



INCREASING COMMUNITY AND PREVENTING LONELINESS

A GUIDE PREPARED BY STUDENT UNIONS
KOE AND LTKY FOR STUDENT OFFICERS IN
LAB AND LUT STUDENT ASSOCIATIONS

OPENING WORDS

Community is an important topic in the world of education, because learning is not a matter independent of the environment, but also a communal and social process. The sense of community reduces the burden of studying and helps students commit to their work. A communal learning environment can therefore promote the progress of studies, because students are more motivated in their studies and receive support from each other. The lack of community can be seen in studies as study exhaustion, a feeling of inadequacy in studies, a cynical attitude towards studies and dropping out of studies.

Our time favors strong sociality, which is why the myth of a happy student life lives on strongly, but at the same time, our individualistic culture expects the individual to be responsible for his own social relationships. Learning this is challenging for students who have started their studies, but this also affects the maintenance of social relationships throughout their studies. The feeling of belonging to the student community of one's field usually weakens as the studies progress.

According to several recent studies, 25% of university students constantly experience loneliness, and 30% do not feel that they belong to any group. We can influence this as a community. The purpose of this guide is to provide viewpoints for the actors of student associations to increase community and prevent loneliness.

a student has the right to

...be well and able to study.
Loneliness and not belonging
to a community affects:

- General well-being
- Mood
- Endurance
- Study abilities
- Study progress
- To develop into a professional and working life skills
- To optimism regarding the future

THEMES

03 BEGINNING OF STUDIES

05 STUDENT EVENTS

09 LOW TRESHOLD ACTIVITY

11 FOCUSING THE PROBLEM
ON ONESELF

14 EXTERNALITY

17 MEETING PLACES

19 VACATIONS

21 GRADUATION

23 POSSIBILITIES OF
INFLUENCE

25 TO KEEP IN MIND

"SETTLING IN A NEW CITY AND JOINING A NEW GROUP STRESSES ONE OUT"

For new students, starting university is a step into the unknown. Some freshers may have lived in the same home all their previous lives, so being in a new apartment does not feel like home, and the fact that there is no familiar person around is unnerving. Getting to know a foreign campus, remembering the names and titles of new people, internalizing the information gained at orientations; learning all this is interesting and educational for a new student, but also challenging and heavy, especially alone. Adapting to the practices of a new place and university can be stressing, as is being part of a new group.

FOREIGN ENVIRONMENT - STRANGE PEOPLE

ASSOCIATION'S SOLUTION

Association officers are familiar with the facilities and faces of the campus, they help regular students whenever they need help with even small things.

Tutors group the freshers together, and the student association should offer freshers experiences and group different year courses together.

Activities promoting a sense of belonging are offered throughout the fresher year, such as fresher events, members' evenings and fresher education.

By their own behavior and example, association officers promote sense of community and open atmosphere towards new students. It is important to ensure that the officers have the skills to intervene in uncomfortable situations for the common good.

By showing a model for solving unpleasant situations, new students learn these practices and apply them in everyday encounters, thereby reducing the association's responsibility as a mediator.

Fresher education,
i.e. introducing new students to the "manners of the house" and showing common rules is important! The campus has zero tolerance for discrimination; here we work together and without prejudice, and every student is accepted exactly as they are.

"STUDENT EVENTS DO NOT SUFFICIENTLY SUPPORT GETTING TO KNOW NEW PEOPLE"

1

Student events are one important way to promote community, but participating in events does not make anyone community-oriented. Many students find participating in student events challenging for many different reasons. Participating can be difficult, because in addition to studies, some work in the evenings, leaving **no time** for events. Another factor is the **lack of money**, because even if the entrance ticket to the event is cheap, the participation as a whole costs so much that the student decides not to participate in the event. The threshold for participation increases in events that must be participated in as **a team**, if the students have not had time to get to know each other so that dare to form teams with each other.

LACK OF TIME - LACK OF MONEY - LACK OF NETWORK

"STUDENT EVENTS DO NOT SUFFICIENTLY SUPPORT GETTING TO KNOW NEW PEOPLE"

2

An important factor is also **the emphasis on alcohol** at the events - although you can participate in the event without alcohol, the atmosphere of the event is too much focused on drinking. The noisy people around can make one anxious, it becomes difficult to have a quality conversation with a friend, and outside of parties, the group doesn't talk to each other. In the worst case, during the event, special attention is paid to not drinking alcohol, as if not drinking alcohol is "wrong". In the individual's opinion, it is easier to avoid all of this simply by not participating in the event.

FOCUSING ON ALCOHOL

ASSOCIATION'S SOLUTION

1

The biggest events are announced in time, e.g. with **Save the date** publications before other detailed information about the event, so that at least the date can be marked on the calendar and requested to be available.

Tickets for excursions and cruises are inexpensive, but the event with all the costs can turn out to be expensive in the end. In all, but especially large events, **sponsor cooperation** is considered to lower the ticket price. Successful business cooperation is a win-win-win situation for all parties, because the company gains visibility, the student's wallet thanks and the association grows trust in both directions.

City orienteering and other team-participated events could include ticket sales for individual tickets that allows to enter **a random surprise team**. One option is that the people who bought this ticket arrive at the venue at a certain time and they are formed into teams. Another option is that the person who bought this ticket agrees to be placed in advance in a group of people who have bought the same type of ticket, which will be notified to them before the start of the event. The most important thing is that the individual does not miss the event because they do not have a team.

ASSOCIATION'S SOLUTION

At student events, alcohol is not the main thing, but community is.

Here are a few ways to reduce the alcohol focus of events.

- No alcohol is made into a special thing: the same ticket price is set for both alcoholic and non-alcoholic tickets, and quality non-alcoholic products are offered instead of basic cola/fanta.
- During the event, it is ensured that water is available at all times, and possibly also snacks. Minimize punishments and rewards focused on drinking.
- In the event's advertisements or in the starting line-up, it is mentioned that discrimination is not accepted at the event and that it is not necessary to ask about, for example, not being alcoholic. Remind participants about the harassment contact person activity.
- The program of the event starts sober, and only later it becomes allowed to drink alcohol, e.g. along a tradition, if participants can only start drinking after the freshers' oath.
- Let's consider whether an event concept could become completely alcohol free, for example, a sitz would be soda sitz?

Psst! It is easier to get sponsor support for alcohol-free events, for example from labor unions.

"THERE ARE NOT ENOUGH LOW-THRESHOLD EVENTS"

It is often stated that the event is a low-threshold activity, but the description of the event is left scarce. When the concept of special events is not opened to the reader or listener, the image of a foreign event can become unnerving, when the individual is responsible for whether the expectations correspond to reality and what the event experience is like. At events, speaking to a large crowd can be stressful, even scary, if one is not an outgoing person. Getting to know others is easier when a person can share their own opinions and experiences with a few people. In addition to the events, students should be offered a smaller-scale activity that does not require as much commitment as an event lasting several hours.

INSUFFICIENT INFORMATION - EXPECTATIONS - PUBLIC SPEAKING

ASSOCIATION'S SOLUTION

The event is made more transparent by providing details in advance, such as:

- How does the event start, do participants have to be there at the indicated time and is there unobstructed access?
- How are you in contact with other people at the event, is there a seating arrangement?
- How can you give feedback about the event, on the spot or afterwards using a form?

In addition, e.g. at the event stand or in story publications, it is given the opportunity to ask questions to ensure that every participant knows the concept of the event and the preliminary preparations.

At the event, opportunities for small group discussions will be added to make getting to know each other more comfortable and natural. A support person will be appointed in advance for the event, who can be reached, if one feels lonely at the event.

Small events in which participation is flexible are organized, and information is given about the university's hobby clubs which activity does not require regular commitment.

"OTHERS HAVE FRIENDS, BUT I DON'T"

Making friends can be difficult if groups of friends have already formed. Sometimes the student's **expectations can be very high**, and the student can imagine that if he hasn't made friends at the beginning of his studies, the game is over. Especially after the covid, many people think that *now they will have friends*, but when the reality does not match the expectations, the individual may blame himself for it. Even if the student has contacts, he may not be able to the experience of deep friendship. A lonely youth easily thinks that **there is something wrong with him** when he does not have a close friend. This kind of thinking lowers self-esteem and increases anxiety, so the individual may end up thinking that others don't want to befriend him or that he doesn't know how to befriend others. Being repeatedly rejected is especially depressing self-esteem so much that the courage to take the initiative disappears or has already disappeared.

FORMED GROUPS - DISTORTED SELF-IMAGE

ASSOCIATION'S SOLUTION

1

Let's be open to all students, regardless of the person and the situation, that is, say hello in the corridors and at events, both acquaintances and strangers. Expressions, comments, greetings - they have **a huge impact** on how welcome a student feels in our community.

Let's praise and give positive feedback to each other and to regular students. Let's stop for a minute to ask how a friend is doing, and invite unfamiliar students to join the events.

The events can start with a round of news, and during the event even quieter participants are asked how they feel and are encouraged to join the conversation with others. Organizers can lead quieter discussions so that students find common topics to talk about.

HOW

All officers together, choose **a time** when you focus on asking members and regular students "how are you doing?", if it doesn't feel as natural in everyday encounters. The idea may seem strange, but in a short time this will greatly affect the entire student community!

ARE YOU?

ASSOCIATION'S SOLUTION

2

If it seems that the participants are not really talking to each other at the events, the association officers help the conversation to arise with various methods of introduction, so that the students get to know each other better.

Ideas for leading the conversation:

- Instead of asking the question "what do you do in your free time?", you can ask "what do you like or would like to do in your free time?"
- Make a suggestion "if place x is still unknown to you, you can go there with this group"
- Attract people to events by asking "are you coming to event x? I look forward to seeing you there!"

Ideas for events:

- "Take a picture with a stranger, and without rushing, find a special, shared factor with them."
- Speed friending, where ready-made conversation topics are available.
- Voluntary one-hour phone parking for events if there is a photographer at the event.

"I DON'T REALLY FIT IN"

Many students feel that they are failures or inferior to others, if they do not match the prevailing stereotype of what a "real" student should be like. Differences are often felt e.g. due to age, nationality or health condition.

The feeling of being an outsider experienced during studies can also be related to **studies**. Retrain students, those who change their study field or those who continue their studies after a longer break feel a weaker sense of community. Differences and even shame can arise if the student's close circle does not appreciate the field he has chosen, or the student has not been able to study the field he wanted or in the way he wanted.

DIFFERENCE - EXTERNALITY - SHAME

ASSOCIATION'S SOLUTION

1

In the activities of the association, especially in events, member benefits and advocacy, attention is paid to the members and participants so that it does not place anyone in an unequal position.

Example: The association has a cooperation agreement with a bar, where the association organizes several events and, in addition, the members receive valuable benefits. Have the following questions been considered from the point of view of the membership:

- Is it possible to enter the bar with a wheelchair?
- Is the bar staff able to speak English fluently?
- Is there other entertainment in the bar besides drinking, e.g. billiards?
- Is the bar also open during the day? Can underage students also enter the bar?
- Are there unisex restrooms in the bar?

Often, international students also want to participate in traditional student events just for the experience, but also to get to know Finnish students and to practice their Finnish language skills. Events in Finnish are announced in English and are planned to be held bilingually.

ASSOCIATION'S SOLUTION

2

Convey to the students the feeling that "just ordinary" is enough and how important it is that we have different people also in interaction situations. Students are encouraged to participate in various events and occasions where they develop their social skills and learn to understand their own social needs and strengths better. Increase an **open atmosphere and discussion culture** with the help of respect, trust and equality, and by effectively addressing inappropriate comments or topics.

Example: It has been noticed that there is a person in the membership who clearly dominates the discussions and influences the activities of the entire group. He makes uncomfortable jokes and belittles the opinions of others. The harassment contact person is not there, but it is hoped that an association officer will intervene in the situation.

- Question it - respond to the joke with a casual tone "Was that a joke in good taste, though?"
- If the joking continues, casually ask the person to the side to chat with you.
- Tell appropriately what is not acceptable in their behavior or speaking and why.
- If necessary, tell them the consequences of continuing to behave or speak in the same way.

Notification to the harassment contact person?

- Make sure they know they are welcome in the group, when respecting the common rules.

”I WISH THERE WAS A PLACE WHERE I COULD MEET STUDENTS”

Instead of shared apartments, students live more often in studios, which means that they don't get to know new people at the housing, and often studios are too small for large meetings. With existing acquaintances, it's easy to go to cafes, hang out, etc. However, **to create new acquaintances**, there is a need for a different space. Many young people need a space that would be like youth centers, but for older young people, or an online platform that would be, so to speak, Tinder for friends. The need for a common meeting place is emphasized for online students and students moving to the town for the summer, if they don't know anyone in the new city.

LACK OF MEETING PLACES - ONLINE AND SUMMER STUDENTS

ASSOCIATION'S SOLUTION

Members are actively encouraged to visit the association space/guild room. Make the space familiar by inviting students there personally and organizing events there. While hanging out in the room, if you notice someone entering the room, you greet them happily and if coffee has just been made, they are offered a fresh cup of coffee.

A "community table" will be set up on campus, and by sitting at it one can start a conversation with anyone.

In the association's own member chats, participants are encouraged to participate in discussions, e.g. by asking for company for free time, by signing up for association olympics and by participating in the association's remote events such as weekly or monthly remote coffees.

Let's create a chat platform for those students who spend the summer in the town, no matter if they are local students or students who come to spend the summer here from other cities.

"VACATION TIMES FEEL AWKWARD WHEN THERE'S NO ONE TO HANG OUT WITH"

For some of the students, study buddies are the only community that they belong to at that stage of life. Family relationships can be distant, which makes traditional family vacations such as Christmas and winter vacations feel even lonelier.

The loneliness experienced at the place of study can be mixed with the idea of temporaryness; about not necessarily daring to start building roots and a network, because one thinks they will soon be leaving somewhere else. This is emphasized during the vacations, when the superficial encounters of everyday life are left out.

LONELINESS ON VACATION

ASSOCIATION'S SOLUTION

Student associations are the primary organizers of events during studies, but during vacations, the board or other officers should not have an obligation to develop student culture. So to speak, during office time, i.e. on weekdays or during studies, the association should focus on grouping its members. Successful grouping leads to members starting to act on their own initiative for the student community.

In the association's own information channels, **regular students are encouraged to develop** some informal activity, such as dinners in the club room of the housing association or a bowling night together.

The idea of temporaryness is challenging to break, and it is not always necessary to end it completely. However, it is important that student moments are made as comfortable as possible, so that the person can momentarily enjoy the company of the people around them, right in that moment.

"NEAR THE END OF MY STUDIES, ALL MY FRIENDS DISAPPEAR"

Many students who are in the final stages of their studies may notice that all their study buddies have indeed disappeared somewhere, and there are no longer shared courses. Doing a **thesis** can be difficult if there is no one who can identify with the situation, and **redoing missed courses** with students one doesn't know can feel lonely. Graduation is not necessarily interesting if the work situation in the field looks bad, and there is no support network to help one transition into working life. Sometimes a student may wonder how the friendships they made during their studies will last after graduation, and whether they will remain alone.

GRADUATION - TRANSITION TO WORKING LIFE

ASSOCIATION'S SOLUTION

The association must **enable students from different year courses to get to know each other**. By getting to know each other, old students share tips with new ones, regarding studies, summer jobs and student culture, and find company in the later stages of their studies.

A person integrated into the student community has a stronger **professional identity**, and is more likely to feel that he belongs to the working community. A student committed to a summer job workplace increases their employment opportunities after graduation.

Consider the development of **alumni activities**, where graduates can network with each other and maintain contact with each other while building cooperation between working people and students.

It is important to highlight to students the importance of social relationships through their studies, not only during the fresher year, because a person's social needs change over time.

"I DON'T FEEL LIKE I BELONG TO THE STUDENT COMMUNITY, EVEN THOUGH I AM A MEMBER OF THE STUDENT ASSOCIATION"

Some students join a student association but don't feel like they belong to the student community. The activities of the association are perceived as distant, getting to know other people at events seems to be largely the responsibility of the individual, and the board is seen as a part of the association that operates in its own closed group. A member's opportunities to influence the activities of the association and the community, without being in a position of trust, are rare. The individual benefits from the membership only financially, but otherwise the student does not see the opportunity to be heard in the community or feel belonging to the group.

MEMBERSHIP - INFLUENCING OPPORTUNITIES

ASSOCIATION'S SOLUTION

1

Members are involved in the planning and implementation of activities. The board does not have to be the only part of the members that is visible on the association's social media, participates in event arrangements and plans activities. Involving members in association activities creates a strong foundation for inclusiveness and the feeling that an individual is welcome in the community and can influence it with their own actions.

Examples of membership involvement:

- Freshers are asked to be models when making marketing materials about overalls or fresher events.
- Members' opinions on events and their stories from previous events are used in the marketing of future events. Tell that applying for board activity was exciting, but that's normal and it doesn't prevent you from applying for the activity.
- Before the autumn meeting, feedback and wishes are collected from the members for the action plan for the coming season, and a personal invitation to join the board is sent to each member. This arouses interest in the meeting and the board activity.

Associations must create a practical strategy for how to promote community into a practical activity and not just at the level of orientation days and celebration speeches.

FINAL PAGE

Memo list:

What is the benefit of the community for the student?

- The student feels overall better:
 - Physiologically, for example, in terms of blood pressure, stress hormones, pleasure hormone levels and the general immune response, as well as in terms of sleep disorder risks, the risk of heart and brain infarction and the reduction of cardiovascular diseases.
 - Psychologically, with a lower risk of mental health disorders (e.g. depression and anxiety disorders), lower stress levels and increased hopefulness and optimism.
 - Cognitively, in terms of the fluency of different processes (memory, thinking, logical reasoning, learning).
 - With the fulfillment of basic needs, the value of one's own life and that of others and the strengthening of a healthy self-esteem.
 - The possibilities of identity construction and development in interaction with others.
 - In terms of comprehensive well-being, coping and satisfaction

- The student's ability to study is better:
 - The motivation to study is greater.
 - Studies are perceived as more meaningful.
 - The attachment to the optional courses is stronger.
 - More resources to put effort into studies and complete courses.
 - The possibility of receiving support from other students when struggling.
 - The risk of dropping out of studies decreases.
- The student is more likely to grow into a well-being expert of the future:
 - Competence can develop to its full potential.
 - The future is seen as brighter and as an assessment of investment.
 - Society will get well-equipped and successful future professionals as the backbone of society.



SOURCES

[Helsinkimissio: Työkirja itsemyötätuntoon](#)

[Hyväterveys: Yhdessä mutta sittenkin yksin](#)

[Mailife: Kun elämässä ei ole muuta kuin työ](#)

[Minska: Yksin, mutta ei yksinäinen](#)

[MLL: Nuori on yksinäinen](#)

[Nuortenlinkki: Yksinäisyys satuttaa](#)

[Nyyti ry: Materiaalipankki](#)

[Nyyti ry: Opas yhteisöllisyyden edistämiseen korkeakouluissa \(pdf\)](#)

[SPR: Kaveritaitoja \(pdf\)](#)

[Yksinäisyyden kokemukset korkeakouluopiskelijoiden elämäkerrallisissa kirjoituksissa \(pdf\)](#)

[Yhteisöllinen korkeakoulukampuksella toimiva kahvilabaari \(pdf\)](#)

[YLE: Yksinäisyys-ilta keräsi ratkaisuja yksinäisyyteen](#)