

Class Representatives Guidelines

The main goals of the class representative system are to facilitate greater involvement of students in their own education and courses, foster reflection through discussion, and improve feedback mechanisms. It also helps lecturers gain deeper insight in how students experience their courses. Through dialogue with student representatives and a better understanding of student needs, lecturers may be able to improve their courses via adaptations of structure and/or content.

The role of the class representatives entails several tasks, consisting mainly of facilitating inclusive course reflection discussions in the lecturer's absence and communicating the feedback to the lecturer and discussing potential modifications.

Steps – suggested timeline – Autumn 2024

1. **Week 6:** class selects two representatives
2. **Week 7:** class representatives facilitate a 15 minute class discussion, focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of the course, and discuss this feedback with the lecturer.
3. **Week 7:** class representatives in the team-taught courses *Academic Writing Skills, Advanced Research Writing, Calculus, Logic, Methods for Social Sciences Research, Qualitative Research Methods, Statistical Methods for Social Sciences Research* and *Big Questions courses*, send a summary of the class discussion to the teacher and the course coordinator(s).

(Week 8: reading week, Week 9: proper break week)
4. **Week 10-16:** lecturer or course coordinator(s) adapts course if needed and if possible.
5. **Week 15/16:** students evaluate the process in the course evaluation.
6. When student evaluation arrives: lecturer summarises and reflects

How does it work?

1. Class representatives are selected and prepare the discussion.

The lecturer is responsible for planning the mid-term discussion date in advance and requesting two class representative volunteers for each of their course sections. The two class representatives will be selected by the students on a voluntary basis, and their selection can occur well in advance of the mid-term such that they can begin to represent their peers and seek contact with the lecturer even before the mid-term discussion.

During the in-class mid-term discussion, one class representative will be taking notes and the other one will lead the discussion. To effectively lead the class discussion, the class representatives should prepare ahead of time with the help of these guidelines.

2. Class representatives lead the discussion

When it is time for the mid-term evaluation, the class representatives will facilitate a 15 minute class discussion during which all feedback regarding the course and lecturer(s) can be discussed. The lecturer will leave the classroom during these 15 minutes. Student representatives will also circulate the written mid-term evaluation form for students who prefer to send their feedback in writing and the representatives will take any written feedback into account before talking to the lecturer. Inspiration for the class feedback discussion can be found on page 3 in the form of recommended discussion points and questions. It is up to the class representatives to decide how the discussion will be facilitated (e.g. open discussion, everyone talks in succession, etc.). In addition to this, two crucial points need to be highlighted: First, the role of the class representatives is to listen and guide the discussion. They can share their own input but must focus on guiding the discussion. Second, the discussion should aim to be constructive and not only be based on naming problems. The class should also aim to list the positive aspects of the course and think about concrete suggestions for improvement.

3. Class representatives talk to the lecturer

After the class, the class representatives will discuss their findings and the written feedback, and talk to the lecturer about the points that came up during the discussion. It is, again, important to remember that they represent the entire class and should bring all points forward in a representative and proportionate manner. Tips for giving feedback are on page 3.

The lecturer will give a brief reflection and will report adjustments (if any) to the entire group, ideally in the next class session. Lecturers should also explain when they cannot implement desired changes (for instance, if the changes would require significant changes in the course manual which can only be amended for the next academic year). Moreover, the class representative system can be an ongoing process and class representatives may voice students' opinions to the lecturer throughout the semester.

4. Class representatives report to course coordinator

Class representatives enrolled in team-taught courses Academic Writing Skills, Advanced Research Writing, Calculus, Logic, Methods for Social Sciences Research, Qualitative Research Methods, Statistical Methods for Social Sciences Research and Big Questions courses, send a succinct summary (list with bullet points) of the class discussion to the course coordinator. This will enable the course coordinator to meet with the teaching team and develop a joint and cohesive approach to adjustments across all course groups. Please find the email addresses of course coordinators at the end of this document.

5. Lecturers summarize and reflect on the process

At the end of the semester, the course lecturers should remark on the class representative process and its outcomes in their lecturer reflection report (which is also discussed in the peer review round and informs any adjustments for the next course iteration).

Finally, it is important to note that the class representative process requires committed lecturers and students to be successful. If for some reason there are no students that volunteer to act as class representatives the written mid-term course evaluation forms should always be available for students, so that all students are able to provide direct but anonymous feedback.

Class Representatives Discussion Questions

The following instructions and questions¹ can be used to guide the class discussion.

- Quickly identify what your group sees as the primary learning objective(s) of the course.
- What aspects of this course and/or the instruction would you identify as most helpful to your learning? How are these aspects helping you to learn in this course?
- What modifications to this course do you believe would help you to learn more effectively? Why do you believe these changes would improve your learning?
- Do you feel that the classroom forms an inclusive space, in which different viewpoints and identities can be expressed?

Class Representatives Discussion Points

The following topics could helpfully be included in the discussion. However, other points can be discussed as well.

- Teaching style and class room atmosphere
- Materials
- Assessments and feedback
- Information and Communication
- Structure of the course
- Learning Outcomes
- Course's position within a track or a major
- Student Engagement

Tips for Constructive Discussions between Class Representatives and Lecturers

Feedback is most useful if it is communicated clearly and carefully. Listed below are qualities of good feedback according to a paper in the Educational Leadership journal by Wiggins¹:

- **Goal-Referenced:** It is important to acknowledge the literal meaning of feedback. It is information that needs to feed back into something: goals to be reached within a course. Since we are in an educational setting, the main goal of any course is that its students learn or, in more technical terms, meet the learning outcomes. Therefore, all feedback needs to be directed towards aiding student learning, by pointing out what works well, what isn't working, and how it all might work better.

¹ Questions borrowed from the "Small Group Analysis" method at Vanderbilt University, <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/cft/services/individual/small-group-analysis/>

- Tangible, Transparent, and Actionable: Feedback should be clear, accurate, and specific, so it can be actionable. Actionable feedback can be directly translated into tangible and realistic changes, leading to improvements for the course, either immediately or in the course's next iteration.
- User-Friendly: The lecturer needs to understand the feedback and be willing to take it to heart. This means that feedback has to be brought carefully in a non-demanding and non-accusatory tone by students. Students should be able to rely on the lecturer's professionalism to take aboard feedback if delivered respectfully and constructively.
- Timely and Ongoing: The most effective feedback loops have quick responding times and are continuous processes. Even though the class representatives system is mainly organized around the mid-term period, it is recommended that issues can be brought to discussion throughout the course.
- Consistent: Make sure that class feedback is based on what a clear majority of students agree on. When there are differences in student opinions, the different sides should be communicated to the lecturer in a representative, proportionate manner. Further, it is necessary that Class Representatives are able to suppress any desires to push for their own personal agendas. Consistency is critical because if lecturers hear conflicting accounts of the class discussions, the trust in the accuracy of the feedback will break down.

In preparation for their discussion with the lecturer, the class representatives are encouraged to read through the short paper by Wiggins and think about ways of optimizing the communication of their peers' feedback.

Academic Core course coordinators

- Academic Writing Skills:
 - Dawn Skorczewski - d.m.skorczewski@auc.nl
 - Julia Hülsken - j.f.hulsken@auc.nl
- Advanced Research Writing:
 - Joost Krijnen - f.j.krijnen@auc.nl
 - Lotte Tavecchio - l.m.tavecchio@auc.nl
- Logic, Information, and Argumentation:
 - Yurii Khomskii - y.d.khomskii@uva.nl
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- Calculus:
 - Michael McAssey - M.P.McAssey@auc.nl
- Methods for Social Sciences Research:
 - Maurits de Klepper - m.c.deklepper@auc.nl
- Qualitative Research Methods:
 - Melanie Eijberts - m.eijberts@auc.nl

- Statistical Methods for Social Sciences Research:
 - Michael McAssey - M.P.McAssey@auc.nl
- All Big Questions courses:
 - Joost Krijnen - f.j.krijnen@auc.nl

¹Grant Wiggins, „Seven Keys to Effective Feedback“, Educational Leadership, v70, 2012.
<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/sept12/vol70/num01/Seven-Keys-to-Effective-Feedback.aspx>