

STUDENT LIFE AND EVENTS 2.1





A GUIDE FOR THE STUDENT
UNIONS' ASSOCIATIONS



Photograf: Lukas Söderqvist

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Many of the texts in this guide are also helpful for **student tutors**. Especially part 1 on steps towards a safer and more inclusive student culture and practical tips on how to organize a fresher's celebration in part 11. Parts 6 and 7 about the Student Union's support is aimed to both tutors and associations.

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INTRODUCTION

Equality and accessibility are priorities in the work of the Student Union of ÅAU. We realise these for example by organising trainings for the associations, in influencing the decision making at ÅAU and with this guide to the associations, filled with tips for successful events, and lists of who you can contact if you have questions.

The purpose of the guide is to help the associations organise their activities in an inclusive way. Events are an important part of the student experience, and we hope that everyone, regardless of gender, age, origin, nationality, language, religion, belief, opinion, political activity, trade union activity, family relationships, state of health, disability, sexual orientation, or other personal characteristics will be able to be part of the student community.

The associations' activities affect all students. It is you who together are responsible for student life and events, and that everyone feels included. It's important that you reflect on what you want your events to be like. Many associations have already worked on breaking norms and developing the activities to be more inclusive. It's still worthwhile to keep up the discussion and think about how events feel for someone taking part for the first time! The students are each other's greatest support!

Developing an organisation and its activities is an ongoing process. We at the Student Union also appreciate feedback, please feel free to write to us via: feedback.studentkaren.fi

Best regards from the Student Union Board and employees & a big thank you to the Committees 2020 and 2021 led by Nicolina Nordman and Ronja Lillkäll!



TEN STEPS TOWARDS SAFER AND MORE INCLUSIVE STUDENT CULTURE

1. EVERYONE DOESN'T IDENTIFY AS A MAN OR A WOMAN

How is this considered at your events? Are there toilets only for men and women? Is the seating planned according to the binary norm? Do you sing songs with different moves for men and women? It might be worth doing something differently to make everyone feel welcome. Always respect the pronoun (he, she, they) a person wants to use. You can set the table with different colored napkins if you want to signal who toasts in what direction.

Discuss what gender norms you might still maintain.

2. EVERYONE DOESN'T WANT TO DRINK ALCOHOL

Many student events are planned around the fact that the participants will be drinking alcohol. To drink alcohol should never be a requirement for taking part. People should not be expected to have a reason not to drink. No one should get questions or odd glances because they don't drink alcohol. Remember to also organize alcohol-free events for the students who don't feel comfortable in an environment where alcohol is consumed. You can also challenge norms by listing the alcohol-free alternative first in the registration.

Are there norms about drinking that your association maintains?

3. NOT EVERYONE CAN AFFORD EVENTS THAT COST MONEY

All students can't pay for events and it's worth considering organizing some events without a fee or very cheap events so that as many as possible can take part. You can consider having an option where participants can state reasons that they cannot pay and get the fee excused, to enable everyone to take part regardless of financial situation.

Do you organize events that are free?

4. EVERYONE CAN'T GET AROUND IN THE SAME WAY

How accessible are the premises where you organize events?

Members of your association or group of students might have some type of medical condition or disability that makes it impossible to get into the premises or to spend time there. It is good to remember that all limitations aren't visible. A person with for example a heart condition might not be able to walk fast for long distances. It's important to inform on practicalities in the event descriptions so it's clear if it is possible to participate.

Are there any of your events that could be more accessibly organized?

5. CONSIDER ALLERGIES AND OTHER SENSITIVITIES AND INTOLERANCES

The events participants' allergies always need to be taken seriously and everyone should be served food of the same quality regardless of diets or allergies. There are different reasons for dietary requirements, and no one should have to explain their choices. If you are unsure if a person is a vegetarian or a vegan, ask.

It is good to bear in mind that there are a lot of people who can't be around strong perfumes or certain chemicals. A box marked "other things you want to mention" in a registration form signals that it is welcome to mention these kinds of allergies too.

The Finnish allergy and asthma association has [materials](#) in English, Swedish and Finnish.

Is there something you could add in your event registration forms?



6. NO ONE SHOULD BE SUBJECT TO, OR AFRAID OF, DISCRIMINATION, HARASSMENT, OR VIOLENCE

The association is responsible for the participants' safety when attending events.

The participants are responsible for themselves and it is always okay to call out unwanted behavior and to ask a person to leave if they do not act according to the event organizers rules. This also applies to Zoom-events and WhatsApp-groups.

An association can have written rules for their premises or events or an equality declaration. There is no need to list all possible unwanted behaviors, but it can be a good idea to remind the members to not question other people's political or religious views, diets, or appearance. Ignorant comments are hurtful too. As an organizer it's easier to raise the discussion about what is okay if you have defined rules that have been communicated beforehand.

Contact persons at events is an easy way to divide the responsibilities and be clear that you want to arrange safe and fun events. More on contact persons in part 2 of the guide.

7. EVERYONE DOESN'T SPEAK PERFECT ENGLISH

It's good to remember that most international students know no words in Swedish or Finnish and a lot of the traditions and types of events are completely new. Few international students are native English speakers, so clear and simple language can be more accessible than perfect sentences with overly academic wording. Descriptions of what the association does and how the events are planned can preferably be very clear with lots of practical examples. It is always easier to join in if you know what the activities are and who is welcome.

Is there something you could do regarding use of language to make more people comfortable to join your activities?



Photograf: Lukas Söderqvist

8. IT IS NOT POSSIBLE FOR EVERYONE TO ATTEND EVENTS DURING EVENINGS

Student events are often arranged on weekday evenings. This can be difficult for students with jobs, long commutes or for students with kids. For everyone to be able to take part in your activities, vary the time to different parts of the day and week.

What times are your events usually arranged?

9. EVERYONE SHOULD FEEL COMFORTABLE ATTENDING YOUR EVENTS

To assure that everyone feels safe and comfortable at your events it is the associations or student tutors responsibility to make everyone feel included and welcome. It can be as simple as seeing to that no one is left completely alone when attending their first event. If you arrange an event with a lot of new participants, it's good to not tell just inside jokes that the new attendees do not understand.

Many associations have a lot of event participants without strong links to the subject of study or region most members are from, this shows that people feel welcome, and the activities are inclusive. In your subject association you can strengthen your community feeling with jokes about your own line of study rather than being negative towards other subjects.

Does everyone take responsibility for each other's well-being at your events?

10. ARE THERE GROUPS OF STUDENTS THAT HAVEN'T FOUND YOUR ASSOCIATION YET?

It's all the associations together that organize the events and activities that make up the student life in Åbo and Vasa. With this comes a responsibility, there should be something that suits everybody. The community feeling among students also supports the ability to study and cope when you feel tired. A small association doesn't always make it easier to join; a shy person might feel left out meeting a group of people where everybody knows each other already. It's good to encourage new people to join in and especially see that they feel included.

- How do you welcome students that start at master level at ÅAU to participate?
- Do you encourage older students or students with children to become members?

CONTACT PERSONS AT EVENTS

WHY IS IT A GOOD IDEA TO HAVE CONTACT PERSONS AT EVENTS?

- You signal to the participants that you want everybody to feel safe, and that you do something practical to make that happen.
- When there are named persons to address problems with it's easier to speak up.
- The same persons and the same form can be used for gathering feedback after the event.
- Clear responsibilities are good when a group of people organize something.

ENCOURAGE FEEDBACK DURING AND AFTER EVENTS

The feedback form can be used for all typed of feedback about the event or just for cases of harassment or discrimination. For example, google forms is easy to use. It's good to have the form available a few days after the event and be clear about who reads the feedback and when you stop checking for answers. If something bad or uncomfortable happens it's common to later realize that you want to address it, or that it takes time to find the right words to describe the incident.

Template for feedback form:

- Have you experienced or seen harassment, discrimination, or something else inappropriate at the event or in the association's other activities?
- Do you want to be contacted by a board member regarding this? If so, please fill out your contact information.
- Do you have other feedback?



HOW SHOULD THE ORGANIZER REACT IF SOMETHING HAPPENS?

1. TAKE THINGS SERIOUSLY

- If you see something happen or someone addresses a problem, take it seriously.
- It should be easy to mention problems like harassment or discrimination. That can happen through listening, acting and preventing.
- The threshold for what is okay differ between persons, never undermine someone else's experience. When having to listen to the same comments for years you are more affected than for example someone who doesn't get the question "where are you really from?".

2. REACT

- Speak up or place yourself between the people arguing.
- Address everyone respectfully, don't descend to the level of the person behaving badly.
- Is it difficult to stop unwanted behavior? -Light all lamps and turn off the music, that signals that you are serious.
- Write a plan for the association on what you do if something happens. Then you know what you are supposed to do and can feel safer. Discuss for example how to empty the venue if you have a hurt person that cannot be moved.
- A plan of action can include a description that the responsible persons or contact persons are notified if someone has acted inappropriately. The person can get a warning and if more complaints are raised against the same person, they are then asked to leave the event.

3. DON'T LEAVE A PERSON ALONE IF THEY ARE VERY DRUNK

- Sometimes participants get too drunk and can't tell what is best for themselves anymore. If someone is already very drunk, don't serve them more alcoholic drinks. Make sure that no-one leaves the event without their jacket if it's cold outside.
- If you suspect that a participant might not get home safely without help, check if they have a friend present who can help them get home safe.
- If no friend can help the contact person or someone else should help the person get home.

- If someone has passed out at an event, do not leave them alone. Do not send home a person who is overly intoxicated. Always call an ambulance if you suspect alcohol poisoning.
- If you are concerned that someone is in bad shape or may have a medical condition that worsens with drinking, call 112 and ask for advice. Calling the emergency number does not mean you call for an ambulance right away.

4. DISCUSS AND ASK FOR HELP

- If you are responsible for an event and don't know what to do, check with another board member or ask someone else for help.
- If you as responsible for events in an association are unsure about questions like inclusion and diversity you can ask advice from another association or the Student Union. It takes practice to be able to talk about things that feel uncomfortable at first.

DO YOU WANT HELP WITH SOMETHING?

The board and staff at the Student Union are there to help you. We don't know the answers to everything, but we can help organize training or find out more about what you need to know. The Student's Right's Expert Petra Lindblad (petra@studentkaren.fi) can help you plan what you want to do or mediate in a conflict situation. All employees at the Student Union have professional secrecy, that means that everything you discuss with them is in confidence.

You can talk to us if you need help in solving problems or if you want to work with your events and activities to make everyone feel welcome and safe. For example, writing some rules or deciding on how to use contact persons.

The Union of Student Unions in Finland, SYL, has a detailed equality guide for events that anyone can use as inspiration:

<https://syl.fi/en/syl-published-equality-guide-for-events/>

The project for awareness of substance abuse at universities Kupla, has some good materials for associations and tutors on event security and inclusion:

<https://kupla-hanke.fi/en/support-material/>

<https://kupla-hanke.fi/en/trainings/>

T THE STUDENT UNION'S HARASSMENT CONTACT PERSONS

If something has happened at the university or on your free time that you want to discuss, you can always contact one of our harassment contact persons.

You decide what kind of process you want, if you just want to talk about what happened, if you want to report an incident to for example ÅAU, or if you need more help or support of some kind.

The contact persons are reached via trakasseri@studentkaren.fi.

The harassment contact persons are available for support and guidance if you feel you have been subjected to bullying, discrimination, sexual harassment, or violence. There is no need for you to have a label for what you have experienced, please be in touch if you feel you want to talk. The discussion is focused on your experience of what happened, and we will help you find the solution you wish for your situation.

The harassment contact persons can visit events if you want to get to know us or know more about what we do. You can always be in touch via phone or e-mail. Everything you discuss with us is in confidence.

<https://www.studentkaren.fi/en/harassment-contact-persons/>



THE UNIVERSITY'S CONTACT PERSONS FOR STUDENTS

Åbo Akademi University has two contact persons for harassment if you want to report something that has happened in connection to the University, regarding a fellow student or a member of staff (including problems outside of a work context, for example on a Christmas party or on social media).

The contact persons for students at Education Services;

Coordinator Jan Kraufvelin (+358 505 365 886) and coordinator Anita Sundman (+358 505 489 505) at Education Services.

<https://abofi.sharepoint.com/sites/intra-en-about-us/SitePages/Harassment-and-sexual-harassment.aspx>

WELCOMING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS TO THE ACTIVITIES

To welcome international students an association doesn't need to do everything and have all documents in English. Quite simple practical measures can be enough to make exchange students and international master's students feel included.

WHERE CAN YOU BEGIN?

- Have a short description about who you are in your web page. It doesn't need to be a separate English version of the web page. "See information in English below" or "SV/EN" and a short text on an existing web page is good enough.
- Basic information is the most important, things you might take for granted but someone who isn't familiar with student life in Finland doesn't know.
- What does the association do? Who can become a member? Do you need to be a member to attend events?
- Where do you get information about events? Who can you contact if you want to join in? How can you buy overalls or patches?
- Information about events in English: what is the event, what does it cost, how do you register?
- If you are unsure about how to contact international students at your subject or faculty, ask the Student Union, ÅAU:s international affairs or the Faculty Office. The Student Union will try to establish a process for how the associations get information about international students arriving.

- The Student Union is happy to share information about your events in the newsletter or on social media.
- The Student Union supports the associations by contacting the Faculty Offices and making sure that at least the subject associations know about international students arriving. The Student Union wants to develop the co-operation between us, the university, the tutors, the associations, and all students at ÅAU. We would like to hear from the Boards of the associations what type of help is most useful.

AT EVENTS

- See to it that at least someone talks to the new participants and welcomes them.
- You don't need to translate everything, but the minimum is what the general rules are, what the program consists of and what is expected of the participants.
- Don't make a big deal of it if someone doesn't know the rules for a sitz party right away.
- Share the feedback link with basic information in English too.
- Remember that most international students don't have English as their first language, plain English is good enough. Don't hesitate to use other languages than the ones you know well. Most people are just happy to have a discussion. The more you use a language the better you get at it.



Photograf: Amanda Marina

SWEDISH – ENGLISH VOCABULARY FOR ASSOCIATIONS

Förening – Association

Ämnesförening – Subject association

Intresseförening – Hobby association

Specialförening – Sub-association; associations that have a status as the Student Union's official partner, and have committed to following the guidelines provided by AAS, e.g. their activities are open for all student union members.

Nation – Nation, an association for students from a certain area of Finland, excepts members from everywhere

Sitz – Sitz party – Dinner with singing and playful rules for everything

Årsfest – Annual Ball

Sillfrukost / Sillis – Herring breakfast, a party the day after an annual ball, the Sillis is a relaxed brunch that usually starts at noon

Fantåg – Flag procession

Sångledare/Toastis – Master of ceremonies (MC) / Toast Master

Konferens – “Conference”, an official break during a dinner

Sånghäfte / sångbok - Song leaflet / Song book

Medlemsmöte – Meeting for members

Medlemsavgift – Membership fee

Medlemsförmån – Membership benefit

Styrelse – Board

Ordförande – Chair of the Board

Styrelsemedlem – Board member

Sekreterare – Secretary

Info/PR-ansvarig – Board member responsible for PR

Kassör / skattmästare – Treasurer

Värd – Event Coordinator

Halare – Overall

Halarmärke – Overall patch eller bara patch

Fastlagstisdag – Shrove Tuesday

Pulka – Sledge

Wappen – May Day / May Day Eve

Gulnäbb – Fresher / new student

Gulnäbbsintagning – Freshers' Celebration, playful contest among new students

Gulnäbbsakademi – Freshers' Fair

Specialföreningsmässan – Association Fair

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR ORGANIZING PARTIES

- Clear information before the event makes it easier to attend, for example the menu, what does the meal cost without the alcohol, what is the dress code. Simple language and practical information signals that the event is for everybody and that you want new people to attend.
- Choose alcohol free alternatives that are similar, for example cans of soft drink if you have cans of beer. Menu alternatives that are equally good regardless of diets are appreciated.
- Make or order simple food so that everyone eats enough, rather than trying something very fancy.
- Include information about accessibility in the event info. Is it impossible / hard / easy to get in with a wheelchair or crutches? What language do you have to know to attend?
- At a sitz party the toast masters can include info about the event being a safe space from harassment when they welcome everyone. If there are contact persons, they should be mentioned.
- It's good if the board or the organizers have decided beforehand what to do if you need to react to bad behavior or what the grounds are for being asked to leave.
- Avoid having participants that get too drunk to take care of themselves. Everyone is responsible for themselves, but it is easier for the organizer if no-one passes out. Enough food and starting to eat before too much drinking and singing is usually a good idea.
- Plan the whole event so that it's fun for sober people too.
- Always have water available, or even better: raspberry juice.
- "Helan" (the first drink called "the whole") is a name, not a signal to drink everything.
- Don't include discriminating songs in the program leaflet, for example objectification or judging body types is not okay.
- Offer the possibility for anonymous feedback, for example using the same link as for contact persons. That makes it clear that you want to hear from members between events too.

T PRACTICAL TIPS FOR ORGANIZING A FRESHERS' CELEBRATION

- Plan the program so that it is fun for the participants and supports team building.
- If other associations plan some of the program it is of course up to you what activities are okay, it's good to talk about the arrangements beforehand to avoid unpleasant surprises.
- Clear information before the event is important, new students don't know what the event is about, or might have been frightened by something a friend has said. Be clear that you want everyone to have fun at the event.
- If there are tasks that include drinking, please have the alcohol-free alternatives ready and visible so no-one must ask for it especially.
- Think about who you organize the event for, and what feeling the participants will have. Older students who hang around looking and filming can have their own fun elsewhere.
- Are there new masters' students at your subject or program? Could they be invited especially and tell them that they are as welcome as the bachelor level ones?
- Don't have tasks that include undressing or other programs with sexual allusions.
- Remember that this is the introduction to your association and student life, treat all participants respectfully, they might become the ones working for free for the common good after you.
- As you don't know the new students, be especially careful when choosing the program and songs, everyone might not enjoy songs where you should shout whether you prefer boys or girls or song that glorify the use of alcohol.
- See to it that the new students understand that late partying doesn't mean that it is ok to miss the orientation course or lectures the morning after. It's good to practice basic self-control from the start of the studies.

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR COMMUNICATION

- Think about what language you use; clarity and plain English is important to make the text more accessible to for example people with dyslexia.
- Is it easy to find information about your association and what to do to become a member or just participate in one event?
- Think about what kinds of pictures and language you choose; do you convey a picture of a member of your association needing to be a certain way?
- Humiliating comments are as tough to receive on social media or anonymous on Jodel as they are in real life. Do not attack associations, groups of people or individual persons online.

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR VIRTUAL EVENTS

When arranging events online, does everyone know how to participate? It's good to have clear instructions and maybe a link to a guide, then it is easier to join in. You can just walk into a break room on campus but to join a virtual coffee break you need an invitation and a link.

For many people it feels more difficult to attend online. You can try telling what "Zoom etiquette" you use, for example no screen shots allowed.



PRACTICAL TIPS FOR THE TOAST MASTER

- When choosing one or two people to be the toast master: prioritize good self-esteem and a positive attitude, a good singing voice is nice but not a must.
- Be clear about what is expected of the toast master, it's good if the board and the toast masters meet and discuss before the party: the toast master should be "on duty" the whole dinner, prepare before the party, know the associations values and customs, for example if there are songs in the song book that no longer are used.
- Two people of different gender and different backgrounds and ages work well.
- Ask someone to stand up when for example a song about people from one town is sung, a new student should not feel alone and pointed out.
- If you plan games or "tasks under the plate" it should be thought thru and might depend on how the seating is done. If someone has just had a death in the family, it can be awkward getting questions about your relatives.
- Toast masters who say positive things to the participants are usually popular.

PRACTICAL TIPS ON ORGANIZING OTHER EVENTS THAN PARTIES

- It's good to have some events in the daytime, whether discussions, seminars, or bowling, then it's possible to attend for people who can't go to parties in evenings because they for example have children.
- Contact persons can be used at other events than parties as well, the participants can be in touch easy and give feedback after those events too.
- Before and during meetings where people are elected to positions of trust it's good to encourage lots of different people to stand as candidates. A board with people from different years and different groups of friends have better chances to attract more people to your events.
- Simple and "mainstream" often attract more people than something that feels difficult or exclusionary.
- Sauna – don't assume that everyone likes this tradition. There should always be a possibility to shower after sports events without being naked amongst other people.
- Sports events – go for activities that are suitable for as many people as possible. In Åbo the CampusSport sports tutors can help both associations and individual students find suitable activities.

- Remember to note what language is used during the event, are you for example visiting an organization where presentations will be in Finnish? Will it be okay to ask questions in English or Swedish?

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR ORGANIZING ANNUAL BALLS

- What does the dress code really mean? “Academic celebration” doesn’t mean anything to someone who hasn’t attended before. Write out if you mean white tie/ jacket with tails and evening gowns. Also write out how to fasten different marks of honor and association ribbons.
- Be clear if it is okay to wear white tie / evening gown or suit / dress of any length. Remember that you might exclude someone by setting the dress code, everyone cannot afford to buy new clothes for one party. Avoid writing that a certain type of dress code is for men or women.
- Detailed information is good, people are even more nervous about making a fool of themselves at fancier parties.
- Where and when do other associations give their gifts or say their greetings? It’s not fun to carry a big present to the dinner if the gifts are given at the “herring breakfast” the following day.



- There should always be alcohol free alternatives and lower prices for that alternative. That signals that you have planned the event for all members and participants.
- Keep breaks, “conferences”, after both the first course and the main course, everyone can go to the bathroom without it disturbing the program.
- Speeches to men or women are usually the time when an annual ball gets awkward. Give speeches to the association, students, your hometown, or the dessert instead.
- Give clear instructions to speakers; how long is appropriate to speak, what subjects might interest the participants. It is not rude to tell an outside speaker or a former student about your general guidelines for what is appropriate to joke about.



DO WE HAVE TO CHANGE EVERYTHING NOW?

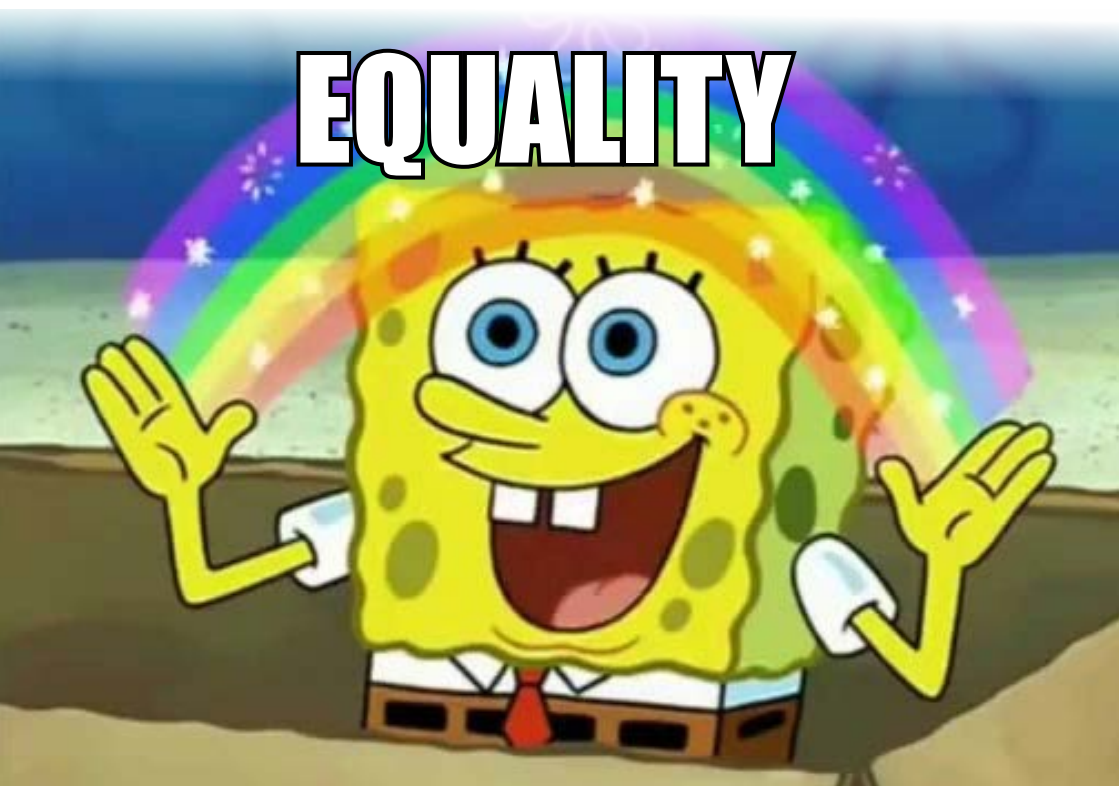
Is everything going to be boring now? No, everyone will be comfortable, and you will have more people attending events and wanting to become active.

We don't know a lot about equality work, what can we do? Lots, you get far with common sense and nice behaviour. It's okay to say that you don't know everything and for example want to know more about a friend's situation.

But it's going to mean loads of extra work? Most of the measures described doesn't cost a thing, doesn't take a lot of time, and will benefit all event participants. Clear communication of expectations and a positive attitude is key in working with inclusion and equality. If you take on more ambitious work, the experience will be useful later, for example in your work life.

What will older students and earlier boards say? Don't listen to them, the people who are active now can decide what they want to do and don't need to listen to anybody talking about how things were better before.

Can't we joke about anything anymore? Don't worry, there are lots of things you can still joke about!



THE AIM OF THE GUIDE STUDENT LIFE 2.1. IS TO:

- Encourage an atmosphere that includes all students at ÅAU
- Give practical tips on how to arrange inclusive events
- End all types of harassment
- Spread information about the Student Unions contact persons
- Describe the concept of contact persons at events
- Continue the discussion with associations and students on how we want student life to develop at ÅAU



Photograf: Mikael Robertsson