The Global Trends in the Attainment of Excellence: the Liberal Arts and Sciences Experience in the 21st Century
Undergraduate education and its discontents

Decreased performance, deteriorated conditions, persistent / growing inequalities, decreased affordability

In contrast to boosted research performance, investment in excellence initiatives for teaching are rare en small-scale

Prestige can hardly be built on achievements in teaching

Growing research dominance to the detriment of undergraduate teaching

Undergraduate(s) a handicap to progress in research – global prestige?

But a key element of the university mission, the cornerstone of the system, and a major indicator for the potential of the knowledge economy!
The shifting tide: (re-)defining excellence in teaching and learning

Need for reform
the purpose of higher education, developing human resources, sense of academic mission, delivering value for money

Awareness of risk
unbalanced approaches compromising the integral mission of the university

Need for differentiation
extending the range of dimensions for which excellence should be defined explicitly

(Re-) defining excellence in teaching and learning
• Comprehensive institutional performance in teaching and research
• Developing a vision on what should be learned, why, and how.
• A future-oriented perspective on values, knowledge and skills essential for the 21st century.
Towards Global Excellence: Drivers for Liberal Arts & Sciences in the 21st Century

- Epistemological arguments
- Economic arguments
- Social-moral arguments
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Interdisciplinarity
21st Century Skills

Global Citizenship
Towards Global Excellence: Drivers for Liberal Arts & Sciences in the 21st Century

**Interdisciplinarity**
- Broad themes and “Big Questions”
- Humanities & sciences

**Epistemological arguments**

**Economic arguments**

**Social-moral arguments**

**Convergence into knowledge economy agenda**

**21st century skills:**
- Creativity and innovation, critical thinking, problem solving, communication, collaboration, information, IT, and media literacy,
- Social and cross-cultural skills, leadership and responsibility

**Divergence** pluralism or conflicting values?

**Humanistic & Ethical values,**
- Citizenship, Global Perspective

The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution (C.P. Snow 1959)

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LAS as a response to the demands of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century?

The liberal arts model seems to respond to a variety of demands that define the criteria for excellence in undergraduate education in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century

Enhanced learning:
• better learning outcomes
• higher student success (degree completion and time to degree)
• stronger pursuit of research degrees by graduates

BUT no panacea!
• Small-scale and capital-intensive

Need to strengthen
• Science component
• Diversity
• Global dimension
• Connection to the professions
• The empirical underpinnings

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Amsterdam University College

Excellence and Diversity in a Global City
AUC’s profile

Selective honours college

Liberal arts & sciences bachelor

Taught in English

Small class size

Residential

Joint degree from UvA-VU

International campus

Science focus

Research orientation

Community projects

Internships

Study abroad
Liberal arts and sciences programme

Crossing the boundaries of languages, cultures and academic disciplines

Focus on “Big Questions” in science and society

Leading to in-depth study in a wide range of disciplines

Majors in sciences, humanities, social sciences

Focus on scientific reasoning and undergraduate research

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At the same time, students achieve depth of knowledge in their chosen major(s), allowing them to participate meaningfully in the interdisciplinary debate.

Towards the end of their studies, they bring their knowledge and expertise together in a capstone project.

The curriculum is organised around broad themes, where students learn at an early stage how to integrate insights from various disciplines.

These themes focus on Big Questions in science and society.
"The two innovative features of the AUC curriculum which impressed me most are its unique emphasis on "big questions" and how to approach them, namely through a research-oriented style of inquiry.

AUC seeks to link the parts of our *globus intellectualis* that seem to have become separated, much like oceans dividing the continents.

Reconnecting the natural sciences – physics, chemistry, and the life sciences – with the humanities and social sciences"
Research Orientation in the Curriculum

AUC enrolls up to 50% of its students as science majors. They are offered access to laboratory-based research projects and the lab facilities of two research universities and the Amsterdam Science Park.

>50% of science majors are female
Students & study success

AUC’s student population:
- Towards 900 students
- 50% international
- Up to 50% science majors
- 10-15% ASF scholarship
- 20% selectivity rate

Study success:
- > 90% retention (drop out < 10%)
- > 80% graduation in 3 years
- > 90% achieved full credit load (=60 EC)
- > 80% honours level (GPA of ≥ 3.0)
The student experience

What students value most:

- Individual study plan
- Broad questions in science and society
- Disciplinary courses for in-depth understanding
- Continuous assessment
- Study abroad experience
- International student community
The International AUC Student Community

- Appreciation, tolerance and understanding of cultural and global diversity
- Understanding the importance of personal and social responsibility.
- A campus climate friendly, intellectual and safe.
- AUC a place where a wide range of diversity is respected.

AUC students come from over 70 different countries
Alumni feedback

Preparation for graduate studies: 4.00

- Analysis, problem solving and methodological skills: 4.12
- Obtain and evaluate information: 4.24
- Team work: 4.26
- Communication skills: 4.40
- Study abroad experience: 4.25
- Residential experience: 4.26
Life after AUC

- Master Programme: 52%
- PhD programme: 15%
- Gap year: 13%
- Internship/voluntary work: 4%
- 2nd bachelor programme: 1%
- Paid employment: 4%

Destinations for graduate studies
(Shanghai Ranking)

2014

- Top 50: 32%
- 51-100: 27%
- 101-150: 19%
- 151-200: 13%
- >200: 4%

Examples: Berkeley, Harvard, Columbia U, Michigan, Toronto, Washington, ETH Zürich, Lausanne, Karolinska Institutet

- VU/UvA: 35%
- other NL: 26%
- Germany: 6%
- Sweden: 4%
- Switzerland: 3%
- UK: 5%
- USA, Canada: 2%
AUC Scholarship Fund 2012-2015

Logos of sponsors:
- Rabobank
- Shell
- Schiphol Group
- PwC
- Unilever
- KLM
- USG Professionals
- AkzoNobel
- De Brauw Blackstone Westbroek
References


