

Report: Open Assembly of October 17th

AUC Student Council 23-24
01/02/2024



Introduction

The open assemblies (OAs) are part of an initiative of this year's Student Council (SC). We hosted our first OA on the 17/10/2023. In this report, we assess it and reflect on how it went, so that we can draw on this to plan future OAs.

The objectives of the OAs are:

- to create a contact space between SC and the student body;
- to inform students on projects the SC is working on;
- to gather students' insight and ideas regarding the topic at hand;
- to create a space where students can, by actively participating, be part of the ongoing changes in the institution.

Thus, the OAs are important for the SC to act as the link between the student body and AUC governance bodies and the management team and represent the students' interest appropriately. The open assemblies are made up of two parts: the first where the SC informs the participants and explains the topic of the assembly, and the second in which the students can discuss amongst themselves and share their views and concerns with the SC regarding this topic.

The topic of discussion for the OA held on the 17th of October was the changes to the Academic Calendar (AC) of 2024-2025. AUC is participating in the national project, Smart Academic Year, to reduce workload and stress for students and teachers. This participation requires implementing changes to the AC, so AUC's management team (MT) is working on a new structure. The SC has advisory rights on the process, which means the Council is asked to give informal advice on MT's draft proposal and later on the final proposal.

SC wanted to use the OA to gather the students' perspectives on the proposed changes, to then propose the data gathered as informal advice, which we sent it in by the 24th November. At the OA 26 students (other than SC members and the Student Assistant) were present.

The SC, first, introduced the idea behind the OAs and then introduced the role of the SC as a body through the examples of some of SC's past projects and achievements to remind the attendees of the potential of the student's voice and participation. Second, the SC introduced one of the projects they are currently working on and the main topic of the assembly. The

presenters gave some background information on the national project AUC is part of, the implications for AUC, the proposed changes to the AC, and the SC's role in the decision-making process. Then, the SC had prepared three questions for students to discuss. The participants were first asked to talk amongst themselves and write their thoughts on two big pieces of paper for about 20 minutes, and then to return to the plenary discussion so that we could consider the questions and their ideas together.

Synthesis of the Recommendations

Question 1: When should the class-free weeks be?

Some of the class-free weeks should be aligned with the Dutch holidays and UvA breaks to benefit teachers and Dutch students. However, not all of them should be, as this would not be as convenient for international students.

Students liked the idea of having breaks between 13-week periods and intensives, as it would aid the reduction of stress.

Question 2: What should the class-free weeks look like? Ex. exam weeks, reading weeks, event weeks?

All students expressed that they do not support the idea of exam weeks, as it would be adding pressure and push students to study for their exams at the last minute possible. It was also considered to go against the nature of AUC, as it distinguishes itself from other universities in its format of continuous assessments.

Students were far more positive about the reading week option.

The SC proposed the idea of event weeks, where students would be given the possibility to organize their own classes and initiatives autonomously from AUC and in the AB. For example, students could decide to share knowledge with each other, teach or learn some new skill, or carry out an activity together. For event weeks the students who attended the OA were divided. While some liked to get a week dedicated to student events, others thought that event week would have low attendance and be more interesting if events were related to academics, ex. masters week events.

One student proposed the introduction of a reflection week, which would consist of a time where instead of preparing for future classes and assignments, one can look back on what they have done already and potentially catch up on assignments. All students voted in favour of this idea.

Question 3: What is the preferred daily schedule between 8:30-10:15 /10:45-12:30 /lunch break /13:30-15:15 /15:45-17:30 and 9:00-10:45 /11:00-12:45 /lunch break /13:45-15:30 /15:45-17:30?

All students but one agree that 15 minutes breaks and start of classes at 9:00 a.m. is the better option. Accommodations should be made for those who need extra time for in-class assessments. Four classes in one day for 1st years should not be possible, especially if the timetable becomes more intense.

Outcome:

The answers we gathered were used to inform the Student Council's advice to the draft proposal for the changes to the Academic Calendar. All of the points students agreed on during the OA, i.e. aligning some of the class-free weeks with national holidays, not having exam weeks and introducing a reflection week, and having 15 minute breaks between classes, were taken into account for AUC's final draft.

Remarks on limitations, strengths, and suggestions for future AOs

Instead of one hour, we should communicate to the student that the OAs will be one hour and a half. If we go overtime, people can leave, but we will continue the discussion with those who remain without rushing through the last points. Additionally, while having the event in the evening worked, in the future, we should check if there are any clashing events in the AB, including exams. During this first OA there was an exam taking place for half of the first year students simultaneously.

The general structure of the OA worked very well, as the informational part was clear and concise, allowing them to think about the questions with no mediation, and the plenary discussion was good to understand the general consensus. However, this structure was appropriate for this topic and the very specific questions we had for students. We expect to adjust the format of the future OAs based on the content and what information we need for the Student Council. One aspect that can be changed regardless of the structure, is that if the Student Council members are presenting some information, they should be taking questions from students as they speak. It would be more beneficial to clarify any doubts students might have as soon as they come up, as other people may have misunderstood and later one might forget. Additionally, it is important to keep in mind that everything is communicated to the student before wrapping up, including the request for anonymous (or not) feedback.

In terms of promoting the OA, the informational reel about the AC was very good and we should always explain the topics of the OAs beforehand, for transparency reasons. Also the insertion of text into the informational reel (following a student's suggestion so that it would be easier for

people to follow) should be done in the future as well! However, we did not link the reels to the OA, so we recommend doing so in the future. The whiteboard with the announcement of when and where the OA will take place should be out the entire week and an announcement should be sent to the Communications Team so that it can be put up onto the TVs around the AB as well and included in the AUC Newsletter. It is difficult to evaluate if the flyers were an effective way to promote the event. For this reason, the Student Council should ask students at the end of the OA how they found out about it, so we can understand what worked best in promoting it. Finally, we should PR on instagram during the OA as well next time and post a follow-up about what Student Council did with the OA.

Appendix 1: Minutes of the OA

AUCSC 23-24 OA #1

Date: 17.10.2023

Start Time: 18:05

End Time: 19:20

Location: Common Room of the AB

Presented by: ER and ML

Attendance: 26 excluding board

Minutes by: NZ (student assistant)



Minutes of the discussion:

- There were introductory questions about two hour/ three hour classes, when does this start, will Wednesday classes disappear, and does this apply to all years?

Q1: Class free weeks WHEN?

- One suggestion was that the current breaks don't align with the Dutch school breaks. Also, the May holiday is the only standardized one. If AUC is aiming to focus on Dutch students, they should align with the Dutch breaks.
- However, for international students it is cheaper to fly at other times but they are mostly for Dutch schools holidays alignment.
- Another person agreed with this point, especially since faculty has children to take care of while they are on the break.
- Another person agreed because there have been lecturers who have not come to class because theyre kids were on holiday.
- The February break is also a good idea to separate between the intensive and the second semester.
- However, that might be a problem because students might have the "AI week slump syndrome".
- Nora says that having a week after the intensive will be beneficial.
- It is assumed that this applies to a lot of Dutch teachers.
- Inguh suggests that maybe not all weeks have to align with Dutch holidays but one week could.
- Miriam also thinks it would be a good idea to have us align with the UvA

considering a lot of faculty is UvA.

- UCU: the way they were is that classes are 7.5 credits so that the intensive becomes optional

Q2: Class free weeks WHAT TO DO?

- Rob would really like a class free week during 4/20 and make it a holiday.
- **No one likes the idea of exam week.**
- Miriam points out that most of the time she cannot attend masters and future week because she has class at that time. It would be good to align the class free week to these activities.
- Versailla points out that having event weeks might not be as influential as we think since a lot of people leave.
- Nora feels like a lot of international students stay here.
- Josie points out that a lot of students would prefer events in Amstrdam outside AUC.
- She also agrees with Miriam about having an **academic event week.**
- Djordje points out that the event has to be very special instead of Dormfest/ or like not really doing anything (something restful but useful).
- Roan says you can even combine it with Dormfest and trap people between two events.
- Johanna feels like students will not leave as much knowing there are many breaks now.
- Someone suggested combining two things like AI week and something social.
- ML points out that we should think about whether we want these weeks to be mandatory or not.
- Djordje says we are adults so it should not be mandatory, some things are niche and only attract a specific type of person. He thinks we ant just oops our way into an event, AUC needs to plan something concrete.
- Someone agrees and feels like having mandatory events is unnecessary.
- Reflection week idea by Micol: instead of preparing and reading for upcoming events, you can look back at things that they have done or complete things they have not finished → ER asks to vote on this: approved by majority.
- Inga reflects on things that have been made mandatory like the GIE and it is not nice to the lecturers.
- Miriam feels like making it mandatory defeats the purpose.

Q3: Breaks between lectures?

- **Daily schedule: definitely prefer 9:00 then have a short break instead of starting**

at 8:30.

- Josie thinks that 15 minute breaks should be fine because most people do not have 4 hour classes.
- 30 minutes would not be enough time to actually do something (too long for a break, too short for an activity).
- Roan points out that 4 classes a day should not be possible, if you only have 15 minutes between classes and complete social isolation it might be harmful.
- Nora also points out that 1 hour lunch break is not enough to go home and cook.
- Djordje pointed out that having extra time should not be an issue as he has extra time himself and thinks that very very few people that have extra time (also the amount of extra time differs from person to person).
- Show of hands: 1 person for 8:30am start and 30min breaks, the rest are for 9am start and 15min breaks.
- One person asks about teachers working hours till 6, WK points out that it is more convenient for teachers to.
- Micol points out that it would be weird to have 15 minutes (not good conversations) but it would be good to have some activities like meditation room, techno room, dance room, ping pong, etc.