

**ÅBO AKADEMIS STUDENTKÅR** THE STUDENT UNION OF ÅBO AKADEMI UNIVERSITY

# Information Guide for International Students 2018-2019

# Welcome to Finland!



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# Welcome to The Student Union of Åbo Akademi University

#### Dear international student,

Welcome to Finland! In this guide, we will introduce you to the Student Union and the student life at Åbo Akademi University. We want to inform you about the concept of a Finnish student union, and share information with you about the services available for students at the Student Union of Åbo Akademi University. As our member, you are entitled to a variety of benefits which we hope will make your stay here easier and more pleasant.

As you might already know Åbo Akademi University has two main campus areas, one in Åbo and one in Vasa. Accordingly, the Student Union of Åbo Akademi University also operates on both campuses. We exist for all our members, regardless of campus or field of studies.

We hope that you will have a wonderful stay in Finland and please, do not hesitate to contact us. We will be happy to help you with any questions you may have – that's what we're here for! Information about the Student Union of Åbo Akademi University and its services in English is also available on our website at www.studentkaren.fi.

Best wishes,

Helmi Andersson International affairs helmi@studentkaren.fi Petra Lindblad Students Rights Expert petra@studentkaren.fi



# The centennial celebration of ÅAS

The Student Union of Åbo Akademi University – ÅAS celebrates its centennial anniversary in 2019 and YOU are invited to the party.

ÅAS was founded in 1919 when the university's first rector, professor Westermarck, encouraged the students of the newly established university to found an organization for the students by students. One of the reasons for the founding of the student union was the need to foster the academic youth to be a productive part of society. While the student union surely helped students better their skills in argumentation, it was the many other traditions that defined and anchored the students to the student union and the university. While some of the old traditions have vanished, new ones are constantly created.

You are now part of a tradition that started a hundred years ago and that is why our centennial motto is "100 years of togetherness". In addition to the traditional events, such as the student unions annual ball, Fastlaskiainen, Wappen, Lilla Wappen and Independence Day celebration, ÅAS is hosting lots of specific programs for the centennial year, such as sporting events, seminars, exhibitions and of course pub nights & clubs. Everyone is more than welcome to celebrate the festivities together!

For further information about the celebration of the centennial year, you should visit **100.studentkaren.fi**. The launch of the website is going to be in late September 2018.

Welcome to ÅAU, we hope to see you around town celebrating the student unions centennial anniversary in 2019!

### What is a student union?

In Finland, student unions are service and interest organizations defending and improving the educational, financial, and social benefits and rights of university students.

The student unions mainly work in the areas of higher education politics, social politics and international affairs. Every university in Finland has a student union and all students studying for a Master's or Bachelor's degree in Finland have a compulsory membership in it; those pursuing their doctoral studies may join their student union if they wish. Exchange students can and are warmly recommended to join the Student Union.

The Student Union of Åbo Akademi University (ÅAS) is a public corporation completely independent of Åbo Akademi University. ÅAS was founded in 1919 which makes it one of the first student unions in Finland. Today, ÅAS has around 5000 members.

ÅAS wants to make sure that the conditions for your studies are as good as they can be. This is done by influencing the decision-making bodies of Åbo Akademi University at all levels. Student representatives, elected by the students, are members of all these bodies. ÅAS also influences and takes part in decision-making by delivering statements on current propositions. Another important area of work is social affairs issues such as housing, health care, student discounts, and financial aid for students.

The Student Union also offers leisure time activities for students at Åbo Akademi University by arranging e.g. subsidised cultural and sport events. Moreover, ÅAS supports the different student associations. The student associations arrange excursions, social and cultural events.

# What benefits do I get from being a ÅAS member?

The membership fee at ÅAS is  $\in$ 116 per academic year and  $\in$ 58 for half a year. The fee must be paid before registration at the University.

#### The Student Card

The student identification card used at all universities in Finland is called Frank. It is your Student Union membership card and with it comes offers for all kinds of services and benefits.

Before you can order your student card you need to be registered at Åbo Akademi University and a member of the Student Union. You should've received information about how to register from ÅAU. The student card can be ordered via www.frank.fi. In order for the card to be valid it needs a validation sticker that you can get from the Student Union office.

Frank offers different options for the student card - you need to decide for yourself which kind of card you want.

There's also the option of an electronic student card. The app and service is provided by Frank, so please refer to them for more information.

#### Finnish Student Health Service (FSHS)

€54 of your Student Union fee goes to the Student Health Care Service, which provides health care for Student Union members all over Finland. All appointments at the general health and mental health services, except for appointments with specialists and dental care, are free of charge for students. An appointment to the dentis costs between €18–32 depending on the length of the appointment. NOTE: There is a penalty fee of €35 for all uncancelled, unused appointments! You can also go to any FSHS centre in the entire country, should you for example become ill whilst travelling. See: www.fshs.fi.

To check and cancel your appointments you can use the Self student online service. More information on the FSHS website.

Please also see the FSHS website for up to date information about the local health centre's contact information and opening hours.

#### Whom to call when the health centre is closed

When the student health centres are closed, for example during weekends or in the night, and you are in need of urgent health care, you must turn to the municipal health care services.

For Åbo: In the evenings and at weekends contact the emergency service by calling the Health Center On-Call Service, phone. 02 313 8800. Tyks T-Hospital is located on Savitehtaankatu 1. Read more about Tyks on www.vsshp.fi/en.

For Vasa: During evenings, nights and weekends contact Vaasa Central Hospital, Hietalahdenkatu 2–4 Y-building, phone 06 213 1001. More info at www.vaasacentralhospital.fi.



#### Discounted travel

You get about 50% off rail travel and coach travel (for journeys of over 80 km), by showing your student card when you buy the ticket in advance. For more information on trains, see: www.vr.fi, and for coaches, www.matkahuolto.fi. You can also get discount travel cards for local buses in Åbo and Vasa with your student card or an official student certificate from the university.

The place to buy these cards in Åbo is the public transport office at Auragatan 5. See: www.foli.fi. In Vasa you can find information at Lokaltrafik Ab at Hovrättsesplanaden 11 or on the website www.vaasanpaikallisliikenne.fi.

#### Student restaurants and student lunch

At student restaurants you can eat subsidised student lunches if you show your student card. The cost for a student lunch is around €2.60. ÅAS owns four student restaurants in Åbo. You willfind weekly menus etc. at the address: www.studentlunch.fi.

There are other student restaurants located all around the university area, for example there is a student restaurant in Academill in Vasa. You will get a student priced lunch not only on your campus, but in all student restaurants in Finland.

#### General discounts

With your student card you can get discounts at most youth hostels in Finland. Ask for a discount when booking. You can also get discounts on everything from takeaway pizza to haircuts by showing your student card. It's always worth asking for student discounts while shopping!

#### Kårkalendern

Kårkalendern is the Student Union yearly calendar which you will receive free of charge. It's mainly in Swedish, but contains e.g. dates for the biggest Finnish student events.

#### Legal advice

As a Student Union member you are entitled to legal advice. You can turn to legal counselors in matters of inheritance, housing (e.g. tenancy agreement), taxation, employment etc. Please note that writing or making contracts doesn't belong to the counselors' work description, but they can give you useful legal advice.

The counselors are situated in Åbo. You can visit or call them Tuesdays 18–19. Address: Student Union of the University of Turku (TYY), Yo-talo A, Rektorsåkersgatan 4, first floor (045 843 3428). The counselors speak English fluently and the service is free of charge.

#### Harassment Contact Persons

The Student Union has two Harassment Contact Persons that all Student Union members are welcome to contact if they experience any sort of disturbing or unwelcome behaviors or situations involving other students, University staff or anyone else.

The role of a Harassment Contact Person is to give support and advice if you've experienced bullying, discrimination, sexual harassment or violence. You don't need to have a definition in place for what you've experienced; just contact us if there's anything you wish to discuss. Anything you tell us is confidential, and no action is taken unless you say so. It's always the Student Union member that decides what the process is, what kind of support one can refer to, if the matter is taken further with name or anonymously. In short; anything from talking for a while to helping out with filing a report with the police or going to the doctors.

Our Harassment Contact Persons are Ms. Petra Lindblad and Mr. Matias Dahlbäck. You can reach us both via the address trakasseri@studentkaren.fi but you can also contact us individually. You can usually find us at the Student Union Office at Kåren in Åbo on weekdays between noon and 3 pm, but we can come and meet you wherever and whenever is best for you.

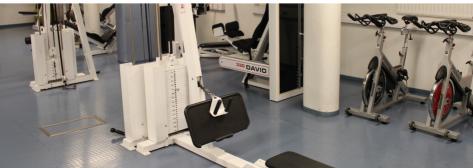
#### Student priests

Mia Pusa and Hanna Jern work as priests for the local congreations, and also tend to university students. If you want to talk about issues concerning religion or life in general, you can always contact them. Mia is at the Student Union office in Åbo (Tavastgatan 22, 3rd floor) every Tuesday 13–15. You can also call (040) 341 7296 or e-mail her: mia.pusa@evl.fi. Hanna works in Vasa and you can reach her at 044 480 8327 or e-mail her: hanna.ern@evl.fi.

#### Sports at Åbo Akademi University

In Åbo the sports activities are organized under Campus Sports, a collaboration with other higher educational institutions in the city. For more information you can check the website at www.campussport.fi.

In Vasa the sport activities are arranged by the University of Åbo Akademi and information about that is collected on the webpage https://oldwww.abo.fi/student/motionvasa. It requires login using your ÅAU username and password.



#### Starting Package

The student unions of the universities of Turku and the Turku University of applied science run a starting package storage where exchange students who are ÅAS members can borrow a package with household items which is then returned again before leaving Finland.

Together with the student union of Novia University of Applied Sciences, ÅAS also runs a starting package storage in Academill. Please visit ÅAS' website for information on how to obtain your starting package.

Please note: the starting package service is only available to exchange students, not international degree students.

Starting package contact information		
Åbo	startingpackage@utu.fi	
Vasa	havtornen@studentkaren.fi	

www.studentkaren.fi/en/starting-package/

#### You and your rights at ÅAU

Our Students Rights Expert Ms. Petra Lindblad (see also next page) looks after your interests and makes sure that ÅAU follows the correct procedure and regulation in all matters concerning students and education.

If you have any questions or feel like you've been mistreated in an academic matter you can be in contact with her.

Petra's also our contact person regarding problems concerning most matters of everyday life outside academia, such as the Finnish Student Health Services and student accomodations, e.g.

# Who do you meet at ÅAS?

When you come to the Student Union Office either in Åbo or Vasa, you will be met by our service experts that take care of everything from validating your student card, sell merchandize and handle most of the regular office administration.

If you have more specific questions related to your studies, student's rights, housing issues or things related to your Student Union fee, they will forward the question to some other staff member or to a member of the Student Union Board.

#### The Student Union Board

The Student Union Board consists of a chairperson and five to six board members. They are elected by the Student Union Parliament for one calendar year and are responsible for executing the parliament's decisions. The Board operates both in Åbo and in Vasa.

# The staff



Secretary General Linda Lindholm gs@studentkaren.fi



Communications Officer Matias Dahlbäck info@studentkaren.fi



Service Expert, Åbo Markus Heikkilä kansli@studentkaren.fi



Students Rights Expert Petra Lindblad petra@studentkaren.fi



Service Expert, Vasa Jonna Lindqvist havtornen@studentkaren.fi

# **The Student Union Houses**

#### Kåren in Åbo

Kåren is not only the shorter Swedish name for the Student Union of Åbo Akademi University, it is also the name of the Student Union's own building that is located at Tavastgatan 22.

Many student events are organised in the Kåren building, mainly in the great hall.

If you have any questions concerning your stay in Finland, you can always turn to the Student Union offices. The Student Union office in Åbo is located in the Student Union's own building Kåren on the third floor.

#### Havtornen in Vasa

The students at Åbo Akademi Vasa have a unique Student Union house, Havtornen, "The towers at the Sea". Havtornen was officially inaugurated in 2007.

Havtornen is a lively meeting point where you can find conference rooms, general facilities, a sauna, a kitchen and even a large terrace facing the sea. All students and associations at Åbo Akademi University have the right to use Havtornen, and this possibility is often used by our active student associations who use the building for all kinds of events and get-togethers. The Student Union Office is located in Havtornen.



# ÅAS - the organisation

ÅAS is led by its highest decision-making body, a 25member Student Union Parliament. The parliament is elected by the students of Åbo Akademi University for a two-year term.

All ÅAS members have the right to both vote in the Student Union elections and run as a candidate. As a member of the student union you can influence ÅAS' decisions by voting in the student union elections, held every other year in November. The next election will be in 2019.

The **Student Union Parliament** decides what the Student Union will focus on during the year and determines how much money will be used and for what purposes. The Parliament also appoints e.g. the Student Union Board.

The **Student Union Board** operates both in Åbo and in Vasa. The Student Union Board elects student representatives for various bodies in the university. The board consists of a chairperson and five to six board members. They are elected by the Student Union Parliament for one calendar year. Each board member has a specific main area of responsibility and the Board is responsible for executing the Student Parliament's decisions.

# **Student** associations

There are about 80 student associations within the Student Union. Traditionally the student associations are grouped into Nations, Faculty associations, by subject etc. They come in all shapes and sizes, and are as diverse as their members.

You can find a list of all current student associations on the ÅAS website www.studentkaren.fi.

Do not hesitate to contact an association you're curious about. Taking part in their activities, their parties, and getting to meet students from all over Finland is a great way to get integrated into the student life at Åbo Akademi University.

# Finland-Swedish student life and traditions

Like every country, Finland has its own cultural traditions that vary regionally. In addition, student life brings its own traditions to Finnish culture, which you will see during your stay here.

#### Student caps and overalls

In Finland, when you pass your matriculation exam and graduate from high school, you can wear the white student cap, *studentmössa*. This is something to be proud of, and the graduation ceremony, where the cap is worn for the first time, is an important occasion. At university, students wear the student cap on a number of occasions.

One of these is 30 April, when Åbo Akademi students gather to celebrate the start of Wappen, the first of May. Another is Finland's Independence Day, 6 December, during a procession to the graves of war heroes.

During your stay in Finland, you will also surely see students dressed in overalls in different colours. Overalls are particularly used at special events and parties by students in Finland and Sweden. The student associations offer the students the chance to buy an overall during the freshman year, and the colours vary according to faculty and field of study. It is customary to personalize the overalls, and they are almost invariably decorated with various badges, souvenirs and inexpensive gadgets. There's also a practice of swapping a part of the overall with another person, typically with a partner. Also badges are readily swapped, especially amongst friends who are of different associations.

#### Gulnäbbsintagning

As an initiation process, the student associations and faculties organise a humorous race with small competitions for the new students. Students compete in teams, and if you want to you can join the event. You will recognize the event from the black plastic bags that the students wear, as well as from their noses which are painted yellow. This is because a new student is called "gulnäbb", Swedish for "yellow beak".

#### Gulnäbbsakademin (Fresher's Fair)

The Fresher's Fair, arranged in September in Åbo and Vasa and is an opportunity for student associations to present their activities and recruit new members. This is also a chance for international students to find a student association, so do not hesitate to attend.



#### Lilla Wappen

Lilla Wappen marks the end of the summer. Back in the day, when being a student was highly reputed in society, students used to wear their student caps all summer and only put them away for the winter. Lilla Wappen is a reminder of that time. Traditionally, there is a party at the end of September, and at midnight the students take off their caps and turn them inside out.

#### December 6th – Independence Day

Finland's Independence Day is a quiet festivity compared to many other countries. Usually people stay at home with family and eat dinner, and watch the President's annual independence ball.

The student unions of Turku also have a procession to the cemetery in order to honor the memory of those who died in the wars.

#### Fastlagstisdag / Fastlaskiainen - Shrove Tuesday

Fastlaskiainen is the common celebration among the Finnishand Swedish Universities in Åbo and Vasa, and the name of the event is a combination of the Finnish word Laskiainen and the Swedish word Fastlag. This winter day in February is celebrated through sleigh competitions at the hill called Vårdberget in Åbo and at Fiskarstranden in Vasa. Shrove Tuesday buns are also a must for this day.

#### Pampas Nationaldag (The national day of Pampas )

The nickname Pampas is used for the flatlands of Österbotten, the area surrounding Vasa. The National day of Pampas is a day to celebrate it. The day starts with competitions between different teams from the Swedish-speaking universities and continues all day until the olympic finals in the afternoon. The festivities carry on all night until dawn when breakfast is served. This is the biggest party of the year among the Swedish-speaking students in Vasa.

#### Wappen

Wappen, also known as Vappu or Valborg, is one of the most important student festivities. In Åbo there is a picnic by the river on the last day of April, and in the evening all the Swedish speakers of Åbo gather at Vårdberget to hear the televised speech of the president of the Student Union board, as well as spring songs by the choir Brahe Djäknar. Afterwards there is an event at Kåren, and on the First of May, Vårdberget is filled with picnickers – both students and families.

In Vasa the students gather at the church square in front of the old Lyceum to listen to the songs of the university choir Pedavoces. A speech is given for the students and the statue of Zacharias Topelius receives its student cap. After this the students arrange picknicks in the park around the Court House, or meet at the restaurant Strampen.

#### The Find-a-Friend Ice Skating

Near or on Valentine's Day the Student Unions in Åbo arrange the Find-A-Friend ice skating event. If you've never tried ice skating before, this is your chance. We're all Bambis on ice at first :)

#### Årsfest (Annual Ball)

The Student Union and many student associations celebrate their birthday through an annual ball. The dress code is white tie or evening dress, and the traditions for the ball are very specific. The Student Union's annual ball is always on a Saturday in mid-February and alternates between Åbo and Vasa.

#### Procession of flags

An old and dear tradition of the Student Union is the procession of flags. It is a solemn way of celebrating the Independence

Day, and it also gives colour to the First of May and Annual Ball festivities. The Finnish flag always leads the procession, and it is followed by the flag of the Student Union as well as the flags of the student associations. The procession is formal and the people walking in it should wear dark clothes and the student cap.

#### Sitzes

A sitz party is a traditional student party with its specific rules and style. In short, it is a two-course dinner with a lot of singing, eating and drinking. The singing is led by one or more toastmasters. It is important to respect the toastmasters, who have a big task in setting the style and pace of the evening.

Usually people drink *snaps* at the sitz, but there is always a non-alcoholic alternative available. Before each *snaps*, there is a song. Sitzes are usually arranged by the student associations, and their traditions differ quite a lot from each other. There is often also a specific theme for a sitz, for example Halloween, Super Heroes or Beach Party.

**NB!** You never have to drink alcohol if you do not want to, it is always your own choice whether to drink and how much. At sitzes, there are usually people who take a nonalcoholic alternative. Getting blind drunk is not an obligatory part of the sitz culture.

#### And much much more...

While there are traditions that are upheld, every year at ÅAU and ÅAS is different. Ideas are formed, events are planned and memories are made. Keep your eyes and mind open (and remember to read the newsletters) and you're sure to find something interesting out there.

# How to stay updated

The main source of information about what is going on is e-mail. Every Monday the Student Union sends out a newsletter with information about current events. The newsletter is in Swedish. and English and consists mostly of information from the Student Union, the university and the student associations. The newsletter will be sent to your @abo.fi address, which is also where the university will send you all sorts of relevant information during your stay here. Make sure you check your e-mail regularly.

The Student Union is of course also active on social media. primarily on Facebook and Instagram. And if you need to look something up about the services the Student Union provides then our webpage is probably your best bet.



A www.studentkaren.fi www.facebook.com/AAStudentkar @AAStudentkar

# Your student life begins at The Fresher's Fair

## Wednesday September 12

VASA: 11 am - 1 pm in Academill's foyer

ÅBO: 5 pm - 7 pm at Kåren



Get to know the associations. Buy som overall patches. Take your first steps into student life.