Voices of AUC May 2023 Report

AUC Student Council 2022-23
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Introduction

Voices of AUC is an 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 organisers 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 May 11th, 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 host a second Voices of AUC, first of all to encourage more collaboration and collective participation at AUC but also to adapt what we learned at the prior event in December 2022. We planned more discussion time and only one plenary session to make sure the tables had enough time to discuss. We created smaller groups so that every participant had the opportunity to voice their opinion and also engage in discussion about it with others. We switched groups once and had a walking session towards the end to make sure everyone gets in contact with multiple ideas and perspectives. Most importantly, we strongly encouraged solution-oriented discussions.

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

We chose the topic **Nurturing Trust and Community at AUC** because during our year in office, we realized that many members of our AUC community feel that there is a perceived distance between different bodies of AUC, students, lecturers, and other staff. Hence, we wanted Voices of AUC to address this issue, hoping it would start a continuous discussion on trust and community at AUC. Therefore, the guiding question throughout the event was:

How can we further nurture trust and community at AUC?

Mentimeter

In order to introduce the concepts and inspire the discussions, we asked the participants to answer two Mentimeter questions. The answers were displayed on the screen for everyone to see, and are added below.

Figure 1: What do you think is important in a community?

Figure 2: How do you view the community at AUC right now?

Synthesis of Recommendations

Student-staff interaction

The most unanimous recommendation to come out of the event was having more student-staff events. Every table mentioned some form of having student-staff events as a way of strengthening the community. Though these types of events already exist in some capacity, for example with the Winter Formal and Dormfest, perhaps more events which prioritise both student and staff attendance could be useful. A further recommendation was that events such as these could be done during working hours so that teacher/student availability is possible.

Apart from events, there was also a push for more in-person interaction in general. One table recommended having a "Meet the Management" lunch hour, another recommended more office hours with different bodies of AUC, and a third table recommended regular lunch sessions in which different bodies of AUC could meet students and discuss pressing issues.

Finally, a popular recommendation was the use of person-first language, in which names are used rather than job titles when interacting between students and staff. While only one table had this as a recommendation, many expressed agreement during the walking session, either by adding initials or post-its emphasising the recommendation. This table also recommended making the staff office more accessible for students.

Feedback and participation

Many recommendations can be categorised by their push for more feedback and inclusive participation. One table suggested students having more voice in important decisions, and especially more interaction with the Student Council. A different table recommended more interaction with the Board of Studies. Another table recommended having class evaluations be more accessible and obligatory to fill in.

Many feedback-related suggestions concerned the tutor system. One table suggested having more mutual feedback between students and tutors, in which expectations are set at the beginning of the year on how tutors can accommodate students during their studies. One table also suggested having a channel where tutors can communicate with each other and ask each other questions in case a student is asking something beyond their knowledge.

Communication

Improved communication was the most popular category of recommendations. One table recommended merging the student-staff newsletter so that students and teachers are informed of both matters. This way, new staff positions can also be announced in the newsletter. Tables also pushed for earlier communication about bureaucracy deadlines and moving periods. Another table suggested having more information on the screens in the Academic Building.

The remaining communication-related recommendations had to do with clearing up confusion about the bureaucracy of AUC. One table suggested having a better student website, something we already know is underway. Others asked for more clarity on what the bodies of AUC are, who belong to which body, and how these bodies interact with each other. This would provide information on where to go when someone has a complaint or inquiry. One table particularly mentioned the ability for students to see the faces of these entities, and another table suggested having more physical contact points rather than only digital.

Student Support

Finally, one table recommended improving tutor training and standardising the tutor system, and another recommended hiring a Disability Officer, who can help students with disabilities get accommodation.

See appendix for full responses.

Interpretation/ Remarks from the Student Council

The Student Council would like to highlight that the recommendations which come from this report call upon all parties to take action to nurture trust and community. We suspect that the period of separation, which this college experienced due to Covid-related rules and regulations, was monumental in creating this perceived distance between different parties at AUC that we now aim to overcome. Student-staff events could be organized through the AUCSA and also by the AUC communications and management teams. Setting expectations to create an environment of mutual feedback is something students and staff must take part in. Improved communication to students is an initiative AUC already takes very seriously, and a realisation of the stated recommendations could help students and incoming staff members navigate how to best become involved in the AUC community.

We would like to state that we are already on the right track in terms of nurturing trust and community, and are hopeful that this will be improved in the upcoming year after our term is over.

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. Furthermore, we also strongly encourage the Management Team at AUC to collaborate with the Student Council to create platforms for students and staff members to interact with each other, for instance at a "Getting to know the bodies of AUC" event at the start of each academic year.

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

Limitations

Only approximately 30 participants were present, despite our efforts to increase attendance numbers. Also, the walking session towards the end was cut short due to timing issues and not as effective as we hoped, since many participants left throughout.

Strengths

The event brought a great mixed focus group together of highly motivated representatives of staff, students, lecturer, tutors, the Student Life Officers, AUCSA, current and future AUCSC boards, and other students. The tables were hence able to address the central question taking various perspectives into consideration, which enriched the discussion greatly. Additionally, we believe that it was beneficial for the effectiveness of the event that only one topic was introduced, because the groups had enough time to focus on it and let their discussions unfold. Furthermore, we are extremely content with the solution-oriented approach that was implemented. All tables came up with strong recommendations to nurture trust and community at AUC.

Suggestions

For further Voices of AUC events, we suggest that more budget for food may be allocated, possibly in direct collaboration with AUC. By offering a meal it may be easier for participants to attend the

event, and create a greater incentive to stay at the AB after working hours. Possibly, a more specific guiding question or predetermined discussion categories could facilitate more directed discussions and ease the process of formulating suitable recommendations. Lastly, we believe that better logistics during the walking session might make this or a similar part of the event more effective and collaborative.

Appendix

Table 1	Table 2	Table 3	Table 4	Table 5
More Student/staff social events	More student/staff social events	More events which include students and staff	Invite students to some staff events	More joint student-staff events
Students having more voice in important decisions (especially more interaction with the Student Council)	Communication between tutors; a channel where tutors can communicate when they themselves don't know the answer	Person-first language	More information on how to navigate bureaucracy of AUC or report something when there is a problem	More interaction between students and the Board of Studies
Mutual feedback in tutor system, set up initial expectations	Keeping students informed about safety measures	Improve tutor training and standardise tutor program	Have a "Meet the Management" hour	Regular lunch sessions to bodies of AUC can meet and talk to students
Merge student and staff newsletter	Find a central place for personal issues, bring back psychologists	New positions introduced in newsletter	Make staff office more accessible to students	Poster to show how the different bodies of AUC interact
Early communication about bureaucracy deadlines	More information on who is part of what body	Office hours with different bodies of AUC	Allow students to see the faces behind the entities	Better student website
		Make class evaluations more accessible and obligatory to fill in	Disability officer who can help students with disabilities get accommodation	More information on screens
			Set expectations of how tutors/teachers can accommodate students	Physical visibility/ contact points rather than digital
			Early communication of moving dates	