



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

The background of the cover is a photograph of a large crowd of students at an outdoor event. The image is heavily tinted with a blue color. In the foreground, several students are wearing shiny, crinkled aluminum foil hats. One student in the center is wearing a purple jacket and glasses. The crowd in the background is diverse in age and appearance, with many students looking towards the camera. The overall atmosphere appears to be festive and social.

# **Information Guide for International Students 2019–2020**

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# Welcome to The Student Union of Åbo Akademi University

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Dear international student,

Welcome to Finland! In this guide, we will introduce you to the Student Union and student life at Åbo Akademi University. We want to tell you about the concept of a Finnish student union, and inform 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.

The Student Union of Åbo Akademi University operates on both ÅAU campuses, in Åbo and Vasa. We want to be available to all our members and make student life as good as possible on both campuses and at all faculties. We will be happy to help you with any questions you may have. We hope that you will have a wonderful stay in Finland and please, do not hesitate to contact us!

Best wishes,

Sara Nordell  
International affairs  
sara@studentkaren.fi

Petra Lindblad  
Students' Rights Expert  
petra@studentkaren.fi

*Information about the Student Union of Åbo Akademi University and its services in English is also available on our website [www.studentkaren.fi](http://www.studentkaren.fi).*

## 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.

## Where is ÅAS and ÅAU?

### Åbo FACT SHEET

Population	191.331
Swedish-speaking	5,4 %

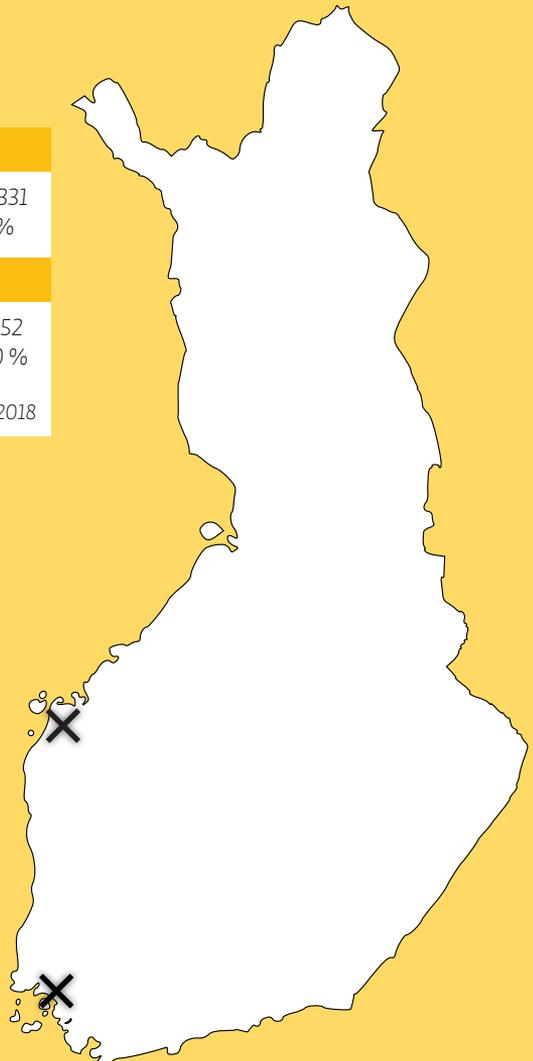
### Vasa FACT SHEET

Population	67.552
Swedish-speaking	23,0 %

Statistics Finland December 2018

Åbo Akademi University  
Vaasa / Vasa Campus

Åbo Akademi University  
Turku / Åbo Campus



## Benefits as a member

The membership fee at ÅAS is €121 per academic year and €60.50 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](http://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.



### 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](http://www.vr.fi), and for coaches, [www.matkahuolto.fi](http://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](http://www.foli.fi). In Vasa you can find information at Lokaltrafik Ab at Hovrättsesplanaden 11 or on the website [www.vaasanpaikallisliikenne.fi](http://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 and you find weekly menus at the address: [www.studentlunch.fi](http://www.studentlunch.fi). ÅAS also owns the Street Food Bar at Kåren, where you also get student discounts.

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 when you show your student card.

### 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!

## Finnish Student Health Service (FSHS)

€57 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 dentist 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](http://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.

Health Center in Åbo		Health Center in Vasa	
Address	Kyrkovägen 13	Address	Hovrättsp. 15 C
Hours	Mon–Thu 8–15 Fri 8–14	Hours	Mon–Thu 8–15 Fri 8–14
Appointments		Appointments	
046 710 1050	General practitioners and specialists, 8–15	046 710 1097	Preventive health care and medical care
046 710 1047	Dentists, 8–15	046 710 1098	Dentists
046 710 1050	Mental health services, 8–15	046 710 1097	Mental health services, 8–15

## 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.vssh.fi/en](http://www.vssh.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](http://www.vaasacentralhospital.fi).

## 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 (TYU), 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.

You can reach our Harassment Contact Persons via the address [trakasseri@studentkaren.fi](mailto:trakasseri@studentkaren.fi) but you can also contact them individually. You can usually find them at the Student Union Office at Kåren in Åbo on weekdays between noon and 3 pm, but they can come and meet you wherever and whenever is best for you.

## Student priests

Mia Pusa, Tiina Hallikainen and Hanna Jern work as priests for the local congregations, 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 040 341 7296, [mia.pusa@evl.fi](mailto:mia.pusa@evl.fi) or Tiina (040 341 7308, [tiina.hallikainen@evl.fi](mailto:tiina.hallikainen@evl.fi)) is at the Student Union office in Åbo (Tavastgatan 22, 3rd floor) every Tuesday 13–14. You can also call or e-mail them. Hanna works in Vasa and you can reach her at 044 480 8327 or e-mail her on [hanna.ern@evl.fi](mailto:hanna.ern@evl.fi).

## Sports at Åbo Akademi University

In Åbo the sports activities are organized via Campus Sports, a collaboration with higher educational institutions in the city. For more information you can check the website [www.campusport.fi/en](http://www.campusport.fi/en).

In Vasa the sport activities are arranged by the University of Åbo Akademi and information about that is collected on ÅAU:s Sports webpage.



## 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 Student Union 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, Vasa. 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/](http://www.studentkaren.fi/en/starting-package/)

## You and your rights at ÅAU

Our Students Rights Expert Ms. Petra Lindblad 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 accommodations.

## 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, the service experts 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 Student Union Board of 2019*

# The Student Union Buildings

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## Come and visit us!

If you have any questions concerning your stay in Finland, or you want to ask us anything else, you can always come to our office in the Student Union Buildings. The office in Åbo is located in Kåren on the third floor and is open Monday to Friday from noon to 3 pm. In Vasa, the office in Havtornen is open Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday from noon to 3 pm.

All students and associations at Åbo Akademi University have the right to use the Student Unions Buildings. The active student associations often use the buildings for all kinds of events and get-togethers.

## 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. There's also a lunch restaurant and the so-called "Marlirummet" which has a sauna, a kitchen and a meeting room. On the ground floor there's also Street Food Bar.

## 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. It's pictured to the right. 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.



## ÅAS - the organisation

ÅAS is led by the Student Union Council. The Student Union Board is responsible for executing the council's decisions and the Financial Board takes care of the economical matters.

The Student Union's highest decision-making authority is the **Student Union Council**, which has 25 members. The council is elected biennially at the beginning of November, the closest one is 5th November 2019. All Student Union members have the right to vote and be nominated as candidates in the elections. The council's meetings are open to all Student Union members and the dates and lists of decisions are available online on the Student Union's website.

The council annually elects a **Student Union Board**. The board consist of students who work full time for the Student Union and operates both in Åbo and Vasa.

The financial sector e.g. the buildings, the student restaurants and the student housing, are taken care of by the **Financial Board** and is also chosen by the council.

The Student Union Council, the Student Union Board and the Financial Board consist of ordinary students who want to work for the benefit of all students at ÅAU.

## Student associations

There are about 80 student associations within the Student Union. Traditionally the student associations are grouped into Nations, Faculty associations, by subject or hobbies. 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](http://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.

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 usually 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, 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, the Lilla Wappen-party is at the end of September, and at midnight the students take off their caps and turn them inside out and wear them like that.

## 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 Finnish and 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 or March 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. The sweet buns are filled with whipped cream and almond paste or jam.

## Pampas Nationaldag – The national day of Pampas

The nickname Pampas is used for the flatlands of Österbotten, the area surrounding Vasa. Pampas nationaldag is a day for celebration. 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 choirs Brahe Djäkmar and Florakören.

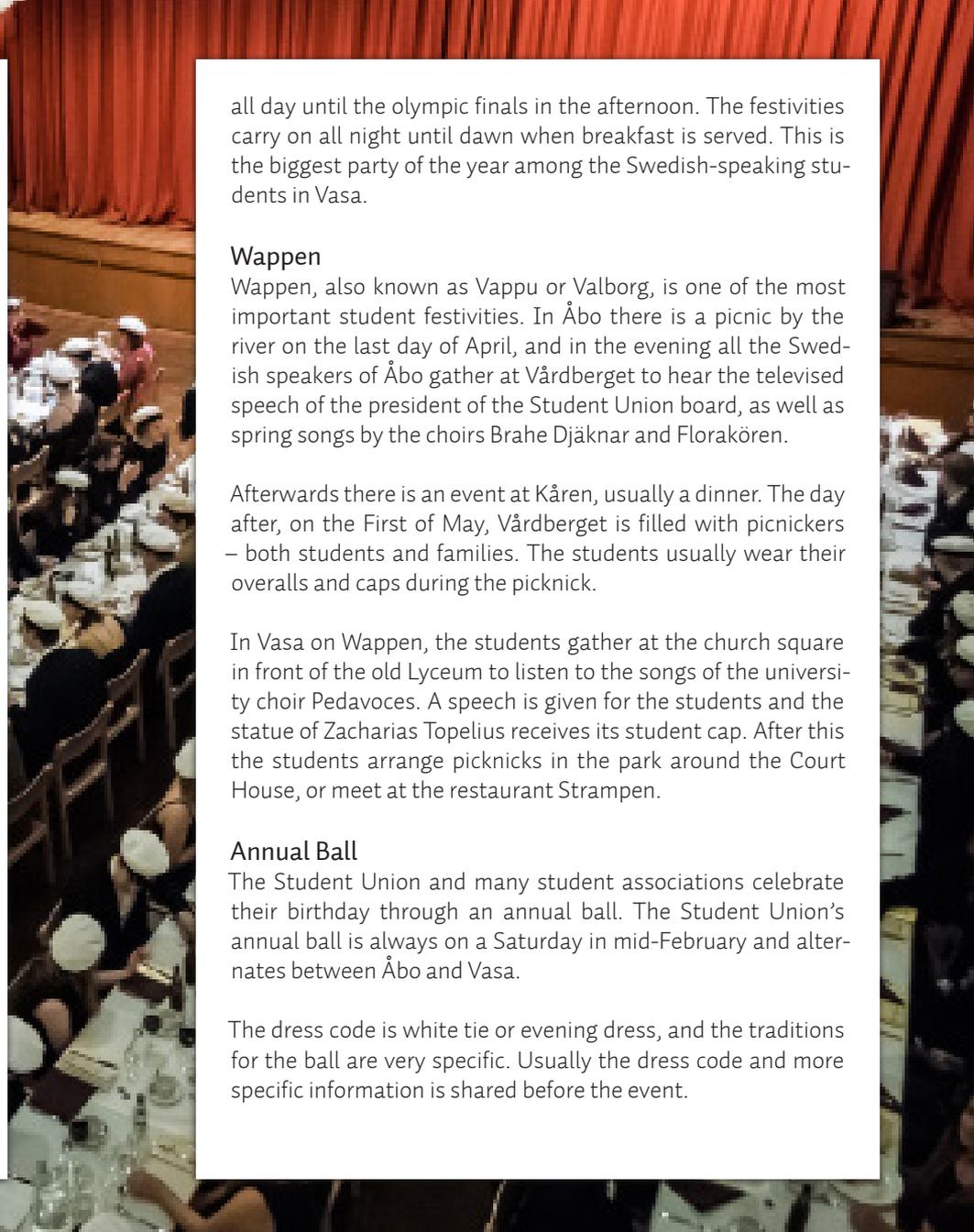
Afterwards there is an event at Kåren, usually a dinner. The day after, on the First of May, Vårdberget is filled with picnickers – both students and families. The students usually wear their overalls and caps during the picknick.

In Vasa on Wappen, 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 picnicks in the park around the Court House, or meet at the restaurant Strampen.

## Annual Ball

The Student Union and many student associations celebrate their birthday through an annual ball. The Student Union's annual ball is always on a Saturday in mid-February and alternates between Åbo and Vasa.

The dress code is white tie or evening dress, and the traditions for the ball are very specific. Usually the dress code and more specific information is shared before the event.



## 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, such as 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. Check out the Student Union's and the student associations' social media and you surely will find many interesting events. Ideas are formed, events are planned and memories are made all the time!

## Let's stay in touch!

 [www.studentkaren.fi](http://www.studentkaren.fi)  
 [www.facebook.com/AAStudentkar](https://www.facebook.com/AAStudentkar)  
 [@AAStudentkar](https://www.instagram.com/AAStudentkar)

We hope you will have a great stay here in Finland. Remember to read the newsletter we at the Student Union sends to your @abo.fi-address every Monday. The newsletter is filled with information about current events and consists mostly of information from the Student Union, the university and the student associations.

You can find information about events on Instagram or Facebook, and our webpage contains lots of information about our services and the student life at ÅAU. Feel free to contact us on social media, phone or e-mail if you want to! You can find all the contact information on our webpage.

# HAPPENINGS

- 29.8** Street Food Bar re-opening (Kåren)
- 6.9** International welcome party and seminar (Kåren)
- 11.9** Freshers' Fair (Kåren)
- 21.9** "Suursitsit" (sitting at the square by Turku cathedral)
- 28.9** "Lilla wappen" (Kåren)
- 5.12** Closing party for ÅAS100 (Kåren)

