UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM

Academic citizenship: science engaged with society

Vision on Teaching and Learning











Introduction

The University of Amsterdam brings curious people together to learn to think independently and creatively

- UvA strategy 2027-2032 - Samen komen we verder (Together we move forward)

At the University of Amsterdam, we connect scientific curiosity with social responsibility. We are committed to sustainable prosperity, healthy futures, responsible digital transformations, and a resilient and just society. By linking strong academic disciplines and research-driven education with a deep-rooted engagement with the world around us, the UvA aims to help educate new generations of academics: academic citizens who combine scientific knowledge with critical thinking, social engagement, and the ability to take responsibility in a complex and changing society.

We believe that scientific knowledge and education do not exist in isolation, but always take place within a broader societal context. In our teaching, we demonstrate how the wide range of knowledge and perspectives at the UvA contributes to scientific and societal challenges alike, from democratic resilience to technological and ethical issues. In addition to disciplinary knowledge, this requires complementary skills and an engaged academic attitude. As an internationally leading university, based in Amsterdam and connected to the world, we enact this every day.

This new vision on teaching and learning provides a shared language and direction for what we want to offer our students and where we want to make a difference. It articulates what education at the UvA stands for and what our priorities are for the coming years. The vision on teaching and learning not only describes what characterises teaching at the UvA, but also what movement we want to achieve together as we work step by step towards the education of tomorrow.

Academic citizenship

The UvA has chosen “academic citizenship” as the guiding principle for our vision on teaching and learning. Academic citizenship concerns the way in which our students and staff always and inevitably are a part of society and how they contribute to it. The UvA therefore focuses not only on the individual development of knowledge, but also on broader academic development and social cohesion.

In our teaching and in our academic community, we encourage students and staff to think independently, take responsibility, and engage in dialogue on the basis of curiosity, arguments, and knowledge. Students are encouraged to actively relate to their environment, to explore different perspectives and to develop their own position. They learn to translate societal challenges into research questions and to make academic insights accessible to a wider audience. This is how we connect scientific knowledge with societal impact.

Academic citizenship encompasses the responsibility of staff and students to contribute to the university and to society – now and in the future – through independent and creative thinking, social engagement, and ethical conduct.

This vision on teaching and learning builds on the foundations of our teaching, which remain firmly in place. Our education is and will remain high-quality, research-driven, and focused on academic development, with room for differentiation and specialisation. The close intertwinement of research and teaching is a core element of our educational quality. Our programmes are based on scientific knowledge, students learn to contribute to this knowledge themselves through research, and lecturers connect teaching and research to the societal context.

Room for different academic orientations

Students at the UvA are given room to explore which academic orientations and research themes suit them. We support them in shaping a study path that aligns with their interests and ambitions. In doing so, we not only educate students to become excellent academics, but also engaged and responsible participants in society.

Reading guide

The UvA vision on teaching and learning elaborates on the *UvA strategy 2027-2032 - Samen komen we verder* and builds, among other things, on our earlier vision on teaching and learning from 2017.

The UvA vision on teaching and learning consists of the following components:

- Academic citizenship at the UvA
- Different pathways to academic citizenship
- Moving forward together

1. Academic citizenship at the UvA

Academic citizenship provides a direction for the attitude of our students, lecturers, and the entire UvA community in a changing world and for what we aim to achieve with our education.

Engaged, curious, and independently-minded

In the *UvA strategy 2027-2032 - Samen komen we verder*, the identity of the UvA is expressed in three core values: engaged, curious, and independently minded (eigenzinnig). These values express who we are and where we want to go as a university. They describe the essence of our rich, multifaceted community of around fifty thousand students and staff, each with their own perspective.

These core values are also reflected in the way we educate. They form the basis of academic development at the UvA and come together in our understanding of academic citizenship. The core values make clear what students can expect from studying at the UvA and what is expected of them.

Translating the core values to education

Engaged

Engagement means connecting with your fellow students, with the academic community, with societal partners, and with society as a whole. It also means taking responsibility for the impact of your work as part of the scientific process. The UvA is deeply connected to society around us. Rooted in Amsterdam, we engage with the Netherlands, Europe and the world beyond.

What does this mean for our students?
Students learn to position themselves in relation to each other and to the world. They are introduced to perspectives that are different from their own, learn to collaborate with people from diverse backgrounds, and develop the ability to bridge the gap between research and society.

Students learn to take responsibility. They reflect on the impact of knowledge, on their own assumptions, and on the ethical dimensions of their work. They learn to handle knowledge sources responsibly, to question standpoints, and to engage in dialogue.

Curious

Curiosity is the starting point of our teaching. We cherish the sense of wonder that leads to new questions, unexpected connections, and fundamental breakthroughs. We create a learning environment in which we examine assumptions and in which students and lecturers explore new perspectives together. An environment where there is room to make mistakes and learn from them. Curiosity is a powerful research tool and is fuelled by the questions and perspectives present in our diverse international community.

What does this mean for our students?
Students learn to do research. They develop disciplinary knowledge, an inquisitive attitude, and critical-thinking skills. They not only acquire the current body of knowledge, but also learn how to contribute to new knowledge themselves, guided by principles such as transparency, openness, and the responsible use of new technologies.

Independently minded (eigenzinnig)

Being independently minded (eigenzinnig) arises from the combination of curiosity and engagement: forming independent thoughts and questioning prevailing norms on the basis of an open academic attitude. This requires courage and a consistently scientifically grounded approach: one of the characteristics of our UvA community. In dialogue with each other and with lecturers, students learn to critically challenge established assumptions. Being independently minded at the UvA does not develop in isolation, because it emerges through interaction with others.

What does this mean for our students?
Students learn to chart their own course. They help shape their own study path, develop the ability to adapt, and lay the foundation for lifelong learning. In doing so, they are part of the UvA community.

They learn to be resilient. By entering into collaborative relationships with others, students learn to view issues from different perspectives and to remain open to change. This enables them to develop resilience and to deal creatively with uncertainty and complexity.

Through these core values, academic citizenship takes shape: at the UvA we educate students who think independently and creatively, who are engaged with each other, with the academic community, and with society. Students who, together, make a difference within and beyond academia, now and in the future. We consider the knowledge and skills this requires to be crucial for the education and research of the future.

For the student

For students, this means explicit attention to ethics, critical and independent thinking, and reflection. Students learn how to approach divergent viewpoints and develop the ability to engage in conversation on the basis of arguments and knowledge. Building on an academic foundation, students develop broad and adaptive skills that enable them to apply their scientific insights and address complex issues, within and beyond the academic context, even when that context is changing. In doing so, they become aware of the impact of academic education and research, and learn to act on that impact in a responsible way. This further prepares them for their role and contribution in society, also after graduating.

For the lecturer

Our lecturers design learning environments in which knowledge, skills, and societal context come together. In their teaching, they create space for ethics, reflection, and dialogue, and guide students in how to deal responsibly with new technologies. As role models, they demonstrate how academics position themselves in a complex society, they welcome students into the academic community, and support them in actively helping to contribute to it. They do so through student-activating and innovative teaching. Evolving insights on learning call for continuous development and joint reflection on what good teaching at the UvA requires.

The UvA places the responsibility for education as close as possible to its teaching staff, with considerable attention to knowledge sharing, and the support and professional development of our teachers. Among other things, we foster this through working with the network of Teaching & Learning Centres in providing didactic tools, training, and innovation. Attention to feasibility and workload are important preconditions here.

GenAI
Take, for example, the rapid development of generative artificial intelligence, which is changing how we produce knowledge and has a major impact on the academic landscape. In teaching, we therefore devote attention to how such systems work, what this means for the reliability of information, and how students interact with them responsibly. AI also has direct and far-reaching consequences for teaching itself. For example, on how students study and which digital competences they will need in the future. This requires attention to AI literacy and data skills. It also calls for carefully considered choices regarding learning outcomes, assessment, and the design of teaching, a development in which programmes currently find themselves. At the UvA, we take an integrated approach through policies, guidelines, and support for the responsible interaction with GenAI in education.

Strengthening what is already there, focusing on shared priorities

Many of these knowledge areas and skills are already part of existing programmes, but are not always explicitly recognised or positioned as such. This vision therefore aims not only to innovate, but also at making visible and strengthening what is already present. In addition, this vision on teaching and learning aligns with UvA-wide priorities and highlights elements that are essential for a learning environment centred on academic citizenship: a plurality of voices, inspiring campuses, and collaboration.

Plurality of voices
We attach great value to an active academic community in which students and staff feel welcome, safe, and appreciated, and in which there is room to develop their talents. We cherish and encourage a plurality of voices: it is precisely the multiplicity of perspectives and disciplines within our broad university that strengthens our teaching and academic debate. An inclusive and diverse learning environment, with room for differences and for open, respectful dialogue, is essential in this regard.

Inspiring campuses
The UvA positions itself as a campus university. Our campuses, both physical and digital, are accessible and vibrant environments where students and staff enjoy coming together. They provide spaces to meet each other, for creativity and collaboration, and support high-quality teaching and research. Meeting one another is essential, and the interaction between lecturer and student, and among students themselves, is a crucial part of the learning process.

Joining forces
By stimulating interdisciplinary collaboration across domains and faculties and by offering students opportunities to study beyond the boundaries of their own programme, we make full use of the vast wealth of knowledge present at the UvA. This is pivotal, because major societal challenges and the UvA's strategic research themes cannot be addressed from a single discipline alone.

We also increase our impact by taking a transdisciplinary perspective on these themes, together with societal partners, governments, companies, cultural institutions, and other knowledge institutions around us. This is how we build a strong and connected UvA community in which we join forces.

2. Different pathways to academic citizenship: focus for students

For students, it is important not only to acquire new knowledge and skills in the context of academic citizenship, but also to have the space to find their own way of contributing to society. There are many ways in which an academic education can contribute to society.

Orientations in the study path

To do justice to this diversity, we work with three orientations through which students can chart their own path: "research", "society", and "entrepreneurship". Each orientation establishes a different connection between science and society. These are not separate routes, but orientations that students can adopt over the course of their studies. For example through electives, minors, internships, practical assignments with external partners, specialisations in the final phase of the programme, and the final project or thesis.

As a student, you do not need to choose a single orientation; especially in the Bachelor's phase, it is the diversity of experiences that makes a study rich in knowledge, skills, and perspectives. In the Master's phase, and in lifelong-learning education for professionals, there is more often further profiling and specialisation. Within the shared principles of this vision on teaching and learning, we do justice to the diversity of disciplines and the wide range of programmes at our university by leaving room for faculty-specific emphases and different paces of development.

Finding your own way

The UvA has a large and diverse student population. We cherish the rich diversity of backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives and therefore think it is important to offer our students both the guidance and the flexibility they need to find their way within the academic environment and to shape their study path appropriately. We provide structure in the options available, without limiting the necessary room for individual development.

Three orientations for students

Research

With a focus on research, students prepare for an (excellent) research career. They deepen their knowledge within a discipline while also learning to work across disciplinary boundaries. After all, the most surprising breakthroughs often occur at the intersection of disciplines and paradigms. Interdisciplinary work relies on effective collaboration, and such skills are an integral part of the curriculum. Science is teamwork: students learn to improve each other's work, identify blind spots, and formulate new questions together. Science communication, integrity, and ethics are important foundational skills in this context. Students learn to become researchers who not only master current knowledge but also push boundaries, and can explain why this matters.

Society

With a focus on society, students learn to make an impact on issues that cannot be solved within a single discipline, such as the climate crisis, health inequalities, digital inequality, or the resilience of democratic institutions. Students apply scientific knowledge to complex challenges and translate societal questions into research. This requires not only an interdisciplinary approach, but also transdisciplinary collaboration with organisations, governments, and citizens. Students learn to deal with conflicting interests and perspectives and to make optimal use of scientific knowledge. They are challenged to look beyond their own expertise, to listen to what a community needs, and to stand up for those whose interests are less visible.

Entrepreneurship

With a focus on entrepreneurship, students learn to achieve (societal) impact through innovation and valorisation. Students connect scientific opportunities with the major transitional challenges of our time. They learn to creatively translate ideas into solutions that create sustainable value. The UvA supports students who want to start their own business, drive social innovation, or pursue a career in, for example, the financial sector. At the UvA, entrepreneurship also means renewing existing organisations, reforming policy, or discovering new forms of collaboration. In doing so, students draw on our network: the UvA provides support for start-ups and new initiatives. Students develop an entrepreneurial attitude and learn that innovation begins with an independent minded perspective and the academic curiosity to do things differently.

3. Moving forward together

Academic citizenship: the relationship between science, student, and society

This vision on teaching and learning is not a break with the past, but a deliberate continuation of what came before. The foundations of UvA teaching remain firmly in place: research-driven education, strong academic formation, room for differentiation and specialisation, and the close interwovenness of education and research. At the same time, this vision on teaching and learning clarifies what education at the UvA stands for and what are priorities are in the coming years. By highlighting academic citizenship, we make explicit what has always been an implicit part of our teaching: the relationship between science, student, and society.

Our vision on teaching and learning has been developed in dialogue with students, lecturers, researchers and staff from across the university and responds to the widely shared need for an updated vision on education. Together, we will translate this vision into recognisable choices in the coming years. We will develop examples that show how this vision takes shape in practice and that help us to learn what works, with room for differences in approach between disciplines and programmes.

This vision is therefore an invitation to build on what already exists and to strengthen it together: in our education, in research, and in the way we as the UvA community relate to each other and to the world around us. The strength of the University of Amsterdam lies in this collective movement: a community that continues to learn, to question, and to innovate.

Colophon

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