Memo: Concerns about equity, diversity and inclusion at the University of Amsterdam in times of COVID-19: an interim inventory

To: Executive Board and Deans

CC: Central heads of departments, Faculty heads of departments, Chairs of OC, Program coordinators/directors, Study advisors, Human Resources managers, and entire UvA community

From: Chief Diversity Officer Team and Faculty Diversity Officers

Dear all,

As you are aware, many members of the UvA community are coping with extra stress and challenges, due to the coronavirus and the measures taken. However, as we know from usual circumstances, not all individuals are equally affected by or resilient to unfamiliar conditions. This can be due to individual risk and protective factors, yet also to factors that are related to the specific working and living conditions with which some individuals have to cope. From the perspective of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) of the UvA community, we - the Faculty Diversity Officers and the Chief Diversity Officer Team - are requesting attention be paid to those conditions that some of our community members are facing due to their specific situations, and which might be overlooked as these are less common among the majority of this community. Our focus is on students and staff who come from underrepresented groups and more vulnerable groups in general.

Below is a list of concerns or challenges that might affect some community members more than others and that require additional attention. First, a list of concerns that might apply to some members of all groups, then a list of concerns that is applicable to students and staff more specifically. We are aware that this list for a large part will overlap with what is known by the Executive Board/deans already. In that sense, this list can be seen as a checklist for exploring how encompassing current measures are, and if there are any issues or groups we might be missing. We are happy that the Board has sent out an extra monitor (the UvA Crisismonitor) in the past week as this will also greatly contribute to an overview of the problems people within the UvA community are facing.

We hope that our advice on possible solutions and best practices will contribute to alleviate the effects of the current crisis on those UvA staff and students belonging to the specific groups that suffer the most right now. We also hope to raise awareness for all UvA students and staff around these issues, by means of this Memo.

We look forward to cooperating and coordinating with you in the important work that we are all involved in during these challenging times.

Sincerely,

Chief Diversity Officer Team
Faculty Diversity Officers
Faculty Diversity Sounding Boards/Working Groups

Checklist regarding equity, diversity and inclusion dimensions of the impact of the corona crisis and responses to that crisis – and in some cases, best practice examples are included for their mitigation. This list is not exhaustive nor complete, but what we have collected thus far.

I. Practical conditions at home

Concerns	Best practices, recommendations
- Unsafe or unhealthy environment: some students and staff are more at risk when staying at home than others or are less able to continue studying and working at home. Some staff and students may be in quarantine within a violent household, and vulnerable to domestic violence. In addition, new vulnerable groups may appear from this crisis, such as students moving back to an abusive household. There have been some reports of UvA students and staff who have been unresponsive to repeated phone/email queries. See NY Times article about the worldwide rise of domestic abuse.	- Study advisors, managers and counselors observe that they have more difficulty in reaching those from vulnerable backgrounds. It might be good to indicate to teaching staff and other colleagues that they should actively refer individuals that appear to be at risk to advisors and the Arbo service. View also this Folia article - Additional channels for communication could be opened for students and colleagues at risk and broadcasted via social media etc. -The UvA could develop a protocol to increase coherence across faculties in the potential responses or options for action. - Some UvA facilities/ buildings might be made available specifically for those in need, e.g. with special permission by Arbo service and/or Student advisors. Spacefinder @ UvA could perhaps be adjusted as to include to specific target groups. - House visits in case of urgent concerns: TU Eindhoven has developed a protocol that includes the use of their security personnel to check in on students/ staff at risk at their private residences if they don't respond to repeated phone/email queries.
- Unequal access to teleworking facilities: some individuals will not be in the position to individually purchase the extra necessary hardware, software and internet access. Particularly those (or their parents/ partners) who have lost temporary jobs due to the crisis may have difficulty in raising extra money for this.	- Study advisors, teachers, personnel managers etc. could actively inquire of students and colleagues regarding their working conditions – especially targeting those known to be at risk. - Options could be actively developed and announced to increase equal access, ranging from offering financial support to lending laptops, screens etc. – also to students. -This has been done in pockets at the UvA, but many are still unaware of their options.

II.   Additional physical and mental health concerns

Concerns	Best practices, recommendations
- <u>Uneven impact of isolation</u> on students and staff: community members diagnosed with autism, ADHD, depression, etc. have generally more difficulty in coping with the corona-induced conditions.	- Encourage university psychologists, study advisors, managers and others to actively investigate how at-risk students and staff are coping. - Develop extra support, for example in the form of a buddy system. The Academic Diversity Program (ADP) of the Chief Diversity Officer Team and the FNWI's Student Impact Center can help with this. - Propose to program and examination boards, that they <u>develop leniency measures or extensions for schoolwork,</u> as not meeting deadlines is an additional source of stress, particularly for students already at risk. - Substituting grading for a <u>pass/fail</u> assessment might be useful in cases.
- <u>Limited availability of care and support</u> for persons with existing disabilities, chronic illnesses and other health conditions. As the fight against Covid-19 requires many resources and isolation measures impede accessibility of usual formal and informal physical and other support (including physiotherapy, volunteer aid -'mantelzorg'-, etc.), those coping with physical conditions are additionally at risk and disadvantaged.	- <u>Inventory urgent needs and lack of availability of usual formal and informal care</u> to those known to be coping with disabilities, illnesses, etc. - Investigate whether UvA's formal (medical, psychological, etc.) care system can offer extra support to those at risk. - Encourage and perhaps (digitally or otherwise) facilitate spontaneous peer-to-peer support systems that seem to work well. The FNWI's Student Impact Centre has opened a dedicated Canvas page that could perhaps function as a hub: https://canvas.uva.nl/courses/2471/pages/corona-action-what-can-you-do

- <u>Some international students and staff members</u> might experience this crisis differently than UvA colleagues, or differently than assumed. Countries (Italy, China, Spain, e.g.) or some groups (refugees, migrants) are more severely hit by the crisis than others, creating additional stress and worries.	- It would be good to both encourage programs and institutions - to the extent that this is not yet done - to develop a <u>buddy system to support their international colleagues</u> as well as initiate and/or publicize existing networks of internationals which might offer support as well. - It also can work very well to co-create solutions with groups of students and staff, in meetings dedicated to the issue of care and care for others .

III.　　　Specific concerns about equity, diversity and inclusion for students in times of corona

Concerns	Best practices, recommendations
<u>Concerns about finances:</u> under-/graduate students from lower socio-economic backgrounds will face significantly more serious financial difficulties after having lost side jobs and not be able to further increase their study debts. This may also lead to interruption or even discontinuation of their study.	- Consider options for offering extra assistance or emergency funds to students from such vulnerable backgrounds. Perhaps by offering extra job opportunities, (partially) waiving tuition fees, etc. - Lobby at the ministry of OCW for lenient national regulations regarding student finances. - Make students aware of the options at the municipal level to receive aid for lost work. Work together with UvA student-employers to ease income loss, for example, StudiJob.
<u>Digital forms of racism and discrimination during online class/teaching</u> that can be more difficult to spot, especially in larger Zoom meetings (e.g. muting/blocking people of color and black students, bullying in private chats without lecturers' knowledge)	- Make lecturers aware that this is happening and give them tools to create safer inclusive online classes/ establish ground rules that all students have to adhere to. - Provide lecturers and students with support, so they can report misconduct that happened online. - Develop an online knowledge video or course that helps lecturers and others to mitigate such digital harassment.

<u>Internships, bachelor's and master's projects:</u> under online conditions, many planned internship and research projects that require physical presence are cancelled or need serious adjustments. This affects students from outside the EU/EEA even more due to financial and visa requirements, creating extra concerns in these students.	- Although this is mainly a national issue, there may also be options developed for these students, enabling them flexible graduation, facilitating exchange options with institutions in their home country, etc.
The possibilities of <u>non-EU students</u> to change their situation (for example to interrupt their studies if their research is not possible, or to shift to flexible learning) are much more limited due to financial pressures as well as visa requirements.	- Make an inventory of how this group is doing and what their concerns are. (International) students could be hired as student assistants to carry out this research
<u>Prospective BSc students from underrepresented groups</u> will probably enroll much less this year since 1) they face extra stress due to online education and due to their exams being cancelled*, 2) they might not have the time to deal with applications, etc. and may not have access to people who can help them with these processes. *In addition, the CITO tests are an independent way of proving students have the skills/knowledge to enter higher education.	- Devote extra resources to reaching out to prospective students from underrepresented groups (and relevant high schools) and help them in finding and applying to appropriate programs. - Consider offering extra support to more vulnerable groups during this process. - Students and study associations from BSc programs could assist with this, as could the Student Impact Centre.
<u>Prospective students following a pre-master 'schakeljaar'</u>: students who need to complete such a program within a year to get access to a program at UvA and/or to receive the funding for this year fear suffering both from a delay and from a financial setback. They will be faced with higher fees next year, while in this group we see more people from underrepresented groups.	- The UvA has already opted for a so-called <u>'soft cut'</u> with some restrictions. This eliminates the stalling and postponement between bachelor's and master's programs for students who experience delays in the final phase of their bachelor's program, due the coronavirus measures. -Especially 'schakel-students' from underrepresented groups might benefit from flexibility with regard to completion.

<u>BA and MA students in their thesis trajectory</u>: Many struggle due to extra stress, anxiety and uncertainty around final deadlines in June. Much secondary data research is also limited during this time due to database restrictions to Library PCs. Blanket extensions have been denied and only individual extensions have been given. This will potentially cause issues later in June when many more students will admit to their study delays.	-Program coordinators/directors, opleidingscommissies, etc. should collaborate and take a lenient approach in providing blanket extensions for students in the thesis trajectory who are already delayed or risking a delay. -This can be done in two systems: one for students who are comfortable staying productive and are certain they will make the deadline (continue as usual and offer online check-ins to check progress). The other for students who are already delayed or risking a delay (and facing possible consequences for their tuition fees). -The latter group needs financial support. One option is to provide Noodfonds for tuition fees or waiving tuition fees in case of re-enrollment to complete theses in the new academic year.

IV.   Specific concerns about equity, diversity and inclusion for staff in times of corona

Concerns	Best practices, recommendations
<u>Staff risks of burnout</u>: Laudable as the quick adjustment to corona conditions is, some teaching and other staff feel pressured to deliver the extra tasks while facing additional challenges at home with vulnerable families, unemployed partners, children in need of extra care - and without the financial or practical support that other staff might receive from their families. In addition, they may fear implications for their temporary job if they indicate their precarious situation.	-Although at-risk staff have been invited to take concerns to their directors or managers, this might be more difficult for those from underrepresented backgrounds who generally feel more insecure in academia. Consider development of other forms of assistance or advice, comparable to confidential advisor. - Staff on temporary contracts are less likely to indicate that they are under pressure than those with permanent positions. It is also difficult for them to consider developing other forms of assistance or to ask for advice, such as from a confidential advisor.

Evaluations, output measures, tenure tracks: Obviously almost all research and education projects are affected, impeded or stalled. Closed laboratories, stalled collaborations, limitations to doing fieldwork research, travel restrictions, cancelled conferences and seminars, late peer reviews and extra time devoted to (online) teaching have extra impact on temporary and tenure track staff. These are also often young parents with extra care responsibilities. Especially for those already experiencing uncertainty about their presence in academia (e.g. those from underrepresented groups, or those with illnesses and disabilities), this might create extra stress and uncertainty about their research output, funding applications, evaluations etc. See also issues related to gender See also early evidence from journals related to gender See also issues related to young academics (NL) See also issues related to young academics (Europe)	-The university, department and/ or institutes can develop measures to limit the impact of the corona-crisis on evaluations and CVs and publish these measures widely. E.g. by temporarily stopping or extending the evaluation clock; offering staff to 'opt-out' regarding inclusion of this period in their evaluation; etc. -Several hundred universities have offered a one year opt-out tenure track extension to all tenure track staff. -The UvA can lobby for national regulation on this topic.
Temporary contracts: PhDs who have temporary contracts have a disproportionate disadvantage if they are unable to do their fieldwork/research now and are therefore greatly delayed. In addition, an important diversity aspect is that for non-EU PhD students, their residence status in the Netherlands is related to their contract with the UvA.	-Consider the possibility of extending PhD contracts for those who have experienced research delays. -The UvA can also lobby for national regulation on this topic.

V.   Visibility and monitoring equity, diversity and inclusion in times of corona

Concerns	Best practices, recommendations
<u>Visibility</u> of what the UvA is doing and which policies are in place during the corona crisis.	-The UvA website has done a good job with making the updates visible and sharing via social media, etc. also by including links to the FAQ page via Canvas so all students and staff have access. -In addition, the UvA can make sure managers throughout the university are briefed about the "new normal" and lower their expectations re. output. Point teams to the FAQ updates. We see this is happening in pockets, but not everywhere. -A link to additional information in <u>other languages</u> could be included on the FAQ sheet.
<u>Monitoring the impact of the Corona crisis on EDI topics</u>, after implementing various recommendations made in this document, the UvA should monitor their progress, and determine whether they are having the desired impact/outcome.	-The UvA has implemented a crisis monitor to assess the impact on students and staff; EDI concerns were not explicitly included. - In addition to the various recommendations in this document, the university, departments and/ or institutes should do research into the effects of their measures in order to check whether they have undesirable diversity and inclusion effects, affecting some groups more than others. - The university should take care to account for individual differences, and avoid considering averages, when it comes to how staff members are affected. For example, reporting averages based on the UvA crisis monitor can be inappropriate because it masks and may misrepresent the effect on different groups or individuals, and it can prevent developing targeted measures to alleviate the effect on those groups.