

# DRAFT ACTION PLAN ANTI-RACISM AND COMMUNITY BUILDING AT LUC

## Background

At the end of February 2020, the LUC community received a letter from students calling on all of us to be more aware of and active against racism and racially insensitive language at LUC. The message of the letter was extensively discussed among staff, but these discussions did not lead to a clear response to the student community. In tandem with the growing visibility of the (inter)national Black Lives Matter movement, the call for a more explicit anti-racist agenda for LUC grew louder, and was exacerbated by the previous lack of clear institutional commitment to this cause. The College Board then convened three online 'town hall meetings' to discuss anti-racism with the entire LUC community, including alumni. These were very well-attended and revealed several clear areas for improvement to make LUC a more inclusive community.

It is also evident that during the past few months a series of online exchanges and social media posts surrounding the debate about racism at LUC diminished trust within the community, and were harmful to open dialogue. This draft action plan is therefore also explicitly aimed at (re)building community trust and a culture of respectful communication. We also need to establish clear guidelines that prevent actions that violate ethical and legal boundaries. By addressing the areas of improvement below, LUC is committed to create a respectful and inclusive student and staff community that fosters a College culture that actively works to prevent and address marginalization, defamation, or abuse of its members, and that promotes critical self-reflection, dialogue, and openness to other perspectives.

## Status of this document

This document contains a draft of the action plan referred to above as formulated by the College Board, and will be finalized after summer following input from students, staff, alumni, and the formal advisory bodies, namely the Program Council, the College Council, and the external Advisory Board. It is crucial that an action plan of this scope is treated with care and time for thoughtful reflection, which cannot be done in the summer period. Therefore, this draft is intended to strike a balance between maintaining momentum and expressing unequivocal commitment to the topics covered on the one hand, and the need to develop a widely supported and sustainable plan of action.

This means the following:

- This draft action plan does not reflect formal decisions until the above processes have been completed, and is thus still open to revisions and additions
- This action plan is confidential and should not be shared outside of the LUC community of students, staff and alumni
- Input regarding this plan from members of the LUC community should be communicated to the College Council ([cc@luc.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:cc@luc.leidenuniv.nl)), so they can take this input into account when the council discusses its contents after summer
- Targeted meetings with relevant individuals and small groups will be held to discuss specific aspects of this draft action plan where applicable

The areas addressed in this draft action plan are the following (see details on the next pages):

- (1) Student awareness and skills;
- (2) Staff awareness and skills;
- (3) Procedures for handling complaints, resolving conflicts;
- (4) Support for students in underrepresented groups;
- (5) Content of the curriculum;
- (6) Communication and Recruitment

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## **(1) Student awareness and skills**

### Intro week

The College Board will convene an online meeting for incoming students with information and Q&A on relevant developments at LUC, including the racism discussions and action plan, the new first-year community-building program (see below), COVID-related developments, and their implications for teaching and learning. In addition, the general issue of community and how it fits into the Liberal Arts and Sciences educational philosophy will be addressed in various parts of the intro week program

### Throughout academic year

A new first-year activity series will be piloted, aimed at respectful and inclusive community building. This series will not yet be mandatory because this requires a change in regulations that takes more time to prepare. The working title of the series is 'Community Building'. The program will for now be primarily conducted by expert organizations in the form of a series of workshops and panel discussions (currently exploring options with several relevant organizations). The new component will include at least the following topics:

- Liberal Arts and Sciences educational and community philosophy
- Anti-racism and privilege awareness, and intercultural communication skills
- Digital citizenship training for a respectful and inclusive community
- Active bystander training
- Gender and sexuality
- Self-advocacy and community advocacy skills

After every block, LUC will evaluate each of the activities that took place in that block in order to develop the program for next year, and see which elements can also be made available to the second- and third-year students. In addition, a series of workshops on self-care and study skills will be offered to all LUC students by the Study Advisors and Student Life Counsellors.

Finally, several existing and new courses at LUC already cover relevant issues of community, identity, and social and societal processes across the curriculum. An overview of those will be made after summer.

## **(2) Staff awareness and skills**

LUC staff is highly committed to deliver the best teaching they can provide. This includes continuous development of courses, classroom management, and didactical skills. In the first semester of academic year 2020-2021, LUC will organize several staff workshops focusing on enhancing awareness and furthering skills regarding a respectful and inclusive classroom and wider College climate. This will involve internal reflection on LUC's educational goals and values, and sharing of best practices, as well as sessions facilitated by an external organization, and including affiliated staff from other institutes who teach at LUC whenever possible. In addition to having collected the students' concerns addressed in the run-up to this action plan, staff has been asked via an online survey to list the topics and concerns that they would like to see covered in this series. A second set of sessions will be organized in the second semester to allow those who were not present

in the first semester (because of various forms of leave) to also take part in these workshops, and to reflect on how some of the new insights and skills have worked in actual teaching practice. From the following academic year, repeat sessions will be offered for new staff members.

Also in the first semester, LUC will engage an external expert specialized in uncovering bias in our organization, from the recruitment phase to the actual student experience, reviewing all possible services and processes that (prospective) students can encounter along the way. This process will lead to a set of recommendations that the College Board will share with the LUC community, with a substantiated response on what will and can be changed and how.

### **(3) Procedures for handling complaints, resolving conflicts**

The College Board had hoped to be able to have a new procedure in place by September, but after researching this in the past few weeks, it has become clear that designing new procedures for handling complaints and resolving conflicts is complex, and that we also have to reflect carefully on what is and is not needed on top of existing procedures. This requires well-considered investigation of the content of our codes of conduct (and revision where necessary), best practices in other institutes, their relation to existing structures, and legal issues. In addition, this process is ideally done with the community, actively involving students in revising the social honor code, which cannot be done effectively in the summer break. LUC will take on this task in the first semester after summer, with the goal of completing both the revised social honor code and the related complaints procedures before the start of the second semester. These procedures will be explicitly aimed at handling complaints and conflicts regarding experiences of racism and other forms of exclusion or marginalization of individuals or groups in a way that emphasizes an educational and reconciliatory approach that builds community trust and cohesion.

In the meantime, we will make sure that before the new academic year starts, a clear overview of the existing structures and procedures that students can utilize when issues come up will be shared with the LUC community.

### **(4) Support for students in underrepresented groups**

All students can always go to the Student Life Counsellors (SLCs) for any issues that affect them socially or emotionally. LUC is currently hiring a new SLC and aims to hire a person specialized in minority issues for this position. If that is not possible, LUC will ensure to have an external 'on-call' counsellor with that profile specifically for supporting students experiencing racism or other forms of identity-based discrimination. One of these will be in place by the beginning of academic year 2020-2021. In addition, LUC will arrange structural academic staff support for the student Diversity committee and its subcommittees, so that they can provide advice and support where necessary, and foster positive student-staff relations. Finally, the College Board will invite the student community and Fortuna to discuss ways of better supporting student initiatives and activities contributing to a more inclusive college.

### **(5) Content of the curriculum**

A group of staff members is already running a decolonizing workgroup, aimed at investigating how and where the LUC curriculum could benefit from a more inclusive and less western-centric

approach. The workgroup and the Program Board note that substantive and meaningful changes in the curriculum require time. To support these efforts and to include students in this process, at least three research clinics focusing on the study of curriculum decolonization from an academic and a practical perspective will be offered in the first semester of academic year 2020-2021, with expert guest speakers (open for all interested students and staff to attend), and meetings with the staff workgroup and major conveners.

#### **(6) Communication and recruitment**

To keep the LUC community of students, staff, and alumni informed on the developments regarding the current action plan, but also about other policy developments relevant to the community, the dean will write a weekly message in the LUC newsletter with updates. The current action plan will also be translated into a webpage where (incoming) students can find all relevant information about policies and procedures regarding diversity and inclusion at LUC. In addition, LUC is working on a social media policy that details how the College uses its social media platforms, and to share this policy with the community so that it is clear what our members can and cannot expect from online institutional communications. This process will also include a review of social media platforms routinely used by LUC students and alumni, but that are not run by the institute, and to develop policies together with the (student) administrators of relevant pages/accounts that can effectively prevent and address racism and other types of offensive exchanges, and foster respectful dialogue. These processes are planned for the first semester.

Regarding recruitment, the information for prospective students will be reviewed and adapted (making use of the upcoming results of the ongoing [Students4Students project](#)), with the following points of attention: (1) honest communication about the diversity (or lack thereof in some areas) of our student and staff body within the limits of what our registration system covers; (2) specialized information for prospective students from groups that are generally underrepresented at LUC (e.g., first-generation students) to support their decision-making and application process. Some of these changes can be made in the short term (this calendar year) and others will require more time and analysis of relevant data. In addition, LUC will continue to invest in fundraising to enhance the number of need-based scholarships for students with limited financial means, a process that will require several years of investment to yield significant resources. In collaboration with the College Council we will examine options for redirecting funds currently used for other purposes (to be discussed in semester 1), and for earmarking part of our scholarship funds for specific target groups/schools/regions (ideally for the next application round).