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## The Benefits of Volunteer Work in Student Unions

### -The students' work readiness

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**Conference Topic:** Cooperation with the students

**Keywords:** Volunteer, student union, Aalto University, work life readiness

The reform of the educational system in Finland which leads to increased pressure on the students, as both the local university and the government of Finland are encouraging and pressuring them to graduate quicker than at the present rate. The main reasons of prolonged studies have usually been working part-time [2] but many students are also active in volunteer work related to their university in student organisations and unions. In this article we will discuss case-examples of the students volunteering at Aalto University Student Union as well as utilize publications and research done by both Finnish and international researchers.

According to Finnish law [3] it is compulsory for “[A]ll the university students who have been admitted to programmes leading to a lower or higher university degree” to be a member of the student union at their university, and that there can be only one student union per university. The purpose of the student union is to act as a link between its members and to promote their societal, social and intellectual aspirations and their aspirations regarding studies and students' status in society. Most of the student unions utilize volunteers to realize these purposes and missions through committees, elected student parliaments and project groups.



Jollands, Jolly and Molyneaux show in their study that project based learning (PBL) contributes to a graduate's work readiness. The study shows that especially communication skills are developed by PBL. Chan shows that non-traditional teaching methods, such as learning journals, may aid learning and that these can be utilized in volunteering work, as the University of Hong Kong did in the second Sichuan reconstruction community service project.

Vacation work can be seen as a kind of volunteering at a company, especially if the position is an unpaid internship or similar, as the student doesn't get any tangible remuneration but rather experience from other fields than the university curriculum – as they do in volunteering positions. Vacation work is seen as very positive and as something that prepares students for working life [4].

Volunteering brings benefits to all who partake in it in one way or another [5, 7]. The author expands on some of the benefits of volunteering: volunteering develops new skills, makes the participants a part of their community, motivates and gives a sense of achievement, boosts career options and lets the volunteer meet a wide range of people. Volunteering is very beneficial for people overall, and especially students who're going to look for their first employment at some point.

Student life is an important part of the experience of studying in Finland, and the Finnish students usually partake in volunteering activities. As volunteering is beneficial for both students and their latter working life, it could be supposed that the Finnish government would want to enhance this. At the moment, the direction is the opposite: study times are being constricted, the grounds for getting a national study grant are being tightened and it's getting harder to apply for higher education. A lessening of volunteering in student unions would probably mean less capable workers entering the working market.

At AYY there are around 250 volunteers from all six schools of the university. Many of the tasks the student union is performing are based solely upon volunteer work, such as the case of freshmen. The first study year is of utmost importance to students, as this shapes their study habits and the groups they will interact with. The care of freshmen, their welcoming and introduction to the student life is done mainly by the older students themselves, and the university is only involved through formal lectures regarding study-related matters. The introduction into the study system, problem solving and the sense of camaraderie is directed and organised by the freshmen-committee which are all volunteers and the committee is managed by a volunteer, the freshman captain. Thus the whole first year experience for new students at Aalto largely rests upon the shoulders of volunteers [8].

Concluding, we see that volunteer work is beneficial for students engaging in it, as their work readiness is heightened. Students volunteering in their student organisations and unions have better work life readiness and have some knowledge regarding responsibilities and how to organise things. A student, who solely focuses on studying and doesn't volunteer or work part-time beside this, has lesser work life readiness when entering the working life. ■