Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan

AUC 2025-2030

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By Diversity Leadership Group

Background and Context

Founded in 2009, Amsterdam University College (AUC) is a joint initiative of the University of Amsterdam (UvA) and the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU). It offers a small-scale and intensive Bachelor of Liberal Arts and Sciences degree.

From its inception, AUC has been committed to providing conditions for students to excel in developing their potential. We explicitly understand excellence as an ongoing lifelong process, rather than a fixed point in an individual's journey. In addition, we relate striving for individual transformation to the social context in which this transformation takes place. Individual excellence is supported by the excellence of the community.

AUC is based in one of the most diverse cities in the Netherlands. Amsterdam is a "majority-minority city" (Crul et al. 2023). More than half of the neighbourhoods already have a "majority minority composition", without dominant ethnic majority/majorities; only in eight neighbourhoods do less than 40% have a migration background. In this context, as Crul et al. point out, it is important to be able to appreciate different norms and values and act upon them. This means that within an international tertiary educational institution like the AUC, specific targeted measures are necessary to achieve a diverse and inclusive institution in the fullest sense. For, as stated in the "Let's Do Diversity" report, internationalisation and diversity cannot be conflated (Wekker et al. 2016, 26-7). However, internationalisation can contribute to diversity when the international context is utilised to systematically generate plural perspectives. Then, internationalisation can fuel innovation both, within the university and society.

'AUC's Framework and Action Plan for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion' of 2020 documented management's institutional lead to embed and deliver inclusiveness in every process, including admissions, student support, scholarships, staffing and curriculum development (FAPDEI 2020). In the following strategic vision of 'AUC Next 2022-2026' (AUC Next 2022), management reiterated AUC's commitment to firmly embed the institution as an integral part in the academic and local

community and to participate actively in (inter-)national debates on diversity and inclusion. This current action plan builds on both, the FAPDEI and AUC Next. This document reaffirms our commitment to AUC's core values of diversity, equity and inclusion, both as an academic community[i] and as part of Amsterdam in which the AUC is located.

Framework and Action Plan

For purposes of this document, the terms diversity, equity and inclusion will be understood as follows:

'Diversity' is a collective mixture of differences and similarities as well as related tensions and complexities that arise in a certain group of people (UvA Diversity Document 2019). Factors including but not limited to age, cognitive diversity and neurodiversity, cultural background, disability, gender identity and expression, migration background, religious affiliation, socio-economic status and sexual orientation generate these complexities.

'Equity' refers to allocating resources to people according to their needs so that equal access to the same opportunities is ensured.

'Inclusion' refers to the creation of an environment in which people feel welcomed, valued and at home, despite the differences, tensions and complexities that diversity generates. For diversity to serve a community as a strength not a divisive force, equity across differences generated by diversity will have to be ensured (FAPDEI 2020) so that inclusion can be experienced.

Our commitment to cultural, moral, political and religious pluralism (AUC Next 2022) is framed by our responsibility to stand up against discrimination, stereotyping, physical harassment and other undesired conduct, including aggression, violence, bullying and sexual harassment (UvA Diversity Document 2019). We are determined to create and nurture an inclusive, supportive and safe environment, based on the fundamental belief that everyone has the right to live, study and work in a safe and supportive environment, free from abuse, harassment and/or assault (AUC Policy for Instances of Harassment, Discrimination and Sexual Violence 2022). As a liberal arts and sciences college, we firmly strive to maintain an inclusive academic space which provides opportunities to engage in respectful dialogues about difficult and sensitive topics. Such a space will contribute to intellectual growth, thus positioning one to appreciate different norms and cultural, moral, political and religious values. We recognise that this might necessitate challenging one's own perspectives and undertaking conceptual risk-taking.

Against the backdrop of previous policy plans that have shaped AUC's policy decisions with regard to diversity (FAPDEI 2020) and institutional identity (AUC Next 2022), this action plan will detail how AUC's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion can be achieved across four pillars: 1) outreach and admissions, 2) teaching and learning, 3) within the AUC community and 4) in the local communities.

Pillar I: Outreach and Admissions

To develop support structures that can facilitate individual development of students, it is imperative to pan out to the larger context in which the individual is located to understand how this context shapes the individual's choices and gives meaning to them. In addition, this larger perspective will enable one to ascertain and monitor whether students from underrepresented groups, disadvantaged and/or vulnerable students receive the resources they need to develop their potential per the principle of reasonable practicability stated in legislation (AUAS and UvA 2016).

Typically, those learners whose share of intermeshing characteristics (e.g. gender identity, geographic origin, migration background, socio-economic background) is lower in the student group than in a comparable group in the local population, are considered to be underrepresented learners. Disadvantaged students are those who, unlike their peers, face specific challenges in their learning (e.g. due to disability, socio-economic background, caring duties, lack of family support). These challenges may be temporary or permanent. Vulnerable learners are those who might be disadvantaged and in addition have special protection needs (e.g. due to gender identity and expression, illness, disability, insecure visa status) that would need to be met by the educational institutions so that these learners can reach comparable outcomes as their peers. These students are considered to be vulnerable in the sense that they need protection from harm and exploitation and extra attention so that their personal wellbeing is not endangered (Rome Ministerial Communiqué 2020; Bologna Follow-Up Group 2024).

To enable all students (including underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable learners) to achieve comparable learning outcomes, we will:

- strengthen our ties with our partner universities to increase participation in their ongoing relevant research, programme development, teaching and support networks;
- review and, if necessary, re-adjust outreach and admission criteria such that AUC's ideal of a diverse and inclusive community is clearly visible as an integral part of the admissions process;
- at recruitment, reaffirm AUC's willingness to offer facilities per the principle of reasonable practicability to meet an individual student's support needs and initiate processes to ascertain that those needs are met;
- encourage underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable students to provide relevant information at admissions;
- raise awareness of existing tools that support and enhance digital accessibility of educational technology and maintain rest spaces, also for chronically ill students;
- intensify fundraising initiatives and cooperation with alumni networks so that needs-based scholarships are possible for a broader section of deserving students; and,
- reaffirm AUC's commitment to life-long learning and actively reach out to mature learners at the recruitment stage.

Pillar II: Teaching and Learning

Our starting point is the recognition that knowledge is not produced in isolation, but by specific people in specific contexts. The making of knowledge is influenced

by, and reflects, power relations and prevailing worldviews. We work with students to make this transparent and equip them with the skills to grasp the different dimensions of the knowledge-making process, to develop an awareness for the geopolitical and historical processes through which knowledge has been shaped, to enrich dialogue, and to practice critical thinking (FAPDEI 2020).

Aiming for a blend of Dutch and international (including EU and non-EU) students who study together in English, we educate our students to value academic curiosity and to prepare them for the reflective and responsible citizenship needed for high-level performance in, and contributions to, local and global culturally diverse societies of our interdependent world. To foster this curiosity, we utilise plural pedagogies. We strive to deliver on our commitment to these pedagogies by developing learning processes in which students and teachers work with each other to generate questions and seek their answers by attending sufficiently to the complexity of the issue at hand. Perceiving themselves to be part of a learning community, they address the methodological and philosophical underpinning of their own presuppositions as also the geopolitical and historical processes through which their specific skill sets and knowledge have been shaped. Only such a broader context of inquiry will assist faculty and students to adequately address the societal challenges that the AUC curriculum centres (AUC Next 2022).

To enable all students, including underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable learners, to achieve comparable learning outcomes, we will:

- create clear support pathways within the college for learners with less familiarity with higher education (e.g. peer support groups, collaborative workspaces);
- regularly review processes throughout the study cycle to ascertain that a balance is maintained between the support needs and institutional resources per the principle of reasonable practicability;
- tailor support and guidance to individual needs of underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable students within the scope of reasonable practicability;
- as a liberal arts college with a science focus, actively support the study of the enmeshment of science and society;
- include criteria in course evaluations to judge whether and how individual courses implement AUC's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion; and,
- create intra-departmental discussion fora to review and discuss implemented pedagogical approaches and the introduction of material that bears on diversity, equity and inclusion issues.

Pillar III: The AUC Community

AUC strives to increase the diversity in its staff body. So that AUC's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion becomes a lived practice, measures to increase awareness about issues related to diversity, equity and inclusion are needed.

To achieve these goals, AUC will:

- step up ongoing attempts to recruit, select, appoint, promote and retain staff members whose share of intermeshing characteristics (e.g. gender identity, geographic origin, migration background, socio-economic background) is lower in the staff body than in a comparable group in the local population as well as those with support needs;
- raise awareness for existing digital tools that support and enhance the accessibility of educational technology and maintain rest spaces, also for chronically ill staff;
- offer internal professional developmental activities to explore different models of participatory leadership practices;
- promote the availability of counselling services for staff and students that promote well-being;
- develop and offer staff international blended mobility learning programmes dedicated to diversity, equity and inclusion that combine physical mobility with information and communications technology (ICT);
- establish discussion platforms which highlight issues related to diversity, equity and inclusion that interrogate 'conventional wisdom' about these issues and regularly take stock of relevant ongoing activities within the AUC;
- promote pathways to implement or enhance an inclusive classroom and workspace;
- work out an inventory of support services for tutors and strengthen informal tutor networks that function as peer support in fostering 'diversity literacy';
- nourish and cultivate a sense of cultural plurality as a good; and,
- initiate and sustain institutional research to track possible negative effects of institutional policy on members of underrepresented groups and the manner in which the diversity objectives are achieved across the institution across time.

Pillar IV: Local Communities in Amsterdam

The commitment to social engagement is an integral part of AUC's profile (AUC Next 2022). Our community projects and internships are geared to give back to local communities, while providing students an opportunity to develop their interpersonal and professional skills through these projects. Our responsibility not to reproduce stereotyping, demands that this commitment be implemented as a collaborative endeavour, a working alongside communities, not a paternalistic working 'for' them.

To implement and sustain this commitment, we will:

- actively intensify our cooperation with local and international stakeholders in Amsterdam, in the city's urban and rural surroundings and with regional and international NGOs;
- collaborate with partners especially in the local communities to implement projects especially with vulnerable students;
- build long-term relationships with partners to organise, formulate and implement community projects with them;
- organise a forum in which members of the AUC and especially the local communities meet to discuss ongoing partnerships and forge new projects;

- support international student and staff engagement with the local communities; and,
- work with alumni to explore and sponsor initiatives that can mutually benefit the local and AUC communities.

At the AUC, we aim to achieve a high quality of education that prepares our students to make well-informed decisions about critical local and global issues. To achieve this goal, we strive to generate resources for the AUC community and local communities and foster a broad range of perspectives that can facilitate individual development of community members. We implement our diversity objectives to meet this goal and regularly monitor this implementation.

Cited Sources

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[i] The AUC community consists of staff and students. 'Staff' includes AUC's core faculty, colleagues from the UvA and VU Amsterdam and other institutes, management, professional and support staff. 'Students' include enrolled students and exchange students.