

## **Unsolicited Advice on the Social Code of Conduct**

Dear Management Team,

In light of recent developments, we are compelled to offer our perspective on the Social Code of Conduct. We believe that the integrity of our university community hinges on the fairness, transparency, democracy and inclusivity embedded within our disciplinary framework. Therefore, we advocate for the following recommendations to strengthen the Social Code of Conduct.

Firstly, the concentration of decision-making authority solely in the hands of the Dean raises concerns about accountability and fairness within the disciplinary process. While the Dean holds a pivotal role in upholding the integrity of our institution, granting one individual the power to make final decisions on disciplinary actions may lead to perceptions of bias or arbitrary judgment. Allowing the Dean to decide critical matters such as extending social probation or denying entrance to the AB, defining inappropriate social conduct, and classifying offensive or disturbing imagery, without clear guidelines or oversight, can result in inconsistent enforcement and unjust outcomes. Here, the involvement of the student body in the development of the Social Code of Conduct is crucial because this document outlines the expectations that AUC has of its students. While it is important for the university to establish ground rules regarding behaviour within the community, it is equally important for these expectations to be established in dialogue with the students who are subject to them. The introduction section of the Social Code of Conduct emphasises that students are expected to exemplify the values outlined and prioritise the well-being of the entire community. However, it can be challenging for students to adhere to these expectations if they feel disconnected from rules that are imposed from the top-down and do not resonate with their experiences or perspectives. Therefore, involving students in the development and revision of the Social Code of Conduct ensures that the document reflects the values, concerns, and realities of the student body, fostering a greater sense of ownership and adherence to the established guidelines.

Additionally, AUC's expectation for students to adhere to certain standards while not having procedures in place for holding themselves accountable raises significant concerns. The disconnect between preaching accountability in this document and the reported inaction regarding discrimination and violence within the AUC community alludes to an intention of intimidation made possible by the power dynamic. Additionally, promoting safety while stifling open dialogue through actions like restricting teachers' speech creates a hypocritical environment. The values that AUC explicitly preaches within the content of its course curriculums diverge from the actions observed within the institution; this inconsistency is making students question their education and its infrastructure.

To make sure AUC is held accountable during the process, we recommend the following:

1. Re-evaluating the authority granted to the Dean. Specifically, we recommend involving the student body more in the drafting and revision of the Social Code of Conduct.
2. Transparency regarding the decision-making process in cases of breach of conduct. This may involve creating oversight committees comprised of representatives from both the student body and faculty, with clear procedures for reviewing and evaluating the Dean's decisions. These committees should have the duty to review cases, provide input, and temper the currently absolute process.
3. Evaluating the effectiveness of breach of conduct procedures yearly and make necessary improvements based on feedback from stakeholders and best practices in higher education. This may involve conducting surveys, focus groups, or other forms of assessment to identify areas for improvement and ensure that the process remains fair, transparent, and responsive to the needs of the AUC community.

Secondly, the vagueness in defining safety within the Social Code of Conduct poses significant challenges for its effective enforcement and interpretation. Without clear definitions of what constitutes a safe environment or behaviours that threaten safety, there is ample room for subjective interpretation and inconsistency in enforcement. This ambiguity can lead to confusion among students regarding expected standards of behaviour and undermine the credibility of the disciplinary process. The notion of safety varies from person to person, and it is essential to take into account the background and experiences of individuals when assessing their perception of safety and discomfort. In this context, AUC's response to expressions of discomfort should consider the unique perspectives shaped by diverse backgrounds and experiences. While AUC has shown respect towards the voices of certain individuals, it has failed to acknowledge the voices of others, particularly those representing minority identity markers. This discrepancy is not coincidental; rather, it underscores AUC's inability to recognise and reflect on the significant influence of these diverse factors in shaping individuals' experiences. When considering the concept of 'experienced safety,' let us take the scenario of calling the police on campus. While some students, particularly white students, may feel uncomfortable or tense in such a situation, the experience for racialised students, especially those who are masculine-presenting, is fundamentally different. For them, the presence of law enforcement can evoke a heightened sense of danger and vulnerability due to systemic biases and historical injustices. This example highlights the importance of acknowledging the disparities in societal position and privilege among students. Recognising these nuances in what constitutes unsafe or uncomfortable experiences is crucial for creating a genuinely safe and inclusive environment for our diverse student body.

Additionally, the disparity in reporting procedures for different offences, such as drugs versus harassment or sexual violence, raises serious concerns about equity and student welfare. The

Social Code of Conduct refers to sexual violence as "experienced as undesirable" (p.4) rather than simply acknowledging it as unquestionably unacceptable, and applies terms like "reasonably" to its consideration as sexual violence. The unequivocal and stringent repercussions imposed by AUC concerning drug-related offences highlight the institution's capacity to define and address serious infractions effectively. However, the absence of similar clarity and decisive action regarding sexual violence suggests a reluctance or unwillingness to acknowledge and confront this issue with the same level of seriousness.

To address these issues, we recommend:

1. Providing clear definitions of safety and related values mentioned within the code to ensure consistent interpretation and enforcement.
2. Reviewing and revising reporting procedures to ensure equitable treatment of all forms of misconduct and prioritise the safety and well-being of students.

Finally, the lack of clarity regarding the exact procedure followed by AUC when a breach of the Social Code of Conduct occurs is concerning and unacceptable. Being accused of misconduct without understanding the process is unfair and can lead to confusion and anxiety among students. AUC must prioritise transparency and clearly outline the procedures followed to ensure that students understand their rights and have the opportunity to defend themselves effectively. This omission undermines trust in the disciplinary process and must be addressed promptly. Moreover, while the use of social probation as a form of punishment within the Social Code of Conduct may be intended to address misconduct and promote accountability among students, the lack of detailed guidelines regarding its implementation and consequences leaves room for ambiguity and inconsistency in its application.

To ensure the transparency and effectiveness of social probation as a disciplinary measure, we recommend the following:

1. Establishing and outlining transparent intermediate steps or interventions that precede social probation, allowing for opportunities for reflection, education, and behaviour modification before more severe disciplinary measures are imposed, depending on the type of breach. These steps could include warnings, counselling sessions, or educational workshops aimed at addressing the underlying issues contributing to the misconduct.
2. Enhance communication during the process of assigning social probation by providing students with detailed allegations against them prior to the first meeting, along with the evidence supporting these allegations. This ensures transparency and allows students to understand the basis of the accusations and effectively participate in the disciplinary process.
3. Providing the students with clear information about their rights throughout the disciplinary process, and make them aware of the existing avenues for appeal or recourse

if they believe they have been unfairly targeted.

The recent summoning of six students to separate meetings for reported violations of the Social Code of Conduct has raised significant concerns within the Student Council. This situation has shed light on several key issues outlined above in the current implementation of the Social Code of Conduct. It is apparent that all decisions and meetings regarding these violations are sanctioned by the Dean. However, there is a distinct lack of transparency regarding the decision-making process. The students involved have received no insight into how these decisions were reached. From determining the severity of the violations to assigning specific punishments, the Dean holds unilateral authority without providing clarity or justification for his actions. Furthermore, the accusations levied against those placed on social probation highlight both the ambiguity of the perceived "safety" of the entire AUC community and the focus on a culture of suppression and discipline. Questions then arise as to who is authorised to represent the entire's community sense of safety. Finally, the procedural irregularities surrounding the summoning of these students are cause for significant concern. Students were called into mandatory meetings without prior explanation or clarity regarding the purpose of the meeting or the exact allegations against them. This undermines the integrity of the disciplinary process. Despite the lack of information provided by the students during these meetings, final decisions were made based on these interactions. While some students received warnings due to insufficient evidence, others were placed on social probation without a clear understanding of the claimed evidence against them. The absence of specific details regarding the evidence used further exacerbates the lack of transparency and fairness in the disciplinary proceedings. While this specific example is noteworthy, it is indicative of a broader pattern of lack of transparency or clear communication in AUC's dealings with students, a concern that the Student Council has been made aware of on multiple occasions. All in all, this lack of transparency creates an environment of intimidation and uncertainty, while it is supposed to safeguard the safety of the AUC community.

In conclusion, we believe that by prioritising student involvement, clarity, and fairness, our recommendations will enhance the integrity and effectiveness of our Social Code of Conduct, which in turn, then, upholds the values of our university community. While there are areas that require refinement, we recognise the importance of establishing ground rules to maintain a respectful and conducive learning environment. We believe that with collaborative efforts and continued dialogue, we can work towards a more equitable and transparent disciplinary framework that reflects the values of our diverse student body.

Thank you for considering our perspective.

Sincerely,

Student Council 2023-2024