Structure of the presentation

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- The shifting tide: (re-)defining excellence in teaching and learning....... and a renewed focus on liberal arts education
- Defining global excellence: the drivers for liberal arts education in the 21st century
  - Interdisciplinarity and the role of disciplines
  - Generic skills and the specificity of regional contexts
  - Citizenship and the need for a truly global perspective
- Conclusion: liberal arts as a trend towards global excellence in the 21st century, but no panacea
- Illustration: a case study on Amsterdam University College
Undergraduate education and its discontents

Decreased performance, deteriorated conditions, persistent / growing inequalities, decreased affordability

In contrast to boosted research performance, investment in excellence initiatives for teaching are rare en small-scale

Prestige can hardly be built on achievements in teaching

Growing research dominance to the detriment of undergraduate teaching

Undergraduate(s) a handicap to progress in research – global prestige?

But a key element of the university mission, the cornerstone of the system, and a major indicator for the potential of the knowledge economy!

The shifting tide: (re-)defining excellence in teaching and learning......

Need for reform
the purpose of higher education, developing human resources, sense of academic mission, delivering value for money

Awareness of risk
unbalanced approaches compromising the mission of the university

Need for differentiation
extending the range of dimensions for which excellence should be defined explicitly

⇒ (Re-) defining excellence in teaching and learning

Comprehensive institutional performance in teaching and research
The shifting tide: .....and a renewed focus on liberal arts education

(Re-)defining excellence in teaching and learning; developing a vision on what should be learned, why, and how.

A future-oriented perspective on values, knowledge and skills essential for the 21st century.

Liberal arts education: a broad interdisciplinary curriculum focused on creativity, critical thinking, cultural awareness, problems solving, and communication skills.

Liberal arts as a global trend?
• USA
• Europe
• Asia
• The middle east
• .....}

Defining global excellence: the drivers for liberal arts education in the 21st century

Epistemological arguments
Economic arguments
Social-moral arguments
Defining global excellence: the drivers for liberal arts education in the 21st century

Interdisciplinarity and the role of disciplines
• Real-life situations, broad themes and “big questions” motivates learning
• The need for rigorous teaching of the disciplines
• The role of the humanities and the sciences

Generic skills and the specificity of regional contexts
• 21st century skills: creativity and innovation, critical thinking, problem solving, communication, collaboration, information, IT, and media literacy, social and cross-cultural skills, leadership and responsibility

Citizenship and the need for a truly global perspective
• Democratic citizenship
• Global citizenship

Nobel laureates in the Sciences – Liberal Arts and Science alumni

Tom Cech (Chemistry 1989)
The top liberal arts colleges produce a higher rate of graduates to receive PhD’s in science and engineering than the most selective private research universities do (Harvard, Princeton, Stanford, Columbia and Yale)

Liberal Arts, a better education? (Tom Cech, 2001)

Tom Steitz (Chemistry 2009)
Why are LAS colleges more successful?
• Small scale
• Faculty, motivated teachers
• Cross-training in the Humanities
• Development of oral and written communication skills

Science Education at Liberal Arts Colleges: Why they do it so well? Steitz, 2001)
"It's in our DNA that technology alone is not enough -- it's technology married with liberal arts, married with the humanities, that yields us the result that makes our heart sing and nowhere is that more true than in these post-PC devices."

(Steve Jobs)

Liberal arts as a trend towards global excellence in the 21st century, but no panacea

The liberal arts model seems to respond to a variety of demands that define the criteria for excellence in undergraduate education in the 21st century

Enhanced learning:
• better learning outcomes
• higher student success (degree completion and time to degree)
• stronger pursuit of research degrees by graduates

BUT no panacea
• Small-scale
• Weak empirical underpinnings
• Global dimension needs more attention
Liberal Arts and the origin of the European University

The Seven Liberal Arts

The *Trivium*

literary arts: grammar, logic, and rhetoric

The *Quadrivium*

mathematical arts: arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy

The Atheneum Illustre (1632)
Predecessor of the University of Amsterdam
Mission

Two major research universities have joined forces to create a liberal arts and sciences undergraduate experience in Amsterdam that demands excellence from its students, preparing them for high-level performance in a 21st century knowledge economy that is fuelled by innovation, and equipping them for today’s globally engaged and culturally diverse society.

AUC and the Sciences

"Many of our students will later be in a position to make important decisions, whether in business, government, policy, or academia. The scientific way of thinking and approaching life could be valuable if not crucial for their success".

Professor Robbert Dijkgraaf, KNAW President, was the chief scientific advisor on the development of AUC’s curriculum. He teaches AUC’s Special Seminar Series on Climate for Science.

Excellence and Diversity in a Global City

Both excellence and diversity matter, as both competition and cooperation are key to success in a globalized world.

Leadership does not only require excellence, but also the understanding and valuing of diversity.

Values:

A commitment to excellence, diversity, and the global perspective defines and drives AUC.

We seek excellence in all that we do and believe that it is not only the responsibility of each individual to strive for his or her best, but to create the conditions for the success of others.

Diversity is our strength. Different approaches, ideas, and values are integral to the creation of a vibrant and challenging learning environment.

We believe that a global perspective is central to the success of every student. A global perspective requires active engagement with other individuals, communities, and the world.
About AUC

Selective honours college
Liberal arts & sciences bachelor
Taught in English
Small class size
Residential
Community outreach
Joint degree from two major research universities

International campus
Interdisciplinarity
Scientific reasoning
Global knowledge, international competence
Civic knowledge and community engagement
Inquiry and project-based learning

AUC’s Curriculum Circle

The curriculum is organised around broad themes, where students learn at an early stage how to integrate insights from various disciplines.

At the same time, students achieve depth of knowledge in their chosen major(s), allowing them to participate meaningfully in the interdisciplinary debate.

These themes focus on real-world issues and the big questions in science and society.

Towards the end of their studies, they bring their knowledge and expertise together in a capstone project.
Principles of Excellence in Teaching and Learning

• A reciprocal commitment to demanding academic standards and engagement on the side of the teacher and the student.
• Students take ownership of their learning process: prepare, participate, interact, and engage in self-reflection.
• Students are encouraged to learn more than expected, think critically, and make connections with what is going on in science and society.
• The teacher is an inspiring source of knowledge and provides guidance to learning.
• The student needs knowledge, to develop understanding, to analyse, and before being able to critically discuss a subject.
• While focusing on core concepts in their course, teachers relate course subjects to other fields and disciplines.
• The teacher varies the forms of class activities and evaluation.

Conditions for Excellence

A culture of excellence: high standards for student performance

"Student success is promoted by setting and holding students to standards that stretch them to perform at higher levels, inside and outside the classroom".

A culture of discipline: ...... is a principle of greatness

"Non profits are in desperate need of greater discipline – disciplined planning, disciplined people, disciplined governance, disciplined allocation of resources”.

Diversity

"Use a multifaceted, aggressive approach to diversity in the student body, faculty and staff”.

Excellence and Diversity in a Global City mission completed?

Facts:

- 50% international students / 15% non-western minority
- Selectivity rate: 20%
- GPA: 80% honours (> 3.0)
- Retention: > 90% / full credit load earned by 95%
- 65% faculty with international background
- 30% PhD from top-100 university (Shanghai)
- Average teacher / course quality: 4.2 (/5)
- Study abroad: 30-35%
- Scholarship students: 10-15%
- 94% students find general climate at AUC tolerant of diversity
- 85 - 90% of the students report positive feeling of belonging
- 80% master between two to four languages (62% at least two at the level to study; 34% three or more).