



SUMMARY LUC TOWN HALL MEETINGS

The recent series of 3 Town hall Meetings were convened by the College Board to address the issue of racism at LUC with the LUC community of students, staff, and alumni. The meetings were attended by ca 100-200 participants, and were moderated by Jasmin Nordien, an external expert on peace building and reconciliation regarding topics such as racism. This document provides a summary of each of the meetings. For each meeting the ground rules were to: (1) Listen (heart, ears, mind); (2) Focus on issues, not the person; (3) Respect (we can disagree on issues, perspectives etc. but still respect the person); (4) Be aware of your 'talk-time'; (5) KISS (keep it short & sweet); (6) Confidentiality, no recording the meeting.

Town Hall Meeting 1 (June 10, 2020)

For this meeting LUC did not make formal minutes. The dean opened with an apology to the community, and expressing her regret that LUC had not responded effectively to students' calls for LUC to address racism. This had clearly been frustrating and upsetting for the student community, and the dean wished she had handled things differently when the student letter about racism first came earlier in the year. The dean ended the opening address by stating that LUC is committed to taking racism seriously, and supporting an actively anti-racist agenda. She then invited the community to provide input for this agenda.

In the 2 hours that followed many personal experiences and concerns were shared by students and alumni, clarifying where LUC could and should do better when it comes to actively promoting an anti-racist climate in its community. There was clear hurt and frustration in these stories that were heard loud and clear by the College Board. The dean responded to some of the direct questions from participants, mostly acknowledging that things had not been handled well in the past, and outlining some ongoing projects that have to date been happening mostly behind the scenes, and new steps to be taken in response to student concerns. Developing a concrete action plan will take time, and acting as a community that listens to each other is crucial in making that happen in a thoughtful manner.

Town Hall Meeting 2 (June 17, 2020)

Opening and goals

The Dean opens the meeting by welcoming all attendees and introducing its two main goals:

- 1) An update on what has happened since the last LUC town hall meeting on 10 June;
- 2) An in-depth community conversation (students and staff) on issues regarding racism at LUC prioritized by the student community.

1) Update on what has happened since the first town hall meeting on June 10.

- LUC takes student involvement seriously, several courses being developed to engage students in topics of racism, community building, and decolonizing the curriculum as part of the program. More information will follow.
- The College Board (CB) has checked the number of POC students who left LUC in the past 3 years, and this amounts to 5 out of 32 (based on what can be checked). There are no cases in which experiences of racism were cited as the reason to leave, but the CB will follow up on these cases.



Blad 2/5

- Visa procedure: is not handled by LUC but via the visa department at LU Central. As an extra service, the LUC admissions office has now informed incoming students that they can contact admissions if they run into problems with the visa department. LUC is also preparing a survey on what has gone wrong in the past, for a report with recommendations to be sent to the visa office..
- Communication: there will be a weekly item from the Dean in the newsletter with updates on this topic as well as other topics to keep the community informed.
- The Dean has had several meetings with individual and small groups of students for small-scale conversations about racism. Several staff members have done the same.

2) New issues prioritized by the students:

Incoming first years need to be briefed on current state of happenings in LUC and what to expect.

Ideas that were brought up by the students:

- During introduction week there should be time for a briefing of incoming students ('this is what has happened and this is how we dealt with it').
- Plurality should be taken into consideration in how this briefing should be constructed.
- Tie the information to the start of the global competencies course during intro week.
- Tying the briefing for incoming students to a statement written by the Dean in which LUC takes a stand on the topic of racism. Then initiatives can build from that starting point.
- Communication ahead of time to inform students and bring them into the conversation.

Decolonization of the curriculum: will a plan be presented to the students for accountability.

Staff members inform the students that there is a grassroots working group in place since September 2019. Two meetings have taken place before the racism debate and the Corona crisis started. They point out that they are still in the phase of conceptual discussions about what it means to decolonize the curriculum. It will be a long-term process and every member of the team is working on this very seriously.

Some ideas:

- Research clinics per major (fall 2020)
- New Global Citizenship course (second semester)
- New course to engage teams of students on policy issues within LUC
- Add a component to the first year program about the history of (de)colonization in the programme so that there is at least some common ground to start from; not all students have been educated about this to the same extent. (Note: the new Global Citizenship course will focus exactly on that)
- Collaborate with institute in Leiden

More of this can be discussed in the third town hall meeting on 24 June. The working group is very open for input from students.

Practical suggestions from the students:

- Create a kind of 'code of conduct' describing what are the consequences for not actively decolonizing a course



Blad 3/5

- Reach out to the Programme Council to address certain courses and to give feedback on the programme.
- Accountability: Ask for specific feedback on the course in this context within course evaluations, add section in syllabus on how this course is/has been reviewed in the project, add thematic section in newsletter.
- Working with experts and resources already available at Leiden University.
- In general communicate better about how student input on courses is handled (feedback on evaluations and topics brought to the PC).

Ingrid Samset can be reached for input to the decolonizing the curriculum group.

The conversation continued with various perspectives on the topics of racism, bias, ideologies, expertise, and trust. This part of the meeting highlighted the fact that there are several issues that require more community conversation to work towards a common framework of anti-racism at LUC.

Town Hall Meeting 3 (June 24, 2020)

Opening and goals

The Dean (Prof.dr. Judi Mesman) opens the meeting by welcoming all attendees and introducing the two main goals of the meeting:

- (1) An update on what has happened since the last LUC town hall meeting on 17 June;
- (2) Continue with an in-depth community conversation (students and staff) on issues regarding racism at LUC prioritized by the student community.

1) Update on what has happened since the second town hall meeting on June 17.

- There was a staff seminar on 23 June with more than 50 participants to reflect on the previous town hall meeting. The staff community and College Board are “on it” and committed to move forward with this topic
- Update from the chair of the decolonizing workgroup: they had a session and are discussing the initiatives and how to follow up. One example is the research clinics. More details about this will be announced as developments continue.

2) Issues prioritized by the students:

Changing the way the university is advertised

Differentiate between diversity and inclusion. The recruitment video on the website has been removed. The process for making a new video was planned before the summer, but due to Corona it was delayed. The Dean and SLO have also been working on the framing of LUC’s identity (‘what we are and what do we want to be’)

Ideas that were brought up by the students:

- Show the diversity and number of nationalities on the website.
- Plan sessions with the student ambassadors and RA’s on how to represent the LUC community and how to communicate about the student diversity.



Blad 4/5 The dean: Good ideas. We do not formally register race/ethnicity (not legally allowed), so that is a more tricky point for recruitment. We do try to get this information in anonymous surveys of each new cohort.

Idea that was brought up by staff: Caution against simplistic thinking. Be much more creative.

What steps will be taken to have an SLC that is a person of color.

LUC has an opening to hire a new SLC and currently there is a list of three names. Two of them are situated in the Hague. Conversations are going on about practicalities of the position to see if one of them can start after summer.

Practical suggestions from the students:

- Create a document that tells students where to go when something happens and clarifies the different roles and positions (diversity officer, SLO, SLC, CB, 'vertrouwenspersoon'). A flowchart in which examples are included.
- Have current students more involved in reviewing the information in the new student handbook (note from staff: students are already currently involved in reviewing the new student handbook)

Institutional support mechanism for POC students (current and incoming)

Students suggest to have staff contact points who can provide support to students of color. The dean mentions that this is a good idea. We do have to see which staff members can and want to take on which roles, this will vary between individuals. The suggestion will be taken on board for the action plan.

Ideas that were brought up by the staff:

- A staff contact person (voluntary role) for every student organization (such as the race & ethnicity committee) to create a more consistent connection.
- Fine tune the academic advising system and give some members a larger role for a specific theme (for example a role supporting students of color, or the LGBT community).
- More contact between staff and students within the majors so that there are multiple avenues for connecting.
- Reach out actively to underrepresented groups (advertising open days etc), especially for LAS.

Ideas that were brought up by the students:

- When digitalizing the student handbook on the website, also include a page with information about alumni who are open to questions from (incoming) students. The operational manager points out that there is already an infrastructure in place that could be used for contacting alumni directly. The alumni mentor network: <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/alumni/mentor-network>
- Engage current students as mentors for students from various backgrounds such as students of color, 1st generation students, students with financial difficulties.
- Alumni currently working in outreach, and former student ambassadors, could present their ideas and input to the LUC outreach team.



Blad 5/5 Social media:

The students ask what LUC is planning to do about online behavior on LUC facebook pages such as LUC central. The dean clarifies that there is only one Facebook page run by LUC – the LUC page. LUC central is not run by the LUC administration. LUC is now looking into all the channels and the use of “LUC” on these pages together with the communications team and the central offices of Leiden University. The goal is to create a clear outline on LUC’s official social media channels and what the purpose of each is, and how to effectively manage and moderate the other channels.

Student input:

- A forward-looking policy on the utilization of the social media sites.
- More mediation and cooperation between LUC and the student community
- Fortuna (adminstrating LUC Central) does not have the capacity to moderate everything; work together with LUC on a strategy for how to do this.

Decolonization of the curriculum

Students ask about the planning of the decolonization plans. The dean explains that the workgroup does not have institutional responsibility for this process. The idea is that they continue their work, and together with parallel groups such as those in research clinics, formulate recommendations for the decision-making body, the Program Board (who will ask for advice from the Program Council). The PB can then report what they will do with each recommendations, when and why. This will be a longer-term process in stages. Staff confirms that many are committed to this topic.

Pluralism letter

One of the writers of the letter shares two concerns:

- POC students and others have been bullied and silenced if they did not have the same opinion as others
- Critical Race Theory is only one lens on racism, and should not be the only one.

Some ideas and suggestions from the students:

- Start a discussion club in LUC where students are able to discuss uncomfortable issues and to really listen to each other, away from social media
- Make the discussion club mandatory for first year students

Next steps

- Pluralism: this is also an issue that will be discussed in the staff meetings
- The community project about higher education by Ann Wilson has been approved by the PB (open for suggestions and ideas)
- Staff and the College Board will work on an action plan with concrete steps on how to move forward. A first version will be presented in the next few weeks.