and other activities not directly related to teaching to make it more transparent and flexible.
- A description of the supervision and evaluation of the tutor role that makes it a more visible part of our HRM.
- Expansion and refocusing of the facilities for professional development.



The NEXT Events

The opportunity to meet and communicate with each other is a prerequisite for a vibrant community of learners. We will take several initiatives to promote this further:

- Regular organisation of plenary staff meetings on AUC's policies.
- More social activities.
- Thematic meetings co-organised with the UvA and the VU.
- Stimulation of events jointly organised by AUCSA and AUC staff.
- Re-launch of the Who's in Town series.
- Better visibility of our International Advisory Board, for instance via guest lectures or temporary positions.
- Promotion of extracurricular initiatives involving both students and staff (e.g. debating club, think tank).
- Enhancement of the connection between alumni and current students, by hosting (more) career and homecoming events.
- Greater acknowledgement of diverse holidays and cultural events in our calendar and communications.
- Reconsideration of the office space allocation in the Academic Building to promote connections between support and academic staff as well as among faculty of the four academic departments.

