Statement on Diversity and Staff Precarity at Amsterdam University College

Following and contributing to the recent and significant student lead anti-racist initiative at AUC in the aftermath of Black Lives Matter protests throughout the world, which tens of thousands joined in The Netherlands, we are offering this statement to AUC's dean and management team:

It is well established that racism is (re)produced through institutional arrangements that guarantee that some thrive, while others are left to deal with institutional walls and barriers. Having read AUC Core Management Team's "commitment to a new approach" we feel obliged to highlight the position of those at the margins of the institution, academic and non-academic staff, on precarious temporary contracts; real people whose working conditions any proposed policy must urgently address.

It is first of all important to point out that minorities are overrepresented among those on exploitative temporary contracts in the Netherlands. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, in the Netherlands, over 60% of non-native Dutch people on temporary contracts are "non-Western migrants" (CBS, Arbeidsdeelname; migratieachtergrond 2020). This is the national context in which AUC is embedded; and the national overrepresentation of minorities on temporary contracts is reflected in AUC's staff composition. It is fundamental to understand that this affects primarily Black people, migrants from the global South, refugees and Muslims, who are those who traditionally suffer from and struggle against institutional racism and bear the brunt of neo-liberal capitalism in The Netherlands. Women from these groups are in a particularly vulnerable position. We infer that these groups are also overrepresented amongst the 70 employees that appear in this table from AUC's 2018-19 annual report:

2018–2019	Number	Fte
AUC core teaching faculty	48	43.69
of which also tutors	35	
Teaching faculty from UvA	45	5.9
Teaching faculty from VU	65	7.02
Other external faculty	70	13.4
Support staff	15	12.5
VU-AUC secondment	5	1.01

AUC relies heavily on precarious workers in order to fulfill its structural needs. It utilises the fact that these workers are available and in need of paid jobs, which is both unsustainable and ethically questionable. Although temporary workers have been crucial to AUC's success over the years and continue to put their time and effort into the institution, they are treated as expendable. Temporary lecturers often agree to last minute requests by AUC, and AUC often expects them to contribute before and after their contracts. They shape, prepare, and evaluate courses, often working hard to cope with the demands of forever teaching courses for the first time. They dedicate their free time to improving AUC and frequently provide expert advice to AUC on curriculum reform and diversity matters. At the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, temporary lecturers took online teaching in their stride to support the very institution that is ready to replace them. Temporary academic and non-academic staff will be willing to expose themselves if asked to return to campus. All of this for an institution that fails to address their precarity.

When asked about their prospects inside AUC, management states that UvA/VU policy disincentivizes hiring "externals." AUC appeals to protocol according to which it is obliged to borrow staff from UvA/VU instead of hiring staff permanently. It is a fact, however, that the UvA/VU struggle with lack of diversity among staff and with deep-seated institutional racism (see

"Let's Do Diversity: Report of the University of Amsterdam Diversity Commission" Wekker et al. 2016). Hiring from a pool of non-diverse staff at UvA/VU clearly prevents AUC from living up to its own ideal of diversity. Furthermore, UvA/VU staff is overworked due to hiring freezes across departments. As a consequence, AUC perpetually relies on a mix of PhD staff at these institutions as well as "external" temporary lecturers; both categories of lecturers ultimately serve the AUC budget at the cost of ethical standing and of the smooth running of courses. When temporary lecturers ask management to explain this gridlock, they are told that AUC is only getting better at hiring UvA/VU personnel – in other words, they are told that AUC is working towards rendering them expendable. While we recognize that AUC is the yield of a joint initiative between UvA/VU, it also enjoys some degree of autonomy in terms of forging its own path as an institution. We therefore appeal to AUC to address the situation of its precarious staff and give it urgent priority by negotiating the hiring protocol with UvA/VU. This protocol is one of the critical reasons why AUC will continue to fail to fulfil its diversity goals.

We further elaborate what a meaningful change would practically mean: first, acquiring independence from a pool of UvA/VU staff that is overworked as well as lacking in diversity will be a key step towards diversity in AUC's hiring practices. Second, AUC strives to maintain the quality of its courses, which is compromised time and again when it discards lecturers who have acquired experience at this institution and have taught several iterations of a course. Third, AUC will be able to stop employment practices that are simply unjustifiable, not by further eliminating opportunities for those traditionally marginalized in Dutch academia, but by creating opportunities for them to become acknowledged full members of its community under sustainable contracts. Putting protocol before people makes for poor institutions in the long run. Students at AUC have vociferously addressed the exploitation of temporary staff and the need for diversity in staff composition in the previous weeks and made justified demands. Our students have not failed to notice that minorities are underrepresented in permanent faculty but overrepresented in the case of temporary staff both academic and non-academic. In fact, it is startling that minorities are truly visible only among temporary lecturers, cafeteria workers, reception, and cleaning staff.

Last but not least, some advances were made in the past years, to introduce and further develop a focus on intersectionality, critical race, and decolonial studies in the AUC curriculum. Expertise in these areas is greatly in the hands of temporary "external" staff. Student responses to such courses are overwhelmingly positive, and the recent mobilization has made abundantly clear that AUC students see this not only as a vital part of the curriculum but also as a lens through which they can understand the world and their responsibilities as global citizens. We call on you to be vigilant about the impact of precarious employment in these areas, and urge you to enable staff to continue to grow and develop this important part of the curriculum, inspiring more awareness and commitment to anti-racism in current and new AUC generations.

As argued by the UvA Diversity Commission, a commitment to diversity must involve an intersectional anti-racist stance that is reflected in the composition of an institution's student and staff population as much as its intellectual life. Anti-racism must be a living institutional practice, which is about real people with real life concerns and aspirations, who have the drive to contribute their expertise to their community of learning, with passion and dignity.

Patricia Schor and Hilla Dayan, also on behalf of other co-authors who wish to remain anonymous

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Signatories in solidarity (next page):

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