

OYY's

Equality and diversity guide  
for organizations

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## Introduction

The task of both the Student Union and the University is to educate the students so that they can become an active part of the society, and to encourage them to take part in student activities. The Student Union is also responsible for upholding and promoting student culture. A student's first touch with university life usually happens through those organizations that work under the Student Union, which also have a big role in integrating the student into the university community. The student organizations must take into account the diversity and the equality of the students, and they must also meet the students' different needs and interests.

By paying attention to equality, the Student Union guides the student culture into a direction where the diversity of its students will be equally appreciated and respected. The subject and interest societies working under the Student Union and the different council groups have an important role in creating an equal Student Union. For that reason, the Student Union in the University of Oulu has created a guide focusing on concrete matters that the organizations can use to aid them in their own activities, as long as it is within their own rules and policies.

The Student Union encourages the organizations working under it into more equal organizational activities. In practice, this is achieved through trainings, guidance and social policy counseling services. When distributing society grants, the Student Union will pay attention to the equality of the organization's activities. When needed, the social affairs specialist will give advice to all students and organizations if they have questions concerning equality.

The quotes used in this guide are originally from the Student Union's equality survey performed in 2015.

## The law

According to section 6 in the Finnish constitution, no one shall, without an acceptable reason, be treated differently from other persons on the ground of sex, age, origin, language, religion, conviction, opinion, health, disability or other reason that concerns his or her person. The Act of Equality (609/1986) provides the legislation that prevents discrimination based on gender, whereas the Non-discrimination Act (1325/2014) prevents discrimination on grounds other than gender.

The objective of the Act of Equality (609/1986) is to prevent discrimination based on gender and to promote equality between women and men, and thus to improve the status of women, particularly in working life. Furthermore, it is the objective of the act to prevent discrimination based on gender identity or gender expression.

The purpose of the Non-discrimination Act (1325/2014) is to promote equality and prevent discrimination as well as to enhance the protection provided by law to those who have been discriminated against. No one may be discriminated against on the basis of age, origin, nationality, language, religion, belief, opinion, political activity, trade union activity, family relationships, state of health, disability, sexual orientation or other personal characteristics. Discrimination is prohibited, regardless of whether it is based on a fact or assumption concerning the person him/herself or another.

## Equality in studying and teaching

The university is responsible for ensuring the equality of teaching and studying. Equality can be promoted, for example, by paying attention to the appropriateness and equality of teaching during an open teaching design process.

According to section 5 in the Act of Equality, the education provider must evaluate the realization of equality in their activities and take necessary measures to promote the realization of equality. The actions of educational institutions are considered discriminatory if a person is, due to their gender, placed in a position worse than the others during student admission, teaching, assessment, or during any other activities of the institution or the community. The education provider must provide a written clarification of their conduct to a student who considers himself or herself discriminated against.

Accessible studying is also a part of equality. Accessible studying can be improved for reasons of health (for example sensory impairment, learning disability, mental problems) by granting additional time to complete an examination, or by allowing oral examinations or quiet working spaces, for example. If a student is in need of special arrangements, they should contact the university accessibility contact person. More information on accessible studying and the contact information of the accessibility contact person can be found on the University website: [www.oulu.fi/university/accessibility-studies](http://www.oulu.fi/university/accessibility-studies)

Students have the legal right to advance in their studies according to the schedule presented in the Universities' Act. All students must be assigned a teacher tutor and all students must receive appropriate supervision when working on their theses. Sometimes students might not agree with their teachers or supervisors when it comes to course or thesis assessment. A student dissatisfied with their assessment can request rectification from the Board of Examinations for 14 days after the assessment.

Unequal teaching or supervision does not have to be tolerated. However, if such situations appear, you should act according to the following instructions:

1. If you or your peers feel like the teaching you are receiving is unequal, express your feelings to the teacher in charge. Writing a formal email is also a good option.
2. If, despite your comments, proper alterations are not made, or if contacting the teacher personally seems too difficult, you should contact the Student Union's academic affairs specialist.
3. Make sure you do not discard any possible evidence of unequal teaching. They will be helpful in the further proceedings.

The Student Union's academic affairs specialist ([kopoasiantuntija@oyy.fi](mailto:kopoasiantuntija@oyy.fi), tel. 040 5257821) will support students if unequal teaching situations appear.

# Equality in organizations

## Surveying equality

Continuous activity in organizations usually includes a lot of well-established practices that might endanger equality. Many of the factors that undermine equality are invisible, indirect, and customary, which means that in order for them to be acknowledged, they have to be given constant attention.

Do you know the state of equality in your own organization? An equal student community is based on the kind of members it includes. Therefore, organizations should take notice of the needs of different kinds of students in its activities. How are people of different genders, ages, nationalities and economic situations, or people with children or a physical impairment, or those who do not use alcohol, taken into account in the organization's activities? Is it possible for all the members of an organization to take part in its activities?

*"Undergraduate students are mainly people who have come to the university straight away or after a few gap years. Older students, who already have either previous university experience or a degree and some work experience, sometimes fall outside this group. In general, no clear discrimination takes place in the university, but during free time activities organized by the subject societies, you feel like you do not belong there, and it also has been mentioned to me because of my age. There is no upper age limit in the university, and people of very different ages study there. One would assume everyone would understand this, but it seems like that is impossible in practice. Luckily, I have found friends among both younger and older students."*

Do the student organization's activities mainly revolve around nighttime partying? Are the same sports played over and over again during the organization's sports activities? Are international students and students with children a visible part of the organization's activities? The board members of the organization should think about the special qualities among their members and devise clear instructions on how all members could receive equal amounts of attention in their activities.

Sometimes, the easiest way of getting started is by asking the members' opinion on the current state of equality inside the organization. Surveys can be used to get statistics, numbers, and real life experiences. They might not give you the whole truth right away, but they can be used to get a clearer picture of the situation and provide useful knowledge on how equality can be improved. A simple questionnaire is easy to add to a questionnaire that surveys the organization's activities in general.

## Equality as a part of an organization's activities

The chairperson of the organization is responsible for the organization's atmosphere and the wellbeing of its member. It should be made possible for all board members to learn something new and to do things collectively. The chairperson should interfere if inappropriate treatment takes place inside the organization, for example, if the chairperson or someone else observes any bullying, should the matter be discussed with the parties concerned. Even though the discussion might seem awkward or unpleasant, it will usually clear the air around the matter. People might not always realize what they are exactly doing, and even small changes can make things easier.

*"In general, it feels like there are some inner circles or cliques, which means that It does not feel comfortable to take part in everything you would want to, for example the events organized by your subject society."*

New members might find it hard to join the organization, if the older members have already been accustomed to a group of their own. It should be kept in mind that without the activity of the newer members the organization will lose its longevity. New board members should also receive appropriate orientation so that everyone will have an equal opportunity to participate in running the organization, and so that the organization's practices are clear to everyone. For example, everyone has the right to express their own opinion, everyone's opinions are given equal attention and respect, and the manner of discussion should stick to the point and leave out all personal disagreements.

*"Usually inappropriate treatment can be seen in people's attitudes and general behaviour, and not so much as something directly targeted at the victim. For example, I know cases in subject societies where the louder and more active members have tried to prevent the "peculiar" or in any other way different people from participating in the organization's activities. The older and more active members usually maintain these bad practices and attitudes with their own behaviour. It is very hard to interfere with something like this, as you can see."*

By organizing a wide range of different activities the organization can reach its diverse group of members. One member does not like partying, the other hates board games, and the third one would like to take part in an event where it is possible to take your children with you. The organization cannot please all its members, but as long as the activities have enough variety, everyone can find something that will suit them.

*"I have faced unequal treatment and discrimination in my organization, because the fact that I did not consume as much alcohol as the others did was considered strange. When I left some parties early because of that reason, I was treated as if I did not even exist."*

In all communication, the students' varying age, family relationships, life views and beliefs, sexual orientation and gender identities, and their sense of humour should be considered. When constructing and updating the organization's website, you should pay attention to the its accessibility. For example, those with visual impairment require clear colours and fonts, and pdf-files should be avoided due to incompatibility issues. For some members, the use of internet is completely reliant on their hearing, and they must use a screen reader application. More information on the accessibility of websites can be found here: [appro.mit.jyu.fi/www/luennot/luento10/](http://appro.mit.jyu.fi/www/luennot/luento10/) (only in Finnish).

*"Discrimination in a slightest level is felt when you don't speak the local language. For an example in certain events held by guilds or some sort of associations, everything is promoted in Finnish and international students who don't speak or understand the language feels left out and un-welcomed."*

International students might find it extremely difficult to integrate in the subject societies' activities. Removing the language barrier is one of the biggest challenges faced by the Student Union and other organizations as well. All information concerning the organization's activities and events should be given in English as well. The Student Union encourages organizations to assign a person responsible for international student relations who ensures that the organization's activities are open to international students as well.

You may hear some jokes concerning international students in your guild rooms, and these jokes may contain stereotypes or prejudices. The international students may not be familiar with the Finnish student culture and all its traditions, so the organizations should

explain some of these customs to them (for example sitsit, mölkky, etc.). Not knowing the local culture might increase the feeling of social exclusion. For example, students from an Asian country might even find the Finnish students' loud party culture threatening. For that reason, the arrangement of different kinds of events is encouraged.

*"There are a lot of activities that are only in Finnish language so it's hard to keep up with everything that's going around you."*

In the university community there are certain organizations where the members, due to the gender distribution in that field, are heavily represented by only one gender. In terms of equality, the extensive use of gender norms and stereotypes is one challenge the organizations have to face. You should reflect on how the organization's activities can be seen in the eyes of the other gender, and whether both genders have equal opportunities to take part in all of the organization's activities.

*"In the engineering circles your gender has a lot to do with how people see you as a person. For example, people might be surprised about the fact you are getting good grades".*

*"I have received a lot of comments regarding my field of study and the fact that I am a woman, for example: "there must not be a lot of women on your field" or "you must be pretty smart for a woman"."*

Subject societies and guilds attempt to bring the students of a field of study together and create a feeling of companionship and team spirit among them. The creation of this team spirit can also create an "us" against "them" mentality. The Student Union encourages different organizations to converse with each other and to organize interdisciplinary events as well. By doing this we can break prejudices and stereotypes towards certain fields of study and their students.

*"I wish different faculties/subject societies did not have a "we are better than you" attitude, but instead encourage more interdisciplinary activities."*

*"You can see a lot of stereotypes regarding certain fields when taking part in interdisciplinary activities, and not all of them even feel like jokes (for example students of humanities not being able to count)."*

## **Checklist for organizing events**

### **1. Can the information reach all members equally?**

- When using email lists, pay special attention to how you express the nature of the event and all things related to it, so that the organization feels equal, reachable and so that event participation feels easy.
- The bigger the event is, the more likely it is to concern international students, making the English event description even more important.
- You should keep in mind that the information can reach people you were not supposed to contact in the first place.
- If advance registration is required for event participation, ask the participants to inform if any special arrangements are required (for example accessibility, dietary needs, need of translation, and so on). Let the participants know about the accessibility or the lack of accessibility in the premises, especially if it is a place the participants might not have visited before.



## **2. In what language is the event arranged?**

- The language used has an effect on the event description and the event as well. If it is possible for international students to take part in the event, all information should be given in English as well.
- If the event (for example a lecture) takes place completely in Finnish, make sure you mention it in the description.

## **3. Can everyone access the venue?**

- Accessible entry means the premises can be accessed with a wheel chair and that there is an accessible toilet in the premises.
- In large events the use of an induction loop is encouraged. Instruct the speakers to use the microphone attached to it, so that the loop and the acoustics can be benefited from.
- Instructions that help the participants find the premises should be printed with a black and clear font on white paper.
- You can always contact the owner of the premises if the accessibility of the site is unclear.

## **4. Can all participants find something to eat and drink?**

- A vegetarian option should always be included. The food should also be at least low in lactose. You should also pay attention to other dietary needs related to different ethnicities or religions..
- There should be a nonalcoholic drinking option other than tap water. Nonalcoholic drinks should be served in the same way as the alcoholic drinks, and the participants should not need to ask for the nonalcoholic drinks. Some tips for nonalcoholic punch recipes can be found here: [www.yths.fi/filebank/2040-Holittomat\\_2000.pdf](http://www.yths.fi/filebank/2040-Holittomat_2000.pdf) (only in Finnish)

## **5. Can all participants freely use the sauna?**

- The sauna shifts should be arranged so that there are always separate shifts for men and women, and also a mixed sauna. All shifts should be as long as the others, and their order should vary.
- Make sure that one of the organizers is always keeping company to those who do not want to use the sauna.

## **6. Who is responsible for the event?**

- The organizer is responsible for the event and has an important role in making all the participants feel themselves comfortable and so that they would like to participate in the event again in the future.
- Make sure that everyone is able to participate, make themselves heard, and that no one is left outside.
- If any inappropriate behaviour appears, intervene immediately. For example, pressuring others to drink, discriminatory jokes, and harassment can be considered inappropriate behaviour.

# Harassment, bullying and violence

## Harassment

Harassment is unwanted behaviour that violates one's personal value and creates a threatening, hostile, degrading, humiliating or aggressive atmosphere. For example, the relationship or previous experiences between people have an effect on what can be considered harassment. The bottom line is that only the victim of harassment needs to find the behaviour uncomfortable.

Sexual harassment includes, for example, physical touching or inappropriate suggestions. Although some people might find bawdy jokes funny, they can make some people feel uncomfortable. The line between appropriate and inappropriate jokes can often be varying and very hard to find. For example party advertisements might have certain features that, despite being added for humorous effect, might cross the line and even be insulting. According to the Student Union's equality survey, the harassment taking place in the University of Oulu is most usually sexual harassment by men towards women.

Quite often the victim's first reaction is to downplay their feelings and try to explain themselves that the situation is nothing out of the ordinary. The feeling is natural, but those who face harassment should express their feelings so that more attention can be given to the matter in the future.

## Bullying

Regular subjection to harassment, harm and/or discrimination by one or more people while being unable to influence the treatment is considered bullying.

According to the Finnish student health survey (2012), half of the respondents had experienced bullying during their time in school. During their time as a student, 5 percent of the respondents had been subjected to bullying by other students, and 6,5 per cent had been subjected to bullying by staff members. Bullying taking place in universities or colleges is usually unjustified criticism, downplaying or humiliation related to one's studies. Verbal abuse, mockery of one's personal attributes, intentional damaging of personal relationships and social isolation also take place in universities.

*"In the university I have seen a group of a few people mockingly laugh at a disabled person. Unfortunately, I did not intervene, which still bothers me to this day."*

Bullying and harassment can cause mental problems, anxiety, depression, eating disorders, fatigue, avoidance coping and/or the lack of social support and the feeling of isolation caused by it. The bully may also experience mental problems, gambling addiction, substance abuse or inability to fit in student groups.

## Violence

Experiences of violence may vary from mild threatening with violence to serious violations of a person's bodily integrity such as rape. Experiences of violence may also be connected to the use of alcohol and mental problems. Experiences of violence are usually serious

enough to require the assistance of the police and crisis care. Violence and suspicions of violence must always be strictly addressed from the outside.

## Early intervention

Early intervention means taking responsibility of your own actions in support of others. The lack of early intervention may at worst lead to negative practices: the situation and all its harmful features become socially acceptable in the community. For example, if bullying is not immediately intervened, it may become socially acceptable as time goes by.

Settling cases of bullying and harassment is important for the wellbeing of the entire organization, as the negative atmosphere has an effect on the entire community. All members of the organization can prevent harassment and bullying with their own actions. The easiest way of stopping harassment is by immediately intervening the situation and letting everyone know of its uncomfortableness. The most common forms of harassment and bullying are talking behind one's back, making someone feel inferior, withholding information, and completely ignoring someone.

*"I know clear cases of bullying inside our own subject society. People start creating bigger and bigger stories out of hearsay and speaking awful things behind the back of someone they do not even personally know. I know that matters that clearly do not belong there have been discussed during board meetings as well. Luckily, there has been an intervention and awareness of the matter has increased".*

According to the Finnish law, an institute is responsible for taking appropriate actions when it finds out that someone has been harassed. According to the University equality plan, the heads of the departments must always intervene if they hear about cases of harassment, whether the victim is a student or member of the staff. The faculties also have their own harassment contact persons. If you need more counseling on solving a situation, you can ask the course leader, your teacher tutor, or another trustworthy member of the staff for help.

A student organization can support the victims of bullying by spreading awareness, influencing the members' attitudes and intervening cases of bullying immediately. Through these actions we can gain the bullies' attention and let them know that bullying is not acceptable in the organization. The victims of bullying can also be helped by supporting their integration into the student community, by taking into the account the diversity of the students, and by offering peer support.

## Help and support

Any kind of harassment or bullying must not be tolerated. If you feel like you have been harassed or bullied, you should act according to the following instructions:

1. Tell the person responsible for the harassment that you do not like his behaviour targeted towards you or any other person.
2. If you are afraid to confront the harassing person alone, you can ask a friend or the Student Union's harassment contact person to accompany you. Writing a letter is also an option.
3. In case regular harassment appear, write down all the times and places in which harassment takes place, and the names all people who have witnessed the harassment.

4. Do not discard any other evidence of harassment such as text messages or emails. They will be helpful in the further proceedings.
5. Contact the Student Union's harassment contact person who will help you resolve the matter fully confidentially.

The Student Union's harassment contact persons help and guide all students who have faced harassment. The harassment contact persons are trained for their task, bound to secrecy, and your conversations with them are fully confidential. The harassment contact persons are not responsible for punishing the people accused of harassment, but for helping to resolve the situation.

You can contact the Student Union's harassment contact persons via email ([hairinta@oyy.fi](mailto:hairinta@oyy.fi)) or in person. One of the harassment contact persons is the Student Union's social affairs specialist ([sopoasiantuntija@oyy.fi](mailto:sopoasiantuntija@oyy.fi), tel. 040 526 5821). The contact information of the other harassment contact persons can be found on the Student Union's website: [www.oyy.fi/en/for-students/everyday-well-being/bullying-and-harassment-2/](http://www.oyy.fi/en/for-students/everyday-well-being/bullying-and-harassment-2/)

## Outside help and support

YTHS (Finnish Student Health Service): [www.yths.fi/en/contact\\_details/units/oulu](http://www.yths.fi/en/contact_details/units/oulu) tel. 046 710 1063 Mon-Thur 8-15, Fri 8-14. In acute cases contact in the morning between 8 and 9 am.

Nyyti ry supports students' mental health and life management: <https://www.nyyti.fi/en/>

Oulun SETA ry is a human rights organization that supports sexual minorities: [www.oulunseta.fi/sivu.php?p=1](http://www.oulunseta.fi/sivu.php?p=1) (only in Finnish).

Seta's Trans Support Center offers psychosocial services to transgender people and their close ones and serves as an expert of gender diversity: <http://transtukipiste.fi/in-english/>

Alcoholics Anonymous is an organization where experiences of alcoholism is shared and sobriety pursued: [www.aa.fi](http://www.aa.fi) (only in Finnish, however English groups can be found, mainly around Helsinki: [www.aa.fi/groupsearch.php?lang=E](http://www.aa.fi/groupsearch.php?lang=E))

Oulu Crisis Centre: [www.oulunkriisikeskus.fi/](http://www.oulunkriisikeskus.fi/). tel. 08 312 0611 Mon-Fri 10-18.

Tukinainen offers help, support, and counseling in matters concerning sexual violence: [www.tukinainen.fi/english](http://www.tukinainen.fi/english). Tel. 0800-97899, Mon-Thu 9-15, Sat-Sun 15-21, on holidays and their eves 15-21.

If you suspect a crime, you can report it to the police online: [www.poliisi.fi/crimes/report\\_of\\_an\\_offence](http://www.poliisi.fi/crimes/report_of_an_offence).

## Attachments

The Student Union's Equality and Diversity Plan ([oyy.fi/asiakirjat/julkaisut/tasa-arvo-ja-yhdenvertaisuussuunnitelma.pdf](http://oyy.fi/asiakirjat/julkaisut/tasa-arvo-ja-yhdenvertaisuussuunnitelma.pdf))

The University's Equality and Diversity plan (notio: search for Diversity and Equality plan)

The University's plan for preventing bullying and harassment (notio: search Prevention of bullying and harassment at the University of Oulu)

The Ombudsman for Equality: [www.tasa-arvo.fi/web/EN](http://www.tasa-arvo.fi/web/EN)

Information and material bank for people and organizations interested in anti-discrimination: [www.yhdenvertaisuus.fi/welcome\\_to\\_equality\\_fi/](http://www.yhdenvertaisuus.fi/welcome_to_equality_fi/)