

Memo by the Central and Faculty Diversity Officers of the University of Amsterdam on their mandate in response to political events, Amsterdam April 2022.

1. In response to recent international events and the discussions these have provoked at the University of Amsterdam, we - central and faculty diversity officers of the University of Amsterdam - are aware that members of the university's community and perhaps other parties will expect certain responses or positions from us. Such requests might range from expressions of solidarity to assistance for student or employee placements. This is not surprising since the UvA is a large, international and bi-lingual university offering an academic context for citizens from many countries and nationalities, including from the countries currently at war. Being tasked with supporting and fostering the process of increasing diversity, equity and inclusion within the community of students and staff at the University of Amsterdam, we are taking these requests seriously. This memo offers an indication of our engagement with the current war but will also apply to requests in the wake of other comparable conflicts.
2. We are aware that all of us are not just UvA community members, yet that as individuals we bring many other identities (or dimensions of identification) to our campuses. These identities can refer to nationality, to cultural, religious, ethnic, migration or other background(s), to our allegiance to political or ideological directions, to our gender and sexual orientation, to our socio-economic status, etc. Depending upon these identities, we may individually be differently affected by conflicts abroad or at home. However, at the same time and irrespective of all these identities, as members of an academic community we convene and engage with each other because of a shared interest in scientific research and education.
3. Indeed, it is these purposes of our UvA community that eventually guide our actions and thoughts, also as diversity officers. While being tasked, though, with supporting and fostering the process of increasing diversity, equity and inclusion at UvA, we do recognize that the contribution to, and participation in, research and education is affected and enriched by these identities mentioned above. Our efforts as diversity officers are aimed at increasing awareness of the - at times undesirable - influences of these identities, offering advice and taking actions in mitigating such influences, and thus supporting relevant processes of change within the UvA community. For these processes we bring relevant expertise and resources.
4. As a result of the foregoing, our primary concern in a war-affected situation like the current one is to offer advice and resources on how to cope with the tensions that the war may bring to our community such that its diversity, equity and inclusion are fostered. Again, this may consist of elements like:
 - a. Raising awareness and offering advice concerning the implications for all individuals affected directly or indirectly by events like the current war in Ukraine, as this may have an impact upon their participation in research and education and being a member of our community. This holds for all those affected by it, irrespective of any of the other identities that they bring to our campus, like their nationality. Consequently, individuals from both warring sides deserve our attention as their participation in the UvA community might be affected even though they don't actively contribute to the conflict.

- b. Principally, though, while caring for the potential impact of conflicts on our students and staff we should avoid bringing the conflict to our university campus. Even though we must acknowledge that in such times it is difficult to keep personal and academic spheres separate, it is our responsibility to facilitate this separation. This also means that as an institution we should be careful in our expressions and actions not to alienate those who are – by their nationality or culture etc. - connected to one or the other conflicting party.
- c. As we are emphasizing here that as a community we are constantly navigating between our academic ‘raison d’être’ and the innumerable individual identities in our midst, it is important that we attend and dedicate time to this challenge. How can we enhance mutual understanding and empathy that individuals around us may need in trying times, while maintaining our academic nature? It appears that we need to teach ourselves the art of personal dialogue, in addition to the critical and rational debate and argumentation which are much more common in our academic context. Indeed, we should also provide space and time for such other modes of interaction, if only to respond to the needs of those community members affected by the current conflict.

As Central and Faculty Diversity Officers, the observations above will guide our responses to conflicts that affect in one way or another those who constitute our UvA community. Recognizing our limitations in what we can offer, we also hope to explain why we may be disappointing some members of that community whose diversity and inclusion we aim to foster.

(This Mandate Statement was drafted on March 9, 2022, by UvA Central Diversity Officer Machiel Keestra and finalized in response to comments to UvA’s Faculty Diversity Officers and members of the Central Diversity Office on April 6, 2022.)