



# Amsterdam University College Student Council

## Policy Plan 2018-2019

## Colophon

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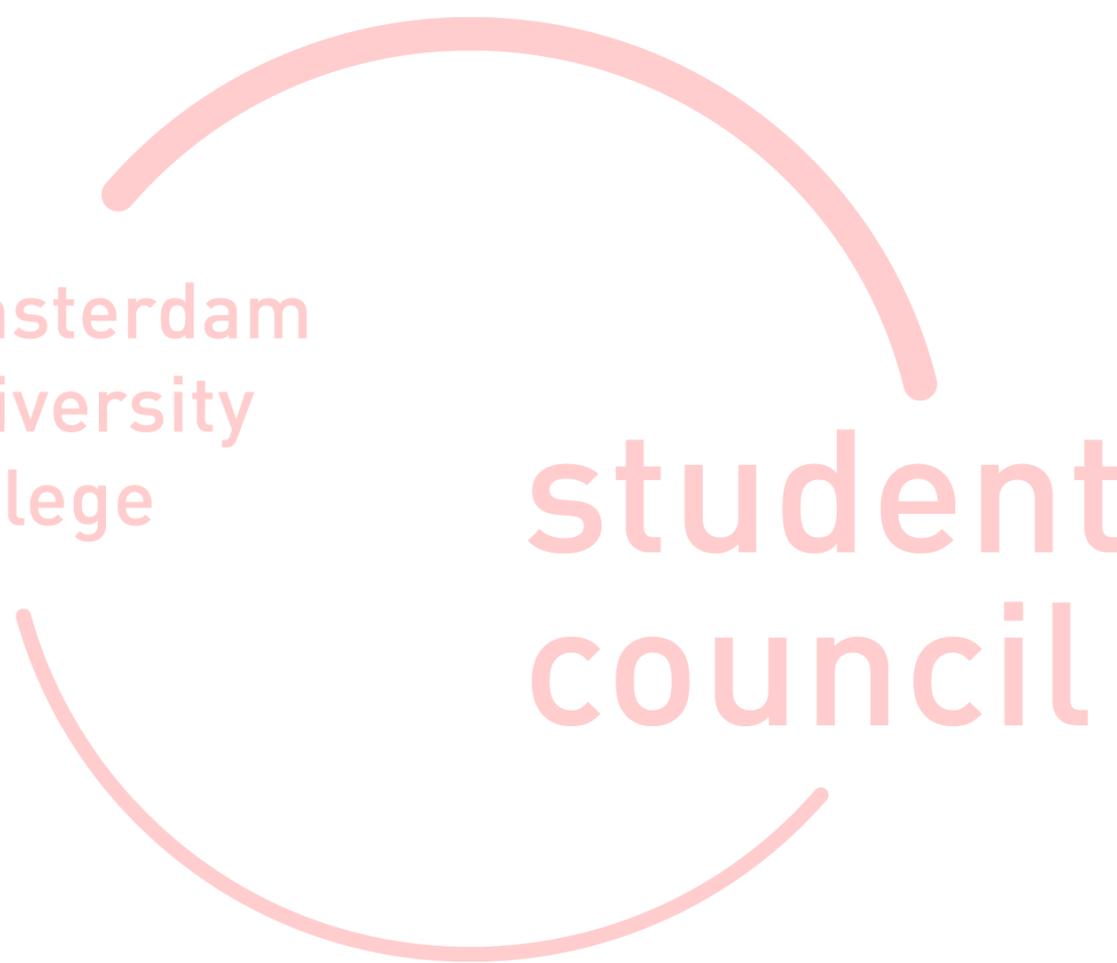
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### Date of Issue

3<sup>rd</sup> of September, 2018



amsterdam  
university  
college

student  
council

## **Preface**

Dear reader,

You hold in your hands the policy plan of the Amsterdam University College Student Council (AUCSC) for the period 2018-2019. We, the current board members of the Council, cordially invite you to take cognizance of our ambitions as well as our concerns for the upcoming academic year. Upon reading this document carefully, you will get an initial view on the mountains that the newly appointed Student Council purposes to move, the walls that it aims to tear down, and the bridges it aspires to build.

The spectrum of policy issues to incorporate in this text is broad. Although we strived for the publication of a complete policy plan, there might still be some lacunae that we overlooked, for which we ask the reader's understanding at this early stage of the academic year. Even though this text provides the reader with a succinct yet informative overview of the themes and topics that will form the focal point of our term, it must be emphasized that this document is still work in progress. We are determined to revise and complement it throughout the year, so please do exercise caution when referring to it.

Nevertheless, despite the present incomplete condition of this document, we hope that the reader draws the following conclusion from it: that we will passionately devote ourselves to the prudent representation of AUC students by critically engaging with AUC's Management, DUWO, our mother universities etc., without failing to approach (the representatives of) these institutions with the respect that they deserve. Diplomacy, frankness, and passion will be the watchwords of our year-long term, the improvement of the student experience at AUC our goal.

This policy plan has been divided into four overarching themes: **Study Environment**, **The Quality of the AUC program**, **Life After AUC**, and **Council Matters**. We further subdivided each of these themes into a number of paragraphs, containing our viewpoints on specific policy issues that fall under the respective overarching theme. The paragraphs have a similar structure. First, we provide a description of the particular policy issue. Second, we express and corroborate our stance on said policy issue. Third, we concisely outline what we plan on doing this year concerning said policy issue. In this way, we hope to inform the reader on our ambitions as well as our concerns for the upcoming academic year both eloquently and structurally.

We are officially on the brink of the academic year 2018-2019. Before us lies the enormous yet humbling task, now that we have been installed as the new Student Council, to prove that we are worthy of the seats entrusted to us by AUC's student body. That we will represent the interests of the student body to the best of our abilities by putting their concerns on the agenda of AUC's Management and by transforming their ideas into feasible policy. This policy plan is our starting point.

With the utmost enthusiasm and sincere gratitude,

### **The Student Council 2018-2019**

Juanita García, Sarah Salaymah, Viktoria Kaffanke, Paula García, Bart Knibbe

## What is the Student Council?

*Before the subject matter of this document is touched upon in greater detail, we reckoned that the reader might benefit from a preceding description of the Student Council. Accordingly, a concise characterization of the AUCSC follows below.*

The **Amsterdam University College Student Council** (AUCSC) is the representative body for the students of AUC. We represent the interests of the student body and bridge the gap with AUC's Management, faculty, and external parties such as UvA, VU, and DUWO.

Unlike the AUCSA, which is concerned with the social aspect of the student experience, the AUCSC is a part of AUC's governance structure with a strong say in academic matters. We have advisory and approval rights over many issues, specified by Dutch law, such as changes in courses and addressing structural problems. This means that the Council must approve decisions made by the Management before they are implemented and can give formal advice that the Management must take under consideration.

We are concerned with student representation in all matters pertaining to academics, curriculum, student health and well-being. Our exertions on these matters are mostly directed by the ideas and opinions expressed by AUC students. Throughout the year we work on an array of topics ranging from sustainability to the structure of courses, for which the input of students is of paramount importance. We host numerous events, e.g., "Voices of..." groups, created to tackle specific academic matters by using the student opinions as a base from which to improve AUC. The numerous working groups and (student-led) initiatives which we are involved in also presuppose student participation and engagement for proper functioning.



## **I. Study Environment**

### **i. Increase AUC's Commitment to Sustainability**

AUC is environmentally conscious, as demonstrated by, e.g., the use of solar energy which is generated by the solar panels that are installed on the roof. Nevertheless, we believe that further action is needed to make the Academic Building (AB) a more ecologically sustainable study environment. We will work together with students devoted to this cause and the Management Team throughout the year, in order to prompt innovative and feasible proposals that will develop AUC into a more environmentally friendly community. With the intent of establishing a framework for this development, we will ... :

- a) ... strive for the addition of recycling bins to the AB, as AUC does not facilitate recycling;
- b) ... promote the recycling of materials used in classrooms, such as whiteboard markers and printed paper;
- c) ... collaborate with the canteen, with the aim of achieving a minimization of plastic waste being produced;
- d) ... propose to replace plastic cutlery at the canteen with cutlery that is manufactured from biodegradable materials;
- e) ... collaborate with committees such as "Pangea", in order to raise awareness of sustainability among students and formulate new ideas on how to make the AB more sustainable;
- f) ... encourage workshops and lectures that instill clean and responsible eating, as well as safe and sustainable cleaning habits;
  - ❖ ... work with the Student Life Officer (SLO) to introduce potential workshops and lectures that students might have an interest in.

### **ii. Ensuring Student Wellbeing by Improving Our Study Environment**

Student wellbeing is per definition a topic of grand importance for the Student Council, which is why we will deliberate over it at great length during our term. The strong efforts made by our predecessors, which we shall continue, to ensure student wellbeing by, e.g., improving our study environment, will serve as a context for our own deliberation over this policy issue.

Indeed, the wellbeing of students and teachers is to a large extent determined by their living, study, and working environment. Bearing this assertion in mind, we want to add to the atmosphere of the AB, in order to elevate our study and working conditions to healthy and sustainable maxima. To realize this amelioration of AUC's study and working environment, we will ... :

- a) ... install UV lights to hearten AUC students, teachers, and staff during the gloomy Amsterdam winters, in the hope that these beacons will alleviate their hardships by shedding a positive light on their situations, i.e., improving their mental wellbeing;

- b) ... add more colour to the AB by, e.g., planting trees and flowers in close proximity to the building as well as refurbishing project rooms with the exhibition of student-made art;
  - ❖ ... inquire about the student support for both the installation of UV lights and brightening up the AB with flora and art before we start enacting these proposals;
- c) ... look into the possibility of designating silent study areas (e.g., a classroom) in the AB, particularly but not only during midterms and finals, as project rooms are often full and the open study spaces noisy. We find this establishment of a silent study area in the AB imperative, because a quiet space to study can contribute to upholding mental wellbeing during stressful periods;
  - ❖ ... create ample support from like-minded students who are eager to work with us towards the establishment of silent study spaces, in order for this proposal to take root.

## **II. The Quality of the AUC Program**

### **i. Improving the Quality of Lecturers**

We should take pride in the admirably versatile and highly educated faculty members and lecturers that are employed at AUC. However, the quality of lecturers for some courses that students mandatorily follow in their first year, such as Academic Writing Skills and Logic, leaves a lot to be desired. These courses are often taught by both faculty members and external lecturers, which can lead to inconsistencies concerning the course manual and lectures that neither conform to AUC's standard nor its philosophy. To improve the quality of lectures and lecturers, we encourage ... :

- a) ... that the lecturers of "Academic Writing Skills" and "Advanced Research Writing" are native English speakers who preferably hold degrees related to writing and/or literature;
- b) ... that lecturers should either have a "Basic Teaching Qualification" or a "Senior Teaching Qualification";
- c) ... that teachers must be instructed to maintain a professional environment in the classroom;
- d) ... that lecturers are employed by AUC on the proviso that they have obtained a PhD;
- e) ... that lecturers are expected to hold a certain amount of weekly "office hours", be it in the form of physical or virtual presence, when students can ask them questions or express their concerns;
- f) ... that lecturers are impelled to give students their grades and feedback within ten working days, thereby upholding the rule in force.

## ii. The Tutor System

The tutor-tutee system is an essential facet of the Liberal Arts and Sciences program, designed to enrich the academic experience of students at AUC. However, this system entails a complex synergy between tutor and student, prompting a plethora of questions concerning the exact role of the tutor, the responsibilities of the tutee, and diverging mutual expectations. Questions that are not always sufficiently answered upon reading the current version of the tutor handbook. Although many current tutors meet with the approval of their tutees, a portion of the student body has expressed their grave concerns with the uncertainty surrounding the loosely defined tutor-tutee relationship, even to the point of requesting another tutor. Fortunately, the senior tutor is working diligently on an updated version of the tutor handbook, which should make the tutor system more consistent and uniform. To contribute to this improvement of AUC's tutor system, we will ... :

- a) ... scrutinize the current version of the tutor handbook, in order to establish where the text is sufficient and where there is room for improvement;
- b) ... define the exact role of the tutor and the responsibilities of the tutee, so that the expectations of both students and tutors are met;
- c) ... closely monitor and review the changes made to the tutor handbook in consultation with the senior tutor;
- d) ... work with the Management Team, the tutors, the SLO, and all the relevant parties in shaping and approving the new, thoroughly revised tutor handbook;
- e) ... consult students, tutors, and the SLO to learn how they envisage the advancement of AUC's tutor system;
- f) ... experiment, in cooperation with the Senior Tutor, with setting up a framework for informal tutor evaluations, which would enable both students and tutors to elaborate on their conception of the tutor-tutee relationship, and in what way it is (not) working for them.

## iii. Consistent Exams and Grading Norms

Several courses at AUC are taught simultaneously but by different lecturers. Examples of such courses are Academic Writing Skills, Logic, Calculus for Economics, etc. We find it important that such classes have consistent and equivalent examinations throughout the semester. We recommend ... :

- a) ... standardizing the peer reviewing of exams by other lecturers;
- b) ... giving exams on the same day for all classes, regardless of differences in lecturers;
- c) ... conducting identical exams, since the classes are meant to cover identical material;
- d) ... bringing grading methods of multilaterally taught courses to a common norm by making use of clear and strict grading rubrics.

#### iv. Full-time Internships

Many companies and organizations require interns to be available full-time for as long as a semester or even a full year. Because of this requirement for interns, it is possible that AUC students are at a disadvantage when applying for internships, as the current curriculum does not allow for that kind of intermissions. During our term, we will emphatically argue ... :

- a) ... that students should be allowed to apply for exemptions so as to have the opportunity to work full-time at an internship and still have the possibility to graduate with honors;
- b) ... that students should have the opportunity to graduate in seven semesters instead of a maximum of six, so that students can do a full-time internship during the course of a regular semester;
- c) ... for the centralization of all the relevant information that pertains to CP/I, in order to wholly inform students about their options.

### III. Life After AUC

#### i. Master and Career Orientation

##### 1. Continue with and Improve Master and Career Week

Last year, the former Student Council started an event that was baptized as AUC's first *Master and Career Week*. The event was organized in order to support AUC students who were looking for more information regarding the transition from a Liberal Arts and Sciences Institution to a Master's program or the job market. The Master and Career Week proved to be a successful yet slightly under-attended event that was useful for many students. We want to continue the work of our predecessors by making this year's edition of the event at least as developmentally lucrative. To accomplish the organization of yet another profitable Master and Career Week, we will ... :

- a) ... invite a larger variety of speakers, ranging from career coordinators to professional storytellers, AUC alumni to potential employers, in order to compile a diverse program for the week;
- b) ... stay in touch with our mother universities, UvA and VU, to keep abreast of the most recent requirements for their Master's programs;
- c) ... promote the event vehemently, so that more students will reap the benefits of the Master and Career Week;
- d) ... involve AUC's newly appointed Masters Coordinator in the organization of the Master and Career Week, thereby gradually making the organizational and facilitative responsibility for the event incumbent on the fulfiller of that position.

## 2. Masters Coordinator

We also want to continue with the workings of the previous Student Council to employ a Masters/Career Coordinator at AUC. It is believed that this possibility for career counseling would be a valuable instrument for students to make use of during the transitional phase from AUC to another university or the job market. To realize and optimize the result of the appointment of a Masters/Career Coordinator at AUC, we will ... :

- a) ... set up the framework for the cooperation between the Masters Coordinator and the Student Council on, e.g., the organization of the Master and Career Week;
- b) ... start collecting data on the student's desires for guidance on choosing a Master's program, and present our findings to the Masters Coordinator.

## IV. Council Matters

### i. Visibility and Approachability of the Student Council

One of the most important tasks incumbent on the Student Council is to enable students to express their sentiments about AUC's socio-academic environment, as these sentiments, in turn, direct the Student Council's exertions. By definition, then, the Student Council has to be visible within the AUC community, so that the threshold for students to approach their student representative body and to express their sentiments is as low as possible.

Additionally, as students are entitled to be regularly informed about the different facets of student life in which the Student Council is involved and exerts influence on, our efforts have to be palpable. In other words, the Student Council must be visible and visibly transparent by apprising students of its activities periodically.

For the reasons outlined above, it is one of our first priorities to improve both the visibility and the approachability of the Student Council within the AUC community, an improvement which is primarily and ultimately conducive to the judicious representation of the student's interests. To enhance the visibility and the approachability of the Student Council, we will ... :

- a) ... inform the students of what the Student Council is working on by means of, e.g., Facebook messages, toilet newspapers, and emails;
- b) ... institute weekly office hours, during which students can come to our office in the AB and approach us with any queries they might have. (Our office hours will be on Tuesdays during lunch break, from 12.30 PM to 1.30 PM.);
- c) ... intensively promote events that we organize, such as Voices of AUC;
- d) ... hold regular polls, be it digitally or physically, about pertinent issues at AUC, in order to acquire the opinions of students and increase their engagement.

## ii. Communication with Other Student Councils

In order to keep up to date with what other councils are working on, discuss policy issues and proposals, improve the student experience as a whole and overall do a better job, we consider it imperative to maintain and improve our working relationship with the Student Councils of our partner institutions (i.e., UvA and VU) as well as the Councils of other University Colleges. To maintain and improve our working relationships with other Student Councils, we will ... :

- a) ... establish external communication channels early on by means of, e.g., email and phone contact;
- b) ... attend so-called "Constitution Borrels", in order to network with members from other Student Councils and Associations and build relationships;
- c) ... put effort into the UCSRN's Academic Committee, in which representatives of the Student Councils from all the University Colleges in the Netherlands are convened;
- d) ... we will visit campuses of the UvA, VU, and other University Colleges;
- e) ... hold meetings with other Student Councils, in order to foster inspiration for different approaches to administrative matters.

## iii. Election Reforms

The recent elections have brought to light that there are some rules in the election process that seem to produce an askew result. Viz., a single list has been allotted two seats on the AUCSC due to a one vote difference with another list that was not allotted a single seat. This peculiar outcome was due to the allotment of seats on the basis of rest votes. When a candidate does not attain the electoral quotient, s/he can still be allotted a seat on the Student Council if their list has the most rest votes.

We would like to look into the way in which the AUCSC can potentially reform the election process, bearing in mind that this process is under the VU's mandate. Nevertheless, we will ... :

- a) ... attempt to substantiate that the VU's mandate is not ideally applicable at AUC and that we need a different system for the allotment of the seats which will avoid askew and even unfair results;
- b) ... inquire whether it is possible to implement the *preferential elections* system at AUC;
- c) ... start a campaign to promote the elections in 2019, which will lead to more students casting their votes on the one hand, and more students running for office on the other hand.



## **Policy Plan 2018-2019**

We invite the endorsement of students, faculty members, and the Management Team of AUC in the implementation of the proposals outlined in this policy plan.

Portrait photo by **Jessica Dang**