

Report: Voices of AUC of November 7th 2023

AUC Student Council 23-24
01/02/2024



Introduction

Voices of AUC is a bi-annually held Student Council event in which students and staff come together to discuss important issues at AUC, as well as suggestions for improvement. As organizers and hosts of this event, the Student Council is responsible for prompting the discussions and recording the outcomes. This report consolidates the results of the Voices of AUC discussion which took place on November 7th, 2023. In accordance with these results, changes are recommended in an attempt to inform future decisions made by but are not limited to AUC management and the participatory governing bodies. The general recommendations will also be used to inform the Student Council's work moving forward, and we are therefore open to discussing them further with anyone who is interested.

About the event

It was important for us to continue to hold Voices of AUC this academic year, to ensure that collaboration and collective participation at AUC is kept. We decided to plan the new Voices of AUC event in alignment with what was done by the previous Student Council, while taking into account the recommendations given on the report of the Voices of AUC organized in March of last year. This time, we decided to have more discussion time and only one plenary session to make sure the tables had enough time to discuss. Our original idea was to create smaller groups so that every participant had the opportunity to voice their opinion, switch groups once, and a walking session towards the end to make sure everyone gets in contact with multiple ideas and perspectives. Most importantly, we wanted the discussion to remain mainly solution-oriented.

Due to technical difficulties, combined with fewer participants than expected, this structure had to be reconsidered, and we ended up deciding to have one main discussion group, starting by a round of introduction, followed by one plenary session, and two discussion blocks: one to raise issues, and another focused on solutions to those issues.

The goal of this event was to first brainstorm and discuss, then to recommend and share ideas, and finally to comment on other recommendations in a constructive way. This report consolidates the outcomes of discussions held and recommendations formulated by the participants. Finally, taking into account issues raised, the Student Council has formulated some

general recommendations for action and concludes this report with final remarks on limitations, strengths, and adaptations for future Voices of AUC events.

About the Theme

This time, we chose the topic Bringing Perspectives on Course Enhancement, because, during our first few months in office, there was concrete discontentment when it came to the teaching of several AUC courses, and the way some courses were structured, particularly after the implementation of the 55%-in-class assessment rule, which stipulates that 55% of all assessments needs to be in class in light of GenAI.

With this in mind, our main question was "How can we enhance course quality at AUC?". The discussion was led in order to reach solutions as to how to enhance course quality at AUC, to promote meaningful assessments, maintain a balanced structure, and foster engaging assignments, all aimed at enhancing the overall learning experience. The discussion focused on 4 topics: Amount of Course Load, Types of Assessments, Types of Learning, and Course Evaluations.

Mentimeter

In order to introduce the concepts and inspire the discussions, we asked the participants to answer a Mentimeter question. The answers were displayed on the screen for everyone to see, and are added in appendix 2 of this report.

Synthesis of the Discussion

Please refer to Appendix 1 for the minutes of this event.

Amount of Course Load

There is a contrast in the importance of interaction between science and humanities/social sciences courses with humanities and sciences as two extremes of interaction/non-interaction. Additionally, it is discussed that course load in sciences is drastically different from humanities/social sciences, since science courses rely heavily on exams and humanities and social sciences highlight more emphasis on class participation. Students point out that sometimes lectures feel tedious, which is not what AUC advertises with its small classes. One staff member shared a positive experience with an environmental course's weekend visit, highlighting the impact it had on both students and lecturers despite not being mandatory or for credit. He then suggests that there is a lot of "seeing" in sciences and proposes a more interdisciplinary plan for non-sciences students over their three years. However, the structure of science classes might discourage students who are majoring in humanities or social sciences from taking them.

Moreover, students expressed contentment with the options to select off-campus courses both at UvA and VU, since these are great opportunities to experience different types of learning and to expand their knowledge on topics of interest. Students feel like the process of signing up to these courses should be made more visible.

General Recommendations

- Implement more hands on/practical ways of learning in other courses, like field trips, field research, excursions etc..
- Increase visibility on information about procedures and websites related to VU and UvA courses. In this case, there has already been action from our part, by releasing the "Off-campus Guide", which is available to all students.

Types of Assessments

Students expressed their concerns about the impact of AI on the curriculum, especially in the context of the 55% rule. There is a discussion on the relevance of AI in certain courses and its effect on academic writing skills motivated by this rule. The students highlighted dislike for the 55% rule as a quick solution, arguing that it undermines the skills needed in courses that require writing skills, for example in humanities and social sciences. Overall, it was highlighted how it is important to continue to learn how to write independently from AI, and that courses should take that into account.

Students expressed concern about the grading system, where some courses heavily rely on discussion questions that contribute significantly to the final grade. This creates an imbalance between courses that focus on testing knowledge and those that emphasize participation. In fact, it was noted that some students might not engage in class discussions, related to personality differences, and this has a lot less impact in science courses. Staff pointed out that science students often test their knowledge through exams. This could suggest a difference in the assessment methods between science and non-science courses. This creates a divide between social sciences/humanities (SS/HUM) and science (SC) majors. It is noted that this does not necessarily lead to a superiority complex but can create difficulties in understanding each other's curricula.

Students highlight the perception of grades as feedback and the potential stress associated with the focus on grades rather than the quality of learning. The idea that grades should come secondary is discussed. In regards to the high level of academic stress inherent to the AUC curriculum, students highlight challenges in the application process, making study plans, and the difficulty of providing constructive feedback.

General Recommendations:

- Improvement of the 55% rule by making the discussion field-specific, employing a range (for example 20-50%).
- Formulating assignments that cannot be answered by AI to encourage critical thinking.

Types of Learning

Students noted that the limited duration of classes (an hour and a half) restricts class discussions. An example is given regarding discussions in the health and well-being course.

Different perspectives are shared on the varying approaches teachers take in preparing and delivering courses, with some emphasizing what they are passionate about. All the people present discussed how to promote mature relations between lecturers and students, with a focus on small classrooms and team approaches.

There is a concern about teachers from other universities not understanding the unique aspects of AUC's international and diverse student body, leading to potential cultural insensitivity. Concerns are raised about teachers not being aware of the student body's diversity, slipping into different languages, and potentially creating unsafe spaces. The importance of teachers understanding and respecting the AUC environment is emphasized.

General Recommendations:

- In terms of intersectionality and sensitivity, teachers must be sensitive to diversity, intersectionality, and respecting pronouns and names. Combining intersectionality may require time and understanding, as staff may come from different backgrounds, but, nonetheless, there is the need to find a balance between focusing on teaching the subject matter and being sensitive to social issues.
- Creating a comfortable space for student-teacher communication, implementing a "safe space" where students can comfortably approach teachers.
- The need to emphasize the importance of increasing motivation for the participation in teacher training and communication programs, such as workshops, for new lecturers.
- In light of the new Academic Calendar, the classes will be increased to an hour and 45 minutes, which can positively affect the class discussions.

Course Evaluations

The discussion touched upon course evaluation processes, the importance of feedback, and how evaluations are sometimes not followed up. Students expressed different views on the effectiveness of evaluations. However, overall, in-person evaluations in class were considered to be more interactive and make students want to engage in the conversations.

General Recommendations:

- Feedback on Course Evaluations being incorporated in class, with both teacher and student perspectives, so that direct feedback is provided and there is the possibility for a deep reflection.

Final Remarks on Limitations, Strengths and Suggestions for the Future Voices of AUC Events

Limitations

The event started with several technical difficulties, since the projector was not working and we had to improvise with our own computers and alter the original structure of the event. Only twelve students and three staff members were present due to a staff event that was being held at the same time, despite efforts to increase participation. And finally, the discussion focused on solution creation deviated a lot to a space for complaints, even with our best efforts to oppose it.

Strengths

Every participant was very active and engaged in the conversation, expressing their thoughts and opinions on the topics proposed. All the staff members present were extremely cooperative and demonstrated understanding for teachers concerns. Thus, the discussion was able to address the main question in a critical manner, highlighting issues in various perspectives.

Suggestions

As Student Council members, we have encountered several different perspectives, and it is our goal to bring these perspectives closer to each other and put them in conversation with one another. Hence, we strongly urge future Student Councils to continuously improve and adapt the Voices of AUC event. We suggest that more effort and planning time is put into the involvement of staff in the event. This could be done by advertising it during Office Hours, organizing the event earlier in the day, perhaps on a Wednesday, and collaborate with the teachers social committee in order to involve teachers in the decision of the topic of discussion. Finally, it should be a priority to ensure that the event is focused on how to solve these issues, using a solution-based approach.

Appendix 1: Minutes of Voices of AUC #1

AUCSC 23-24 Voices of AUC #1

Date: 7.11.2023

Start Time: 18:00

End Time: 20:00

Location: Common Room of the AB

Presented by: ET and WK

Minutes by: NZ (student assistant)

Minutes:

- Round of introduction, 12 people present.
- The main goal today is to discuss course enhancement.
- Lots of comments about assignments, teaching methods, and decolonization of the courses.
- WK and ET inform everyone about what course enhancement means.

Discussion

- ID: Had to do a lot of discussion post about certain topics and a high percentage of the grades would be dependent on it. This is absent in SS and SC although they could be helpful. This also makes an unfair balance because some courses are very dependent on getting tested on the knowledge and others depend on participation.
- MC: Find it interesting because for science students, you test your knowledge through exams.
- ID: some lecture classes get a bit boring and it is not what AUC advertises with their small class environment.
- MC: so science courses can be more interactive
- M (the head of studies): the environmental course did a visit in the weekend. The visit wasn't mandatory so everyone came. It was impactful. It was positive for students and lecturers even though it wasn't for credit.
- ID: there is a divide sometimes between SS/HUM and SC. This doesn't necessarily cause SC to look down on HUM, but it just makes it harder for majors to understand each other's curriculum.

- JV: Sciences are more individual inherit. But AUC is more
- LW: the hour and a half does limit the class discussion a lot, an example is discussion in health and well being.
- ML: there is so much seeing in sciences, there could be a more interdisciplinary plan in someones 3 years but they would feel discouraged to go to sciences courses because of the structure of the class.
- ID: some classmates don't engage in class as much and it might relate to personality. This can also be stressful for people who don't like sharing opinions. There are two extremes, where interacting is not emphasized in SC but so important in HUM.
- MC: I took nutrition and health and although I didn't do well grade wise, I gained a lot of knowledge. There is an equilibrium.
- M (HoS): it is good to mix and have diversity in courses but differences are real and we have to keep them.
- ID: There should be different approaches because there are different fields. But then some courses have a big portion of their grades are participation/ discussion. This doesn't reflect my knowledge and so my grade is not as fair.
- MR: How does what youre being tested on not being reflective of the learning outcome.
- ID: photography of modern and contemporary art is not very reflective of the class because 20% of the class is dependent on discussion points.
- MvH: I feel like we are discussing two different problems, the diversity with a specific course, and the diversity among courses.
- NP: The 55% rule is making It harder because teachers weren't prepared for it.
- JV: for AWS, the AI rule has fully effected the curriculum, a lot of the course content and essay writing revolves around AI which I am not personally interested in.
- MC: Do they teach you to explore AI/ avoid it?
- JV: They first encourage us to explore it then they give us rules for citing it. I find this irrelevant because when writing a paper, I want to focus more on the content rather than the AI itself.
- MR (DOE): we found ourselves in this transitional moment and we were surprised on how to react to it. We had to balance between balance between writing skills courses and how to integrate AI into our courses. With time, we will pick up skills that will allow us to be able to integrate AI to our learning.
- JV: The way AI is implemented in the moment is not the right way. It takes away from being able to write academic text. This is not how I see myself using AI.

- LW: but can you not limit the use of AI yourself?
- JV: yeah I personally do but for AWS it was a part of the course.
- It feels like in class we are taught how to apply things, while in class we can apply actual skills, and then compare and contrast (for example summarizing text). If there is an actual step before using AI that will make sure you learn the skill first and then compare it to AI will be important.
- LV: first years doing AWS will complain about doing something twice.
- MR: some skills will become AI dependent, but some people still want to learn the skill. different
- JV: AI will be great for cutting these time-consuming tasks, but writing is valuable (in terms of human aspect).
- SP: While chatGPT is good, it is not there yet with writing .
- M (HoS): we were amazed by the amount of students who use it regularly (around 70%). We are also on a learning curve and we need to get feedback.
- ID: (this also regards AWS) teachers are an important fact in the quality of the course. I felt that it was really hard to criticize teachers because they are very young. They are very passionate and it causes me some problems. Learning from adequate teachers is important and sometimes that absent at AUC.
- JV: I felt scared to ask any questions because I felt like I would get ridiculed for it. I then reached out to my tutor and expressed my concerns. I appreciate that AUC provides the support systems needed for this.
- ID: I experience times where teachers are not aware of what AUC is/ there is only one teacher so you can't change class. I don't know what to put on the evaluation because it can be seen as unconstructive critique.
- MR (DOE): How do you fill the midterm evaluation?
- GB: I really like the part where you can just add the comments. Sometimes you can also propose different ways assessments or for extra material if needed. Really appreciated the
- MvH: any feedback to me as dean?
- JV: the application process is difficult when it comes to making your study plan.
- M (HoS): we changed it in the last couple of years, the main goal of it was to familiarize yourself with the course.
- ID: I had 4 course evaluations this semester, they weren't sent online and had to do it via paper. Only one teacher did it. some things dont have follow ups.
- M (HoS): likes the idea of co-creation.
- MR (DOE): lecturers value this too.
- JV: who write the course? sometimes teachers just concentrate on what they are

passionate about.

- MR (DOE): there are a lot of variations, it depends on the course.
- NP: likes the evaluations more this year than last year, because teacher discussed the feedback.
- JV: all her courses were online.
- ML: had a convo with a teacher today in class
- MC: Statistics teachers did a closed loop, discussed feedback in statistics.
- ID: responsibility wise, I know it is my right to do the evaluation. Requesting an evaluation from teachers is quite intimidating and time consuming. Maybe it should be better implemented by management.
- JV: position of authority influences the way students will answer. even if the form is anonymous.
- NP: the teacher leaving the class is a good approach since it is a big discussion with the class.
- SP: this method eliminates the idea that it is coming from you as an individual and feels more like a class opinions.
- M (HoS): I am looking for ways to promote mature relations between lecturers and students. This way students can speak up when something is not productive. Small classrooms can really help with this.
- JV: I wonder how AUC would implement this?
- M (HoS): there are individual approaches but then AUC as a team will address things. (unifying thing among a team).
- ID: a lot of teachers coming from UVA and VU. These teachers don't know how to manage an AUC life since we are very different from other universities. They don't take into consideration the international background of AUC.
- NP: some teachers don't take into account the idea that students come from different backgrounds and different educational systems.
- GB: I don't feel like we should be treated different because we are AUC, maybe they can offer more support to educational background difference. for cultural difference we can voice our own opinion.
- JV: if it expected that you know so many things it can cause problems in course level.
- ML: taking grades seriously has been engraved in us, I wonder what we can do to breakdown the idea that grades are equivalent of feedback. A way to serve as a reminder that this is something you are interested in.
- NP: when applying to AUC, you do need a good grade to come in, so it is hard to find a middle ground.

- JV: there is no way to break that, maybe there is no viable alternative for that. Grade is a neutral way to evaluate whether or not we have learned something.
- M (HoS): sometimes the grade becomes the entire focus, the grades should come secondary. Some students stay away from non-safe options. this stress can also affect the quality of learning.
- ID: the teachers not knowing how the students body works. some teachers will accidentally slip dutch words. Other teachers dont know how to keep a safe space in the classrooms. Some teachers have said insensitive things because they are not taught that AUC has a very specific body
- NP: the grade system is from one place to another and that can mess with how your teacher over-grades or under-grades.

Solutions:

- MC: we should implement a brave space where there is a comfortable way of approaching teachers.
- GB: I feel like it would be really nice if there are ways to learn about the procedures and the websites regarding the VU and UV courses.
- WK: AUC will plan a course market and STUCO will explain off campus courses
- LW: for the course evaluation people liked different things, maybe the teachers can do both.
- MR (DOE): we used to do both but then we decided to have the teachers to decide what approach they should implement.
- ET: what is a major aspect is having all teachers implement.
- ID: maybe there could be a panel of student that can gather info and then communicate it to management.
- MR: it is not the lecturers themselves but the way they are approached.
- M (HoS): there are minimum requirements for lecturers and a good way to communicate if there is something going bad. I also cherish the diversity of the different teachers and the varying teaching methods.
- JV: It is valuable to have lecturers coming from outside because there are specialized in their area (example: organic chemistry).
- MR (DOE): there are manuals and presentations (workshop) for new lecturers. all the info is provided but sometimes, just like students, lecturers depend on certain communication channels.
- ID: is there anything mandatory?
- MR (DOE): It needs to be intrinsically motivated, when things are mandatory

people wont do it.

- Maybe telling AUC about intersectionality and international community. this is especially for science teachers. These values (intersectionality) should be valued.
- MC: if I wanted to take an orgo chem class, I wouldn't expect them to be an expert on intersectionality but should be sensitive.
- CG: teachers should be aware of the learning outcomes.
- ID: some lectures don't take into consideration pronouns/ respect for names. these are small concrete examples that should be expected of our teachers.
- JV: (at risk of sounding offensive) I would rather have a teacher that is going to teach the substance rather than focus on sensitivity.
- WK: lecturers should understand the diversity of AUC. Regardless of what they are teaching, they should be mindfull of their students.
- M (HoS): there will be mistakes.
- CG: If some lecturers are insensitive but they perpetuate certain social norms (like ignoring pronouns)
- JV: teachers who are not hyper focused that they forget about intersectionality
- ID: even science is based on principles, lecturers are not expected to discuss it extensively, but they can have a basic understanding.
- A teacher did a servery about people outside from the course and that way he got to know people personally.
- GB: There is no need to actively discuss it intersectionality, however it should be respected if it was brought up.
- M (HoS): there are good ways to combine intersectionality. This will not come automatically, we will still have staff that were raised in a different time and place.
- SP: it is most important to see students as individuals.
- NP: It is important to have teachers uphold the same baseline of diversity as students (the ones we had in our application)
- ET: can we discuss it AI/ 55%rule?
- ID: make this field specific. For example, formulate a question that cannot be answered with ai.
- NP: A range would work. also if teachers have time to prepare, they can create more effective assignments.
- JV: eliminates the idea of take-home exams.
- GB: we are also understanding the need for in class assignments.
- WK: for humanities this was shocking

- ID: a lot of people had to hurry the exams, and the questions are less deep because there is not enough time to critical thinking.
- CG: AUC values critical thinking and research which takes time.
- MC: I dont like the 55% rule as a quick and dirty solution. The skills you need to develop in SS are undermined with 55% rule. Policing what AI is used for is not beneficial

Appendix 2: Mentimeter Display photo

