

The Student Union of the University of Vaasa

Declaration of Equality

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INTRODUCTION

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.

(Non-discrimination Act 1325/2014 § 8)

In the Student Union of the University of Vaasa, equality means respect, inclusion, and acceptance. Community is reflected in the appreciation of student diversity and the progress of equality in all activities of our community.

The Declaration of Equality is a guideline for equal action within our Student Union. The organizations, associations, clubs, societies, and other communities within the Student Union are doing their best to implement the Declaration. In 2023, a survey will be conducted on the implementation of the Declaration of Equality, and the Declaration's contents will be updated as necessary.

VISION

The Most Equal Student Union in Finland

COMMUNALITY

Foreword

The corona pandemic has damaged a sense of community and increased loneliness among students. According to the Student Union Equality Survey conducted in 2021 as part of a master's thesis, as many as 6,1 % of students felt lonely constantly during the coronavirus pandemic. In the same survey, less than half felt they could participate in events just as they are.

In order to achieve equality in our community, we must nurture the diversity of community members as and actively interfere in harassment situations. We take into account the different backgrounds and experiences of people in our actions and actively develop our actions based on this understanding.

Goals

We respect all members of our community, regardless of their qualities, background, studies, or beliefs. The communities acting within the Student Union promote dialogue between members of different fields of study.

Each of us is **unique**. Our community accepts individuals just as they are. Our community is anti-racist and equal, and also free from discrimination.

Every student feels like they belong to a community.

Members of our community **are included** in all actions. Everybody has a chance to take part in the activities and the development of the activities within the limits of their time, ability, and other limitations.

Our community has an **open discussion culture** and all our members are heard equally without any presumptions.

Actions

1. The Declaration of Equality will be introduced among the associations and clubs. The Student Union will monitor the implementation of the declaration. The declaration will be communicated actively.
2. Members of our community are involved in activities/decision-making by involving members in decision-making and collecting feedback.
3. The actors in our community work together to promote a sense of community. In our student union, the **event organizing guidelines** are followed. In cases of harassment VYY's approach to harassment and bullying is followed.

WELL-BEING

Foreword

With the corona pandemic, loneliness and study difficulties have become more common: According to the Finnish Student Health and Wellbeing Survey (KOTT) commissioned by the Finnish institute for health and welfare, up to a third of students struggle with exhaustion. Queues for welfare services have increased and it is difficult to get help.

According to the Student Union's Welfare Survey, less than half (41 %) of our members know about the harassment contact person and how they can be contacted. 9 % of respondents have experienced harassment or bullying. Some harassment and bullying situations have been perceived as racist and sexual in nature.

In order to promote well-being, VYY takes into account the safe space policy in all our activities, VYY does not accept any kind of harassment in its activities, and harassment is actively addressed. We promote anti-racist activities and, for our part, enable the right to a safe education.

Goals

The members of our society will have equal opportunity for **physical, psychological, and social well-being**. We will take care that no one in our society will be left alone. Our society will actively prevent discrimination and recognize harmful operating models within its actions.

In our Student Union, everyone must feel safe at events as well as other activities. Harassment is prevented and talking about and highlighting problems is easy.

In the cases of harassment, VYY's instructions for dealing with harassment situations are followed by members of the student union, anti-bullying persons, and the harassment contact person. The Student Union provides an anonymous reporting form through which cases of harassment can be reported and advice can be sought.

The members of our community are aware of the available support and services in connection with studies and life around them.

The well-being services provided by the university and the student union are of high quality and access to them is barrier-free and accessible to all members of the community.

Actions

1. The quality of well-being services is ensured by mapping the needs of our community, for example through surveys, and doing advocacy work on services based on the surveys.
2. Information on well-being services will be increased and developed.
3. Participating in events and peer support groups in our community alone is easy. We enable diverse participation.
4. We train anti-bullying persons who, through their actions, will contribute to the implementation of and adherence to this declaration in our community.
5. We develop the policy of safe space and based on them our members feel that our community is a safe place to be and participate as themselves without fear of discrimination, bullying, or harassment.

ACCESSIBILITY

Foreword

Accessibility is a multidimensional concept, that can refer to the barrier-free accessibility of physical spaces as well as accessibility of online spaces. VYY recognizes two forms of accessibility, which are physical accessibility and mental accessibility, which means, for example, a sense of belonging to the community as one is, without fear of discrimination.

In our student union, accessibility is examined from the perspective of teaching, communication, digital services, and facilities. In order to promote accessibility, VYY works to

ensure that all our members have equal opportunities to receive quality education and participate in the activities of the Student Union, regardless of their limitations. One way to implement teaching is high-quality hybrid teaching.

In addition, communication should be accessible to all, whether or not they use social media. In the campus project, VYY also contributes to making the university's facilities as accessible and accessible as possible. In its own activities, the Student Union strives to provide facilities that are as accessible as possible to all members of our community.

Goals

Members of our community may have visible, invisible, physical, mental, or psychological constraints. **Everyone's constraints must be taken into account** in all our community's actions and plans.

The associations among our community are aware of the accessibility of their operations and prepared to act to improve it. Members of our community should have an opportunity to participate regardless of their inner or outer qualities

Our communication is honest and accessible reflecting the **diversity of our community**. We take different language groups into account by also implementing communication in English, which is better understood internationally. In our communications, we take into account that not everyone uses social media, and we also offer access to information through other means, such as a newsletter that can be subscribed to by e-mail.

All members of our community have an equal opportunity to participate and be heard.

Actions

1. We train members on the safe space policy and to recognize their own privileges. Through our own activities, we ensure that everyone can openly express their opinions and views on matters with respect for others.
2. The events within the student union are accessible and free from harassment and follow the safe space policy. In the event descriptions, it must be clearly stated whether the event is accessible and the contact details of the harassment contact person and the anti-bullying persons of the event.
3. Wherever possible, the facilities used by our community should be accessible. We will ensure that accessibility is taken into account by influencing the campus project.
4. Communication is transparent, taking into account the diversity of our community. Communication is accessible and multi-channel.

TERMINOLOGY

TERM: explanation, description

- **Accessibility** - Can be divided into physical accessibility and immaterial accessibility.
- **Physical accessibility** - Physical accessibility means taking into account the diversity of people in the design, implementation, and maintenance of the built environment. In short, therefore, physical accessibility means the accessibility of the physical world.
- **Immaterial accessibility** - Immaterial accessibility usually refers to a physically intangible environment, such as digital documents, websites, services, and attitudes. The starting point for the activities to be achieved is that solutions are made that are suitable for everyone so that the utilization of services and participation in activities are equal.
- **Mental accessibility** - the feeling that you can be part of the community as you are, without fear of discrimination.
- **Safe space** - A safe state means that everyone has the freedom to be themselves, to express themselves freely, and to be involved in all activities. In a safe space, all harassment is strictly prohibited. The easiest way to achieve a safe space in practice is to follow the safe space policy.
- **Safe space policy** - Practical policies and guidelines on how to act and behave with people in the same state and event so that everyone feels safe and sound, both physically and mentally.
- **Harassment**- Harassment is any activity or behavior that is subversive, creating a hostile and unpleasant atmosphere, or threatening a person or group of people. For example physical contact without permission, verbal behavior that is not welcomed, following another, or threatening another.
- **Anti-bullying person** - Persons selected from among the tutors and organizations responsible for monitoring and ensuring that no harassment or other inappropriate use occurs at the events or other activities organized by tutors or organizations. The anti-bullying person can address the harassment that has occurred and direct the victim of the harassment to contact the harassment contact person. Anti-bullying persons are called "hyvis" in Finnish.
- **Harassment contact person** - The harassment contact person is a support person you



can turn to if you feel bullied or harassed. They support and advise in resolving harassment situations. The harassment contact person will help if you do not know who to take the matter to and will direct you to the right kind of help if necessary. The harassment contact person may also be contacted, even if you are not the victim of the harassment yourself, but have witnessed such situations or would like to discuss possible ways to address them. The harassment contact person is neither a psychologist nor an authority, so they will not take any further action without the consent of the person concerned. The harassment contact person is an employee of the student union and is bound by professional secrecy in all activities related to acting as a harassment contact person.

Up-to-date definitions of the terms used can be found, for example, at syrjinta.fi/en