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PROGRESS REPORT DIVERSITY COMMISSION

July 2016

On February 24, 2016 the Diversity Commission¹, was publicly presented in a packed CREA music room on Roeterseiland. This was the third commission, after the Commissions Finance and Housing and Democratization and Decentralization, that was installed after the Maagdenhuis Occupation. The pre-commission presented the members, who each held a short maiden speech, after which there were possibilities for remarks, suggestions and questions to the Commission. The impression that many people shared was that the installation of this committee was highly significant for them and someone remarked that “she, now, for the first time felt, that she was at home at UvA”. The expectations, toward this particular Commission, are especially intense. This is evident from the many communications that the Commission receives.

In the middle of March 2016, the GV, the joint meeting of the COR and the CSR, decided to positively advise on the establishment of the Commission, whereupon the Central Board of UvA decided to subsidize the Diversity Commission, which had been meeting already since January in order to meet its mandate. The Commission works from the joint realization that the importance of diversity in the academy takes shape in increasingly complex local and global contexts. The Commission thinks about the role of

¹ The Diversity Commission is made up by prof. dr. Gloria Wekker, cultural anthropologist, emeritus professor Gender Studies, Faculty of the Humanities, Utrecht University, chair; dr. Rosalba Icaza, International Studies scholar, asst professor/researcher at the Institute of Social Studies (ISS), Erasmus University Rotterdam (EUR); prof. dr. Hans Jansen, pedagogical scientist, University of the West of England, Bristol, UK; dr. ir. Marieke Sloopman, sociologist, researcher at AISSR, Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research, UvA, vice chair and dr. Rolando Vázquez, asst. professor/sociologist at University College Roosevelt, Utrecht University

the university and the question of diversity in relation to the challenges posed by social inequality and the contemporary legacies of our colonial history at the local and global levels. The enhancement of diversity with a decolonial awareness is necessary so that the university, more than is the case now, becomes an inclusive community, where people, regardless of their gender, race/ ethnicity, religion, sexual position and disability, can develop their talents, their knowledge about our historical present and become responsible and ethically accountable citizens. Diversity is an aspect of, more precisely, a precondition for academic excellence and social justice.

In broad terms, the Diversity Commission has the following goals:

- I. To give insight in and make recommendations on *the presence of diversity among students and staff (both academic and support staff)*. In order to evaluate this diversity correctly, comparisons will be made with diversity presence at other relevant places, such as the city of Amsterdam and other educational institutions. This step consists of a quantitative analysis. This analysis is based on linking available data, and the results of the survey that the quantitative research team executed.
- II. To give insight in and make recommendations on *the UvA as an inclusive institution*. The focus is on the experiences of students and staff concerning inclusion and exclusion. Do students and staff feel part of the UvA community? Both formal and informal aspects are addressed here. For example, understandings of diversity at the EU, the national and UvA level will be mapped and *diversity policies* will be compared to (international) 'good practices'. Based on qualitative research, various aspects of diversity, such as experiences of staff and students with in- and exclusion in daily encounters, in curricula, in classroom situations will be mapped.
- III. To give insight in and make recommendations on the current state of *knowledge and teaching practices at the UvA*. What is taught and how it is taught? In what ways does this happen? This part of the research will identify to what extent the knowledge practices at the UvA reflect the diversity among students and staff as well as the diversity in broad perspectives and approaches to knowledge production.

- IV. To advise on the installation of a *permanent university-wide Diversity Unit at the UvA* to monitor and advice on policies related to diversity and the practice of diversity.

In the months since its presentation, the Diversity Commission has:

1. Prepared a joint workplan and a budget as part of the procedure for attaining formal approval for the Diversity Commission to be installed.
2. Composed detailed workplans for the four subprojects, three qualitative and one quantitative, in alignment with the mandate.
3. Worked on organizational conditions:
 - a. Recruited and hired eleven research assistants, who support the Principal Investigators with the projects.
 - b. Procured temporary housing, as workspace for the whole team, and also the secretaries of the D&D Commission (Handboogstraat 2, room 2.07).
 - c. Sorting out relevant legal regulations.
4. Established contact and held regular meetings with the Contact Group, the successor to the pre-commission, consisting of representatives of Amsterdam United, COR, CSR, University of Colour, De Nieuwe Universiteit, Humanities Rally, the labor unions, New Urban Collective and ReThink UvA. The Diversity Commission has requested the collaboration of the Contact Group in keeping in touch with the academic community through their own channels to their constituencies; to jointly organize town meetings and speaker events.
5. Organized, in close collaboration with the Contact Group, a public lecture on June 16, 2016, by prof. dr. Philomena Essed from Antioch University, U.S.A, entitled 'Every Day Racism and the Future of the Academy. What does it mean for the academy to be a diverse and decolonial place of work and learning?' This lecture was attended by 250 people, and was followed by a panel, in which questions could be asked. The lecture was the most well-attended of the Maagdenhuis lectures, so far.

Prior to this lecture, also on June 16, prof. Essed gave a workshop to the entire Diversity Commission in which the different teams presented their preliminary research findings and she gave feedback on these.

6. Reached out to the Deans of the seven faculties, in order to seek their collaboration on the research and to get firsthand information from them on the state of diversity in their respective faculties.
7. Started being active online. The Diversity Commission has its own page at the website of the D&D Commission and a Facebook page where events and news updates are posted.
8. Gone on a tour of visiting and interviewing various members of UvA staff and students in many different faculties, including FMG, FGw, FNWI, AMC, FdR, FEB, ACTA, Amsterdam University College and the Administrative Center. Focus groups and discussion circles on diversity were organized with many different participants. In addition, pictures were taken of various UvA buildings, in order to get a clearer picture of the inclusivity of the UvA environment.
9. Invited (inter-)national experts, like professors Walter Mignolo, Hanneke Takkenberg, Maurice Crul and Philomena Essed to take a seat in the International Advisory Board of our Commission. These renowned experts will advise us on the report and its recommendations and will assist in building up an international network for UvA in the field of Diversity and Decoloniality.
10. Invited dr. Isabel Hoving, Chief Diversity Officer of Leiden University, to give a workshop on June 29, 2016, to the entire Diversity Commission, including the research assistants and the volunteers. Dr. Hoving advised us about practices at Leiden University, strategic choices that have been made there, and do's and don't's.
11. Made contact with and joined, in the interim and on behalf of UvA, the national Network of Diversity Officers and Employees, initiated by the universities of Leiden, VU and EUR. Steps have been taken that this task will be taken up by UvA diversity employees, once the Commission is defunct.

12. During the course of its tenure, the Commission has organized four training sessions for its research assistants and volunteers, aimed at developing a joint theoretical framework.

The execution of the various research projects is in full process. As stated, the Diversity Commission is conducting four subprojects. Each subproject is carried out by a specific research team. In recent months the four teams made the following progress:

Project 1 Composition and experiences by UvA staff and students

Based on quantitative data, dr. ir. Marieke Sloom and two research assistants aim to enhance insight in the composition of students and staff (at least gender and ethnicity; where possible also class, sexuality, religious orientation (levensbeschouwing), disabilities); in the relation between gender and ethnicity and study/career progress; and in the relation between diversity and experiences of inclusion/exclusion and attitudes towards 'diversity initiatives'. The quantitative research team has identified relevant reports and is analyzing data from various existing databases, such as UvAData, 1cijferHO, and the National Student Survey; databases they have obtained (varying kinds of) access to. In addition, the quantitative research team sent out a survey among students and staff, and obtained information about the demographic composition of staff of outsourced services.

Project 2 Institutional frameworks

'The Meaning(s) of Diversity in Higher Education: Learning from the UvA Experience' is the first qualitative research project. The leading researcher is dr. Rosalba Icaza who is supported by three research assistants. The objective of this research is to identify and understand possible effects that certain meanings attached to the notion of 'diversity' might have in overcoming or reproducing entrenched and new forms of discrimination in higher education. The UvA is the particular context in which this research unfolds. To operationalize this, a twofold strategy has been deployed. First, key policy guidelines dealing with 'diversity' at EU, Dutch and UvA contexts have been identified, and the analysis of these documents has started in consultation with academic and policy experts on Diversity in Dutch higher education. Second, semi-open interviews have been conducted with academic staff responsible for 'dealing with diversity' in the everyday

administration of teaching and research activities (e.g. Deans), and in designing curricula (teachers, course leaders). All the interviews are being documented with transcripts which have been sent to the interviewees for their verification. The team has so far interviewed sixteen persons including five of the seven UvA Deans and has developed an analysis tool to highlight the findings.

Project 3 Informal frameworks: hidden messages

Prof. dr. Hans Jansen, supported by three research assistants, collects characteristic stories of students and staff at the UvA via interviews. These stories will show to what extent diversity receives attention at UvA. Some of the stories will be used to illustrate the current situation at UvA regarding diversity. The rest will be deconstructed to get a clear picture of the underlying patterns in the stories. In addition, photos of UvA buildings (of the inside and outside) are deconstructed to review the accessibility of the buildings. The deconstructed photos will also show how students and staff may or may not feel at home at the UvA. Many photos have been made and the deconstruction process has started.

Project 4 Knowledge and teaching practices

The qualitative team led by dr. Vázquez that approaches diversity as a practice of teaching and learning, has developed a theoretical framework for the analysis of diversity in relation to what is taught and how it is being taught at the UvA. The team's research activities will formulate recommendations 1) on the curricular level, 2) the faculty level, and 3) the student level. Three corresponding research approaches have been developed. In order to address diversity at the level of the curriculum, the team has engaged in background research in order to design a catalogue that can highlight diversity-rich courses offered at the UvA, based on a keyword analysis of the course offerings. To identify structural as well as pedagogical practices that either reduce or foster difference, they have organized interviews and conversation circles with students and staff. They have developed a tool-kit and facilitator guide for the diversity discussion circles; and they have also produced promotional material like texts, posters and logos. Furthermore, the team has developed interview guidelines and conducted in-depth and semi-structured interviews with key informants at the faculty level. Both the circles and the interviews have been documented, with extensive notes, recordings and

a number of transcripts. A codification scheme has been finalized to analyze the data produced in the interviews, discussion circles and the expert workshop.

For the remainder of its tenure, the Commission envisions to continue its research during the summer months and to draft the first preliminary reports. These will be shared with the (inter-)national Advisory Board and the Contact Group. Instead of a referendum, starting in September 2016 consultation rounds on the first draft of the report will be held with the entire academic community in various central sites of the UvA. We welcome everyone to give their input on the report which will be taken into account in the final report. The Diversity Commission will present its final report on October 12, 2016, in keeping with the final submission of the D&D Commission.

You are welcome to react to this report via email: uvadiversitycommission@gmail.com.

We would like to thank you for your interest and wish you a good summer.

Best regards,

UvA Diversity Commission