

Reporting Results of the Task Force on Quality of Undergraduate Education

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Quality of Education is one of the five pillars in AUC's new strategic plan. What follows is a summary of the main findings of the Provost's Task Force on Quality of Undergraduate Education for those who have not attended the various presentations on the subject or read the report. We recommend that you refer to the [full report](#) for many more details (found online under the [Provost's initiatives](#)). All forthcoming references are to pages and sections in this report.

In summer 2017, the Provost established a Task Force on Quality of Education to investigate the perceived decline in quality of education at AUC over the past few years. The Task Force included faculty from various disciplines, members of the Center for Learning and Teaching (CLT) and those of Data Analysis and Institutional Research (DAIR, now renamed "Office of Strategy Management and Institutional Effectiveness"), and two students. Although educational quality is contextual and difficult to define, the Task Force identified and described key elements that a Quality Education at AUC embodies and reflects with reference to three main stakeholders: students, faculty, and the institution (Appendix 2 in the report).

Data previously collected by DAIR (The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE 2017)) and the Business School (Ipsos 2016 report) was consulted, and new data collection commenced in Fall 2017, including focus groups with students and parents (see Appendix 3 for full results), and surveys with students (N=285), parents (N=209), faculty (N=146) and chairs (N= 20).

Results of the focus groups, and the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the survey responses reinforced the prevalent perception that the quality of "education" at AUC was good (the best in Egypt), but not excellent. It also reinforced the notion that students, faculty and parents largely attribute the quality of education to the quality of teaching. In addition, results supported the findings of previous studies (NSSE 2017 and Ipsos 2016), namely that students do not feel challenged enough (seniors and juniors in particular), and that their courses do not push them to do their best work.

Highlights of Results

- All constituents (students, parents and faculty) agree that quality of teaching is the most important factor influencing quality of education at AUC. When asked to rate the overall quality of teaching at AUC, there is a perception gap between the appraisals of faculty from different schools and that of students from the same schools, where faculty rating is higher than those of students'.
- A noteworthy perception gap also exists between how faculty and students appraise specific aspects of students' learning experience: while a majority of faculty see themselves "almost always" doing what is important for quality teaching, students see it otherwise (p. 14-15, also see figure 1 below).
- Only 10 % of students reported that all courses showed "Clarity of teacher explanation". This is low considering that AUC prides itself on high quality teaching. Factors such as "Quality of feedback on submitted work", "teaching beyond memorization", "promoting critical thinking" as well as "challenging students beyond their comfort zones" showed that students valued these, and that faculty (who responded to the survey) felt they were doing them frequently, while students felt they rarely encountered them at AUC.
- After teaching, students valued liberal arts education and content of major courses among their top 3 factors influencing quality of education (p. 25), and some (especially in School of Business and SSE, as well as undeclared students) valued real-life application highly whereas faculty in School of Business and ALA were the ones who valued real-life application to a similar degree. In focus

groups, students reported a need for more real-life applications in courses, but in the survey, they reported encountering them frequently at AUC. In open-ended responses, the most frequently occurring definition of quality education involved real-life application and career preparation.

- A majority of seniors and juniors do not feel that their courses challenge them to do their best work, and the majority of students find that on average less than 60% of the courses/semester are high quality courses. These results align with the Ipsos 2016 results as well as the with NSSE findings (2017) in which AUC is perceived as not challenging enough.
- The majority of all students (66.7% - 82%, with the exception of freshmen) feel that end-of-semester student evaluations rarely or never make a difference to the quality of teaching they receive at AUC.
- With the exception of ALA faculty, most other faculty do not receive any regular feedback or mentorship on their teaching aside from problematic cases.
- Faculty report that teaching is not valued, and that research “counts” for tenure, renewal and promotion while teaching excellence is encouraged but does not “count”. With the exception of ALA, approximately half of the faculty surveyed do not think that teaching evaluations are considered for the purpose of tenure, renewal and promotion.
- Faculty consider the main barriers that hinder their best teaching to be workload and well-being issues (43%) as well as student issues (readiness, quality, attitude and motivation) (41%) (p. 33).
- Faculty consider the main factors that support them to do their best teaching to be interactive students (31%), facilities (20%), community of teachers (14%) and professional development (11%) (p. 33).
- When asked how AUC can improve quality of education, the most frequent open-ended responses from parents and students focused on teacher quality, skills and faculty hiring criteria, followed closely by teacher assessment and professional development, and real-life application and career preparation (p. 31).
- When asked how AUC can improve quality of teaching (p. 32), the most frequent comments from students, faculty and chairs, related to teacher quality, skills and hiring criteria and teacher professional development; the third most frequent comments for faculty and chairs referred to teacher motivation and workload
- Although most of the results on Quality of Education relate to teaching per se, other factors affecting it and the learning environment as a whole are mentioned.

Some Recommendations

Most of the Task Force’s recommendations focus on improving the quality of teaching at AUC since all constituents in the focus groups and surveys focused on it as the critical factor to influence the quality of education at AUC. This has become a strategic priority for AUC for the coming years.

- A. To improve teaching quality at AUC and to increase the validity of the assessment of faculty teaching, additional sources of data should be used together with student evaluations: specifically peer review and self-assessment. Although, in principle this is what is recommended in the Faculty Handbook, the process in general is not rigorous enough, and varies greatly across departments. The task force recommended that:
 1. End-of-term student evaluation questionnaire be enhanced
 2. A quality Peer Review process be established at AUC that includes both confidential formative assessment (used to improve teaching) for annual assessment, as well as structured, summative assessment of teaching for promotion or tenure. (CLT could offer workshops on peer assessment).
 3. Self-reflection on teaching becomes part of yearly reports and be included in a teaching portfolio. Faculty could attend workshops on “How to Prepare a Teaching Portfolio” and on “How to Self-reflect on our Teaching.” [This is strongly recommended for early career faculty]

- B. The task force recommended that administrators and faculty undertake the following (suggestions on implementation are given in the report):
1. Establish a set of departmental expectations for high-quality teaching
 2. Revise the ‘first year’ review for faculty to make it more effective
 3. Develop, implement and assess a more robust faculty professional development program for new and adjunct faculty.
 4. Develop different models (and criteria) for promotion, tenure and renewal of contract that allow for flexible and different choices for faculty with regards to teaching, research and service.
 5. Create channels of communication between faculty and students to address the discrepancy that exists with regards to their learning.
 6. Address the barriers that faculty see as hindering good teaching.

Sequel to the task force recommendations:

The Provost assigned five members from the F2017 Task Force on the Quality of Undergraduate Education at AUC to work on an **Action Plan** for the implementation of the recommendations that came out of the Task Force.

The working group on the Action Plan extracted three overarching goals from the recommendations:

- GOAL 1: Improving the learning experience of students
- GOAL 2: Enhancing and supporting quality teaching
- GOAL 3: Admitting outstanding students

For these goals, the working group identified eleven objectives. For each objective, detailed action step(s) was/were proposed, responsible parties/departments identified, and a timeline with Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) proposed.

The full report on the proposed Action Plan for the Quality of Undergraduate Education can be found [here \(Ellozy, 2018\)](#).

References:

Ellozy, A. R. (2017). Provost’s Task Force on Quality of Undergraduate Education at AUC: Final report. Retrieved from: https://documents.aucegypt.edu/Docs/llt_clt/Chalk%20Talk/FINAL%20REPORT.pdf

Ellozy, A. R. (2018). *Proposed Action Plan for the Quality of Undergraduate Education. Final Report*. Retrieved from: https://documents.aucegypt.edu/Docs/llt_clt/Quality%20of%20Education/REPORT%20ON%20PROPOSED%20ACTION%20PLAN%20ON%20QoE.pdf

Figure 1

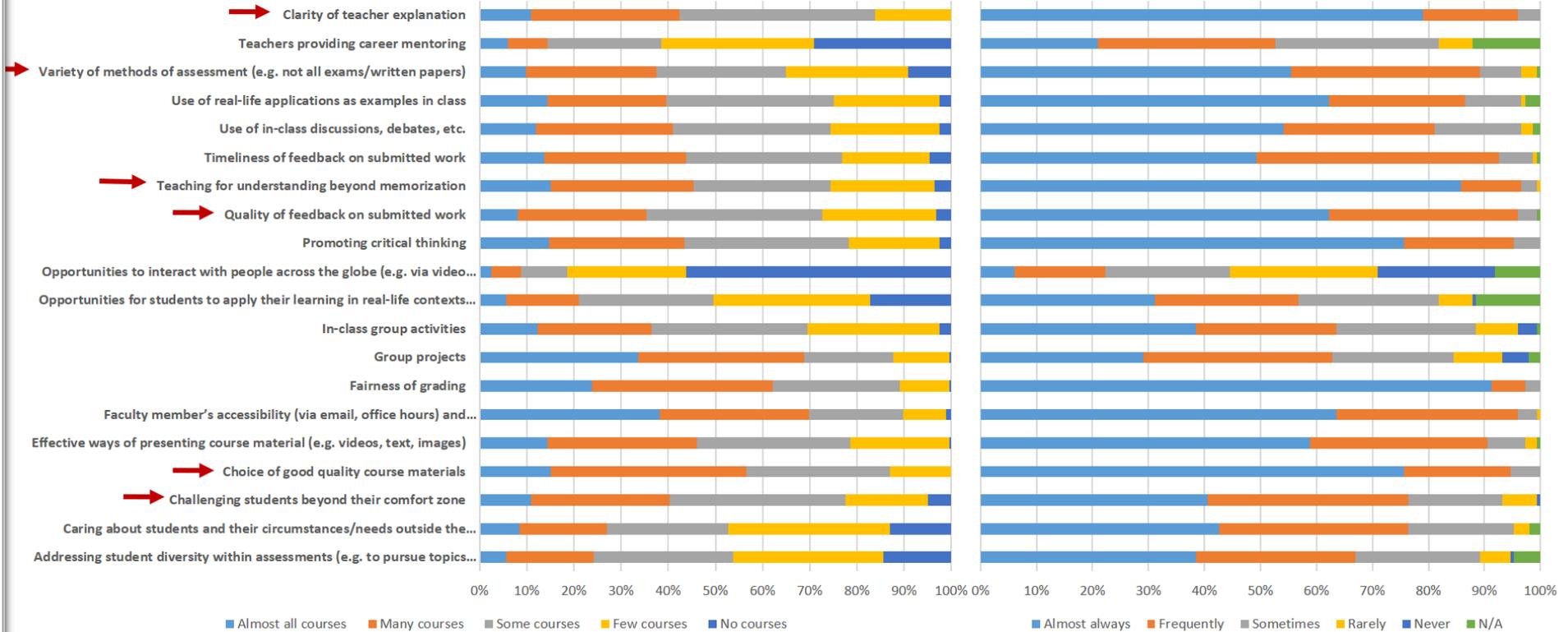
QUALITY OF TEACHING

Students: N=285

How often are you exposed to the following at AUC?

Faculty: N=148

How often do you do each of the following when you teach?



When comparing students' perceptions to those of faculty (regarding the same factors), a definite divide exists: while a majority of faculty see themselves "almost always" doing what is important for quality teaching, students see it otherwise. A majority of students think they only are exposed to these factors in 'some courses', or 'a few courses' or 'no courses' at all.