



STUDENT LIFE & TRADITIONS



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Introduction

Welcome to the student life at Åbo Akademi University! 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. At Åbo Akademi University the student life is largely shaped by the Student Union and by the associations who work together to ensure that student life is varied and brings balance to the studies. In this guide you will find information on the traditional student attire; student caps, overalls and patches, as well as information on the traditional events organized by the Student Union, other large student events, and information on the associations that are active at ÅAU. We want the student life to be open to all and we formally invite you to be a part of it.

Student caps

In Finland, like many other countries, there are traditional graduation caps, or student caps. There are two primary types of student caps; the white with a black band (studentmössa/ ylioppilaslakki), which you can wear when you pass your matriculation exam and graduate from high school, and the white with a coloured band (yrkesexamensmössa/ ammattilakki), which you can wear when you graduate from a vocational school. The latter has different coloured bands, depending on which field the degree is in.

Aside from the two main types, there is also the one worn by those studying technology (teknologmössa/ teekkanilakki). This one is similar to the studentmössa but has a black tassel.

Everyone who has started academic studies is a student and can therefore wear a student cap! We are also happy to see all types of graduation caps, so regardless of which cap you own, you are welcome to wear it. At university, students wear student caps on several occasions. Traditionally, the student cap is worn from 30 April, i.e. Vappen, to 30 September when it is turned inside out. There is also a “winter version” of the student cap, which is dark blue instead of white, that is worn outside of the timeframe, but it is not commonly used anymore.



Student overalls

Finnish students often wear overalls to parties or other special events. The subject associations are the ones that typically sell the overalls, and the different colours symbolize which subject(s) the association is for. The associations typically only order the overalls once a year during the start of the autumn term. However, many tend to have extras so if you are interested in getting an overall, contact one of the subject associations.

Overall patches

The student overalls are, as mentioned above, often decorated with different types of overall patches. These patches can be given out for free or sold, usually for a small price. Many events also have an overall patch specifically for that event. You can get overall patches from the Student Union and from the associations. Sometimes companies can also have overall patches. There are also online-stores that sell overall patches, if you want a specific patch.

Many want to have their name or nickname on the overalls. The letters can be bought from most sewing supply stores. At ÅAU the name is typically put on the leg but can be put anywhere on the overalls.

The traditional way of putting the overall patches on the overalls is to sew them on by hand, however, many prefer to glue them on or even do both. Either way, the patches are a fun way of personalizing the overalls and remembering events and student life.



The Student Union's traditional events

Gulnäbbsintagning – Freshers' Celebration

As an initiation process, the student associations and faculties organise a humorous race with small competitions for the new students in teams. The race also serves as a way of helping the freshers familiarize themselves by taking them all over the city. 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".

If you want to participate, there are a few things that are good to keep in mind. The competitions can be more or less anything, so comfortable clothes are recommended and remember that the event is taking place outside, so keep the weather in mind.

While alcohol may be a part of the competitions, you are never obligated to drink! You can always choose an alcohol-free option or even to abstain from that competition without penalty. The same goes for any competition that you do not feel comfortable with. It is supposed to be a fun introduction, and if you ever feel uncomfortable you are allowed to say so!

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. You can also buy ÅAS' patches and meet the Board and staff at the Fair, welcome!

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.

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 Åbo also have a procession to the cemetery to honour the memory of those who died in the second world war. If you want to join in the procession, you are very welcome!

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. The associations build imaginative sleds and then compete for the trophy. Shrove Tuesday buns are also a must for this day. The sweet buns are filled with whipped cream and jam or almond paste.

Association fair

The Association fair is similar to the Fresher's fair but is arranged in March. Just like the Fresher's fair, the Association fair is an opportunity for student associations to present their activities and recruit new members. You can also buy overall patches, song books and much more.

Vappen and May Day celebrations

Vappen, also known as Vappu or Valborg, is one of the most important student festivities. In Åbo, there is a rowing competition in the Aura 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 chair of the Student Union board, as well as spring songs by the choirs Brahe Djäknar and Florakören. Students usually wear nicer clothes and the student cap to the event at Vårdberget. Afterwards there is usually a dinner at Kånen.

The day after, on the First of May, Vårdberget is filled with picnickers – both students and families. Students usually wear their overalls and caps during the picnic.

In Vasa on Vappen, the students gather at the church square in front of the statue of Zacharias Topelius for a ceremony where he receives his student cap. When the statue has received the hat, everyone else puts their hats on as well. Afterwards the university choir Pedavoces performs a few songs in front of the old Lyceum next to the statue. After all of this, the students arrange picnics in the park around the Court House (Hoviska) or meet at one of the restaurants nearby (e.g. Strampen or Faraos).



Annual Ball

The Student Union and many student associations celebrate their organisation's 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. In 2025 the annual ball will take place on 15 February in Vasa.

The dress code is usually white tie or evening dress, and the traditions for the ball are very specific. The dress code and more specific information is shared before the event. The annual ball has several different parts, and you can choose if you participate in all of it or in parts. The most important part of the annual ball is the banquet, which is a three-course dinner with speeches and other program, and of course, lots of singing.

Procession of flags

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



Other traditional events

Sitzes

A sitz party is a traditional student party with its own specific rules and style. In short, it is a three-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.

People often drink snaps (shots of vodka typically) at a sitz, but there is always a non-alcoholic alternative available. Before each snaps there is typically a song, and the toastmasters often tell a short story or joke to introduce the 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, Superheroes or Beach Party and you are encouraged to dress according to the theme.

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 non-alcoholic alternative. Getting drunk is not an obligatory part of the sitz culture. You can also always wear whatever you feel comfortable in, regardless of theme or dress code.

Pikkulaskiainen

Pikkulaskiainen can be translated as “little laskiainen” and is a winter festival organized in Åbo during February. The event is organized by the economy students’ association at the University of Turku (TuKy) and draws both Finnish and Swedish-speaking students. During Pikkulaskiainen there is a bar crawl and you collect stamps from different bars, restaurants and cafés to receive an overall patch.



Glöggrundan – Glögg bar crawl

Glöggrundan is a traditional event organized by Merkantila klubben (economy students' association at ÅAU), typically in November in Åbo. The event itself consists of a bar crawl during the day and then an after-party at different bars in Åbo. During the bar crawl, you go to different bars, stores and restaurants to get stamps. Depending on how many times you have participated, you want to get a certain number of stamps to get a different overall patch.

The first time you participate you can receive the “Glögg kandidat” overall patch (Glögg Bachelor), and after that you can receive the higher “levels”; “Glögg magister” (Glögg Master), “Glögg doktor” (Glögg Doctorate), “Glögg professor” (Glögg Professor) and “Glögg gud” (Glögg God). You can only receive one per year, and they must be taken in order, i.e. you must have the “lower level” to receive the “higher level”.

During the after-parties different artists perform at the bars. Depending on which artist you want to see, you buy a ticket to that specific after-party when you buy the ticket.

Pampas Nationaldag – The National Day of Pampas

The nickname Pampas is used for the flatlands of Ostrobothnia, the area surrounding Vasa. The national day is celebrated during an entire week, that is filled with different types of events, leading up to the actual National Day on Saturday. 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 continue all night until dawn when breakfast is served. This is one of the biggest parties of the year among the Swedish-speaking students in Finland.



Associations

There are many associations at Åbo Akademi University. Some of these are also student associations of the Student Union, which means that they fulfil certain criteria on membership and inclusion and are granted student association status by the Student Union Council. The student association status means that they are eligible for grants and discounts from the Student Union. Most of the associations at ÅAU are also student associations. There are many different types of associations, and there is a good chance that you find one that suits you and your interests. For the full list of the Student Union's student associations, check out our webpage: <https://studentkaren.fi/en/associations/aas-student-associations/>

As there are many different associations that do different things, we recommend that you visit the Fresher's fair and the Association Fair. There you can meet them and familiarize yourself with the events they organize for their members.

Subject associations

Subject associations are, as the name might suggest, associations that gather people from specific subjects. These can be on either faculty level or subject level, meaning that there are associations that gather people from the entire faculty as well as associations for people studying a specific major.

Nations

The nations gather students from different regions in Finland. While most of the members are from that specific region, they are open to all, regardless of where you are from. Unlike the subject associations, the nations gather people from all subjects and faculties at ÅAU.

Sports associations

If you are interested in sports, there are several to choose from. There is an association for almost all sports, from ice hockey to karate, so there is a good chance that you will find a sport that you like. Some of the sports associations also organize different types of sports events so that you can try different things.



Music associations

There is a strong tradition of student choirs at Åbo Akademi University. In Åbo there are Florakören and Brahe Djäkna, and in Vasa there is Pedavoces. They typically organize auditions a few times a year to find new members and you do not need to have any experience beforehand.

If choirs are not for you there are also bands. Axelbandet and RÅA (Rockföreningen vid Åbo Akademi – The Rock Association at ÅAU) can be found in Åbo and in Vasa there is RÅAV (Rockföreningen vid Åbo Akademi i Vasa – the Rock Association at ÅAU in Vasa). Regardless of what instrument you play, or even if you do not play an instrument, you are welcome to join.

Cultural, religious and hobby associations

Aside from the above-mentioned associations there are many more. There are associations for theater, political parties, and even one for strange interests and hobbies. There is a very good chance that you will find an association that is interesting to you.



Wordlist

Appro – Bar crawl

Evenemangskalender – Event calendar

Fantåg – Flag procession

Fastlagstisdag – Shrove Tuesday

Förening – Association

Första maj – May Day

Första maj picknick – May Day picnic

Gulnäbb – Fresher/ new student

Gulnäbbsakademi – Freshers' Fair

Gulnäbbsintagning – Freshers' Celebration, playful contest among new students

Halare – Overall

Halarmärke – Overall patch or just patch

Info/PR-ansvarig – Board member responsible for PR

Intresseförening – Hobby association

Kassör / skattmästare – Treasurer

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

Medlemsavgift – Membership fee

Medlemsförmån – Membership benefit

Medlemsmöte – Meeting for members

Mösspålägging – Capping

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

Ordförande – Chair of the Board

Pulka – Sledge

Sånghäfte/ sångbok - Song leaflet/ Song book

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

Sekreterare – Secretary

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

Sitz – **Sitz party** – Dinner with singing and playful rules



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

Specialföreningsmässa – Association Fair

Studentmössa – Student cap

Studentrabatt – Student discount

Styrelse – Board

Styrelsemedlem – Board member

Tutor – Tutor, a fellow student that helps you out in the beginning and answers questions.

Tutor utbildning – Tutor training

Valborg/ Vappen – Valpurgis/ Vappu

Värd – Event Coordinator

Årsfest – Annual Ball

Årsfestveckan – Anniversary week

Ämnesförening – Subject association

