Yhdessä yhteisöksi

NYYTI RY

Improving Sense of Community in Higher Education

500 IDEAS FOR YOU

LIST OF CONTENTS

NYYTI RY

SYL NATIONAL UNION OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN FINLAND

SAMOK

KIRKKOHALLITUS

JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO
UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

STUDENTLIFE

LAUREA
AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU
University of Applied Sciences

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Laureamko.
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FOREWORD

Nyyti ry's "Yhdessä yhteisöksi" project ("becoming a community together") gathered ideas in 2018–2020 from higher education students and people who work with students on how students' experiences of communality in higher education institutions could be improved. Ideas were collected both online and face to face from:

- Several web surveys.
- Workshops and trainings.
- Numerous discussions at stands and booths.
- Collaborative meetings.
- Social media communications.

Altogether, several hundred people were reached in the idea gathering stage, and over 500 ideas were presented. However, it is not the number of people reached or ideas collected that makes this data unique. It is also the kind of people that were reached:

- Students of various disciplines
- Active student association members
- Tutors
- Teachers
- Other staff
- Students who are not part of a group or who experience loneliness

As a result, we have received ideas that are based on genuine needs and ideas that address the groups that are in prime positions to influence students' sense of community. We'd like to sincerely thank everyone who shared their ideas! These materials would not exist without your valuable input!

The aim of our activities is to pay it (i.e., the good deeds) forward and to help higher education institutions nationwide seize this theme, an important one for the whole society. Therefore, we want to offer our one-of-a-kind materials to anyone who is interested in this topic.

In order to make the materials convenient to use, we have:

- Condensed and combined ideas into larger wholes.
- Divided ideas into categories based on which groups could realize them or most naturally take them into account in their activities.
- Stayed on a tangible and practical level in idea descriptions so that the original creators' voices are still present.
- Marked with the ★ ★ ★ symbol any ideas that were mentioned repeatedly or gained notable support in the data.

Feel free to utilize and adapt the material and the ideas in a way that best suits your operational environment (but remember to include a reference). Some ideas are already being tested in practice by our project, but there's still a lot of work left in improving the sense of community among students on a large, nationwide scale. That is why everyone's efforts are needed. Everyone can, in one way or another, have an impact on the atmosphere and operational culture that surrounds students during their years in higher education in Finland.

So, here are 500 ideas for improving students' sense of community—condensed, ready to use, and at your disposal!
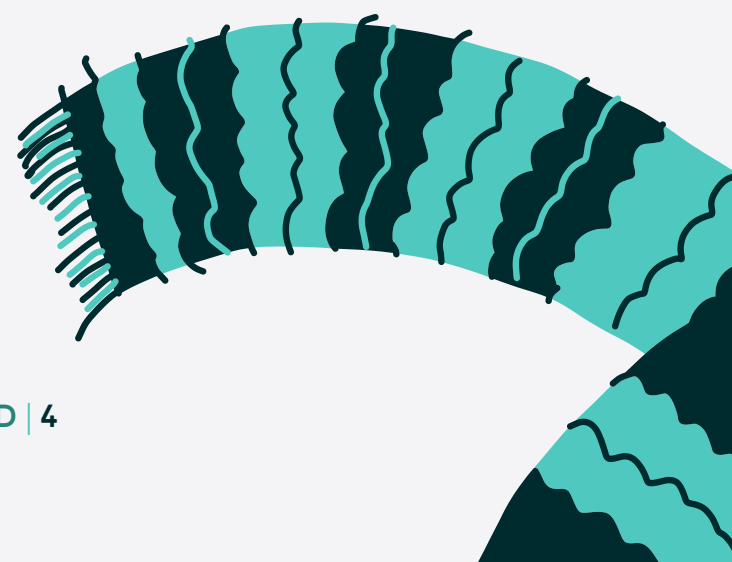
STUDENT ASSOCIATIONS AND TUTORING

For whom? Active organizers in student associations, tutoring supervisors, and tutors.

Who realizes the ideas? Student associations and tutors for the most part, but they can collaborate with other parties as well.

The essentials: Student and subject associations play a major role in how well students get to know their peers, find social groups, and find their place in the world of higher education. These organizations also have a lot of expectations placed upon them because they should be able to consider the many needs of a diverse student body in their events and activities. Many students who experience loneliness or exclusion feel that their needs have not been taken into account properly in student organizations' activities. In fact, many areas of development and ideas for improvement are provided in the materials.

Tutors also have a key part in promoting communality because the first few months of new students' studies are crucial to finding a sense of community. Thus, many expectations and wishes are directed at tutors.

20 IDEAS

1. **INCLUDE A WIDER RANGE OF STUDENTS IN ACTIVITY PLANNING** ★ ★ ★

    Tips for implementation: Start including, for example, introverts, highly sensitive persons, and shy students (and everyone else) in event and activity planning so that group activities truly represent the student community. In-person meetings may be daunting for some at first, so other methods—even anonymous ones, such as surveys and polls—can be utilized in activity planning. It is best to let everyone know right away why their opinions matter and to offer a reward of some kind for participation.

2. **EMPHASIZING THE DIVERSITY OF STUDENT LIFE IN ACTIVITIES** ★ ★ ★

    Tips for implementation: Tutors and active student association members should pay close attention to the picture they paint of student life in the first gatherings. Are different aspects of student life being presented to new students, or is the main message that life as a student is about partying and drinking? It is also important to clarify the tutors' responsibilities, areas of awareness, and roles not only in introducing study routines but also in discussing relationship themes. Moreover, it's good to make it clear during tutor training that tutors need to also get along with people who are not "like them."

3. **STUDENT ASSOCIATION MEMBERS AS ROLE MODELS** ★ ★ ★

    Tips for implementation: Subject and student associations' representatives serve as an example of how other people should be treated and included in groups. Active organization members can, for example, make it a habit to ask at least one student whom they don't know very well if that student is going to participate in an upcoming event or activity. At the same time, they can encourage others to do the same. This will significantly increase the number of people who get personally invited to events.

4. **ORGANIZED INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES ALONGSIDE SUBJECT ASSOCIATION EVENTS**

    Tips for implementation: In addition to student associations' own events and activities, the associations could establish a regular practice of organizing multidisciplinary get-togethers for students.

5. **ADDITIONAL TRAINING AND MATERIALS FOR STUDENT ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATIVES**

   Tips for implementation: Subject and student associations should receive more training, support, and information, for example, on how to interact with solitary students, meet the needs of a diverse student body, and include everyone respectfully.

6. **APPOINTING EVENT LEADS AND SPECIFYING THEIR DUTIES**

   Tips for implementation: In addition to having a communications lead, social affairs lead, academic affairs lead, and so on, there could be an event lead who would take care of individual participants at every event, help them make connections, and support participants without them having to ask for help. These leads can also be temporary volunteers, but it is important that they are chosen in advance and that they know their role.

7. **FINDING SOLUTIONS TOGETHER WITH STUDENTS**

   Tips for implementation: Associations should take better into account that it can be difficult to participate in activities and events even if one wants to attend. Students should have the opportunity to inform the student association that they want to take part in activities, but they're not able to act on that desire yet. After receiving such information, for example, through a survey, the student association can contact the person (with their consent) and look for ways to help the student participate in activities.

8. **MORE COOPERATION WITH THIRD PARTY ORGANIZATIONS**

   Tips for implementation: If subject and student associations were to collaborate more actively with organizations that are not directly connected to the higher education institution, it could provide a neutral setting for students and encourage them to participate. Various events, activities, and non-profit organizations' introductions would be great opportunities for cooperation.

9. **SENDING PERSONAL INVITES**

   Tips for implementation: A student who doesn't know anyone and is considering taking part in activities would have a much easier time with "taking the leap" if they received a personal invitation. Personal invites could be utilized for particular events and activities, for example, on Facebook, via email, or on WhatsApp. Volunteers could also help with the invitations.

10. SUFFICIENT GROUP ACTIVITY KNOW-HOW AND SKILLS ★ ★ ★

Tips for implementation: It should be ensured that tutors and student association representatives possess the necessary knowledge and skills for promoting social interaction and realizing their role in it. Organizers should ensure that their team has the necessary practical skills, for example, in leading a group, mixing groups, utilizing suitable get-to-know-each-other games, and so on. Tutor training and training for student associations' active members can be used to influence these skills and this type of knowledge.

11. BRIEFINGS AND GATHERINGS BEFORE THE ACTUAL EVENT

Tips for implementation: Make it standard practice to organize briefings to explain what events, such as fuksiaiset, the first-year students' initiation party, are about. Address the concept, the schedule, what actually happens at the event, and so on. Students should also have the opportunity to ask questions about events, also anonymously, to make room for "silly" questions.

12. CHAT ACTIVITIES

Tips for implementation: Student associations can organize anonymous chats where students have the opportunity to discuss their concerns and fears, for example, regarding events and participating in them.

13. EXTENDED TUTORING ★ ★ ★

Tips for implementation: A student's need for support and personal circumstances may only become clear after the first few months have passed. At that point, tutoring has usually ended, and many students feel that no one is there to support them, for example, in getting to know the other students. It's important to extend tutoring beyond the first few weeks and months or to develop a system that adopts the same supportive role after the first few months.

14. PEER SUPPORT ALONGSIDE TUTORING

Tips for implementation: A low-threshold support person system or volunteer support system, focusing especially on promoting friendships and a sense of community, could be utilized. The peer support person could, for example, attend events with the support seeker or be there to ensure that no one is left alone at events.

15. COOPERATION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF TUTORING

Tips for implementation: The tutoring leads at various higher education institutions could work together more when developing tutoring practices. This would make it easier for institutions to share methods that have proven successful, which would raise the quality of tutoring in different institutions.

16. **THE BASIS FOR DIVIDING TUTORING GROUPS**

Tips for implementation: Establish new practices for how tutoring groups (and other small groups) are divided. It would be beneficial to do some preliminary surveying, for example, on students' interests, goals, or other relevant factors before assigning tutoring groups.

17. **CHANGING THEMES FOR ACTIVITIES**

Tips for implementation: Each person in a tutoring group should be asked at the start of an academic year to make a wish or wishes regarding the type of activity—for example, what kind of events to organize, what themes and topics to discuss, and so on—they want for their group, and attempts should be made to fulfill these wishes. This way everyone gets to feel like they had a say in group activities, and students can learn about others' interests as well. In addition to tutoring groups, this approach suits student and subject associations and other small group activities.

18. **TUTORING GROUP COOPERATION**

Tips for implementation: What if a student has difficulty getting to know the others in their tutoring group or feels like they're not on the same wave length? Combining tutoring groups, or at least having more cooperation between groups, could expand everyone's potential friend groups.

19. **ADDRESSING LONELINESS ON A THEME DAY OR HOUR**

Tips for implementation: Tutors can organize a theme day or theme hour where loneliness among students and its effects on the whole community are discussed openly. At the same time, an effort is made to actively promote group building and ensure that no one in the class/year is left alone. This theme event should be organized early on for new students, and it should be marketed to freshmen from the get-go.

20. **TUTOR-ORGANIZED LUNCH GATHERINGS**

Tips for implementation: Tutors could organize lunch dates and ensure that everyone is invited so that no one's feeling of exclusion is reinforced by being left out. Various channels of communication should be used, and at times, tutors could join forces and invite more than one group to have lunch. Tables should be reserved in advance so that everyone has a seat alongside their group.

STUDENT EVENTS

For whom? All students. The goal is to consider the needs and interests of different students equally when organizing events.

Who realizes the ideas? Various actors, preferably in collaboration. Mainly student and subject associations, but other parties who organize events or activities for students can also use these ideas.

The essentials: In order for students to feel that activities were organized for them specifically, event organizers should account for students' diverse needs and different interests. It is common that students who experience feelings of loneliness or exclusion feel that student events only take into account the needs of socially capable and extroverted students with great social skills.
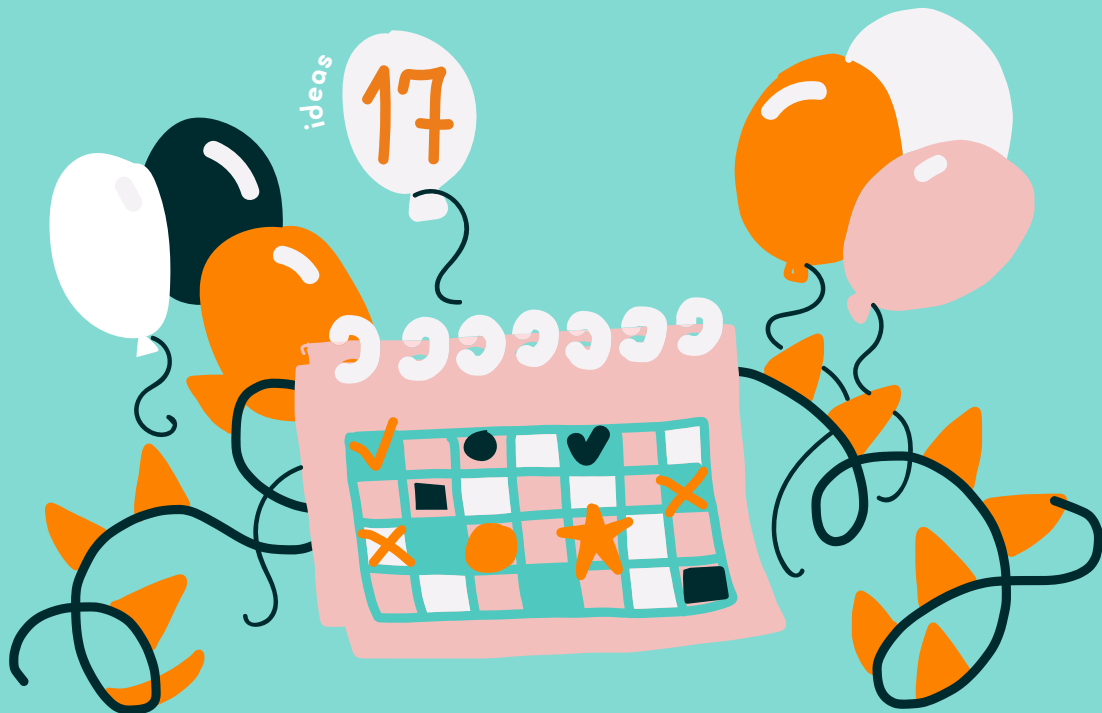
17 IDEAS

1. **MORE ALCOHOL-FREE EVENTS** ★ ★ ★
   Tips for implementation: There's a variety of options and concepts. For example, exercise and sports (team sports, individual sports, casual exercise in groups), crafts (arts and crafts, sewing, woodworking, model building, cooking), nature activities (mushroom picking, nature walks to learn about the local nature, plant identification trips, hikes), arts (listening to music, playing music, singing together, choir, theater, visual arts, movie nights, museum tours), city tours (sightseeing, sharing knowledge about the area), and group activities using apps (Pokémon GO, geocaching, treasure hunts). Basically, any activities where alcohol and other substances are not present: board game nights, coffee dates, seasonal activities, and so on.

2. **MORE RECREATIONAL CLUBS** ★ ★ ★
   Tips for implementation: There's a variety of options and concepts. For example, exercise and sports (team sports, individual sports, casual exercise in groups), crafts (arts and crafts, sewing, woodworking, model building, cooking), nature activities (mushroom picking, nature walks to learn about the local nature, plant identification trips, hikes), arts (listening to music, playing music, singing together, choir, theater, visual arts, movie nights, museum tours), city tours (sightseeing, sharing knowledge about the area), and group activities using apps (Pokémon GO, geocaching, treasure hunts). Basically, any activities where alcohol and other substances are not present: board game nights, coffee dates, seasonal activities, and so on.

3. **AFTERNOON-CLUB-LIKE ACTIVITIES**
   Tips for implementation: There are plenty of options, but activities could include afternoon study sessions, inclusive and casual exercise, and doing schoolwork together. In general, a concept that resembles afternoon clubs for school children.

4. **EVENTS THAT STUDENTS ATTEND ALONE**
   Tips for implementation: Here's a new concept for events: it is not only acceptable but expected that students come to these events alone. This allows students to interact with each other truly without pre-existing cliques. The concept aims to make itself redundant over time (i.e., there'll be no cliques to counteract): students will find like-minded people with whom they can spend time in the future.

5. **WORK AND CAREER EVENTS**

    Tips for implementation: These events would not be organized for specific class groups but for everyone who's interested. There could be interesting guest speakers from various companies, possible workplace tours, and general discussion about professional life.

6. **EVENTS SCHEDULED AROUND FAMILY-LIFE REALITIES**

    Tips for implementation: There could be weekend events that are also suitable for families. Students of certain disciplines (e.g., social services) could supervise a play area for kids while parents participate in the event. Students of different disciplines could organize these events in turns with changing themes.

7. **"POTLUCK OF SKILLS" EVENTS**

    Tips for implementation: Participants could share their special skills in these events, introduce others to them, and discuss or practice these skills together. There's potential for uplifting and confidence-boosting activities when participants get to be the expert in something. Additionally, each participant gets to expand their skills and knowledge.

8. **EVENTS TO PREVENT EXCLUSION OR MARGINALIZATION**

    Tips for implementation: Start-of-the-fall events where the goal is to prevent students' exclusion from social groups. The topic is discussed directly, and the event concept revolves around educating students on why it is important for everyone to know at least some of their fellow students.

9. **COOPERATION WITH VARIOUS PARTIES**

    Tips for implementation: Sometimes it's easier to attend events that are organized by an outside party or that revolve around an activity that allows you to stay busy while getting to know people. Suitable event collaborators include sports and fitness service providers, non-profits, services provided by the city, animal care centers, and so on.

10. **SPEED FRIENDING EVENTS / FRIENDS' CLUB**

    Tips for implementation: A speed-dating-esque event (series) for getting to know people. The aim is to meet new people and make friends (as opposed to making romantic connections). Another approach could be a Friends' Club where people could gather to discuss friendship-related topics and skills.

11. **EVENTS TO INCREASE COOPERATION BETWEEN DIFFERENT YEARS** ★ ★ ★

    Tips for implementation: The event concept aims to bring together different years' students and allow more experienced students to share tips on studying, student life, and other informal topics.

12. **A SUBSTANCE-FREE EVENT SERIES THAT FOLLOWS THE ANNUAL PLANNING CYCLE**

    Tips for implementation: Students should be able to join events at any point in the academic year, and events should have seasonal themes: sledding and buns around a campfire on Shrovetide, or laskiainen, "Friend Cafe" on Valentine's/Friend's Day, egg hunt at Easter, "Vappu Disco" on May Day (with non-alcoholic mead), foliage walks or hikes in the fall, and Christmas parties with Santa, carols, and traditional food.

13. **INCREASING COOPERATION BETWEEN SUBJECT ASSOCIATIONS**

    Tips for implementation: Host multidisciplinary events where the activities require participants to cooperate with students of other disciplines and with people outside their usual cliques.

14. **PARTIES FOR INTROVERTS**

    Tips for implementation: An event concept that is built entirely according to introverts' needs. The plans take into account, for example, the following factors: making room for silence, spending time together in a shared space without the social pressure of talking, a guest book where participants can leave their contact information if they want to connect with someone, a quiet space for solitary moments and breaks, and so on. In general, organizing events where introverts aren't left to fend for themselves.

15. **TASK SHEETS FOR GETTING TO KNOW / BEING MINDFUL OF FELLOW STUDENTS**

    Tips for implementation: The sheet or "pass" could be part of a wellness event, themed event, or campaign. The task sheet would include small assignments that encourage students to interact with others and help people. Once the pass is full, the student gets a small reward, for example, a patch to sew on their overalls.

16. **THEMED MONTHS AND WEEKS**

    Tips for implementation: Each month or week could have its own theme, on which events and activities are based. This would make it easy for people to attend events in the months or weeks that match their interests.

17. **PROVIDING A QUIET SPACE IN ALL EVENTS**

    Tips for implementation: Learn how to utilize quiet spaces in events and make quiet spaces a natural part of all events. At the same time, the overall noise levels at events deserve more attention.

PEER GROUPS, SUPPORT AND ACTIVITIES

For whom? Activities are geared towards outsiders, students who experience loneliness, students who could benefit from practicing their social skills, and students in general.

Who realizes the ideas? Various actors and organizations. Cooperation is encouraged.

The essentials: We should use one of the most effective tools in improving sense of community: peer support. Peer support activities are a great way to show individual students that they are not alone with their challenges.
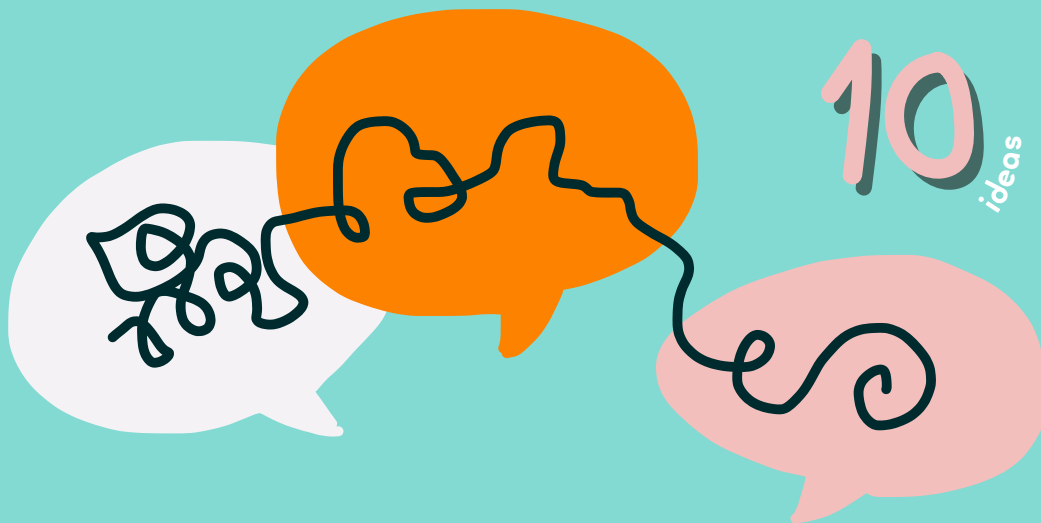
10 ideas

10 IDEAS

1. **REGULAR PEER SUPPORT GROUPS FOR STUDENTS EXPERIENCING LONELINESS OR ANXIETY**

   Tips for implementation: It is important that these groups are based on peer support: sharing experiences, having discussions, being heard, and offering advice in a safe and supportive environment. The group would help simply by being present: "You're not the only one with these experiences and feelings!"

2. **INTEREST-BASED SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES**

   Tips for implementation: When signing up for groups, students mark their main interests. Based on these interests, small groups that aim to increase social interaction are formed. This way, mutual interests and topics of discussion are more likely to be found, which helps students get to know each other.

3. **TRAINING FOR ACCEPTING DIFFERENT PEOPLE AND INTERACTING RESPECTFULLY ★ ★ ★**

   Tips for implementation: It is best to organize this training as an activity for all students so that every student on campus recognizes their impact on the study atmosphere. How can I make the other person feel in all our shared interactions that they are a pleasant, respected, and wanted companion at that moment and in general?

4. **WORKSHOPS ON SOCIAL SKILLS**

   Tips for implementation: Especially for those who struggle with social interaction. Other students could also benefit, for example, by improving their listening skills.

5. **IMPROVISATION AND ACTING EXERCISES TO PRACTICE REAL-WORLD INTERACTION**

   Tips for implementation: These exercises should especially highlight seeing things from someone else's perspective and understanding different ways of acting. This activity has got to be as accessible as possible so that people can participate easily even without prior experience. Students could benefit from such exercises in general.

6. **INTRODUCTION TO SELF-WORTH, MINDFULNESS, AND SELF-EXPRESSION**

   Tips for implementation: Especially for students who experience loneliness or exclusion. How can we strengthen self-esteem and sense of self-worth when they have been damaged by loneliness and other life experiences, improve existing social skills, and develop new ones?

7. **BASICS OF SMALL TALK - WORKSHOPS AND EXERCISES**

   Tips for implementation: This is easily marketable and useful information that can help students improve their social skills. These lessons suit all kinds of students.

8. **GROUP-BUILDING MEETUPS THAT GO DEEP**

   Tips for implementation: It should be clearly communicated in marketing that these gatherings allow students to talk candidly, for instance, about themselves, the community, their academic discipline, fears, expectations, and hopes.

9. **"IT'S OK TO BE SOCIALLY AWKWARD" GATHERINGS**

   Tips for implementation: This is the place where everyone is allowed to mess up, lack skills, and be a regular human being. Event marketing can be very impactful.

10. **ORGANIZING CAR POOLS AND SHARING THE COMMUTE**

   Tips for implementation: This is a way to tie communality into daily routines and actions.

COMMUNICATION AND MARKETING

For whom? Useful for anyone who organizes activities or events for students.

Who realizes the ideas? Each organization in their own activities. Student associations in particular should pay close attention to these matters, but the ideas are beneficial to everyone.

The essentials: Communication and marketing paints a preliminary picture of what an event or activity will be like. It's not enough to carefully plan activities and take different kinds of students into account if the plans aren't also communicated clearly. Many subtle details can affect people's perceptions of an events' safety and inclusivity. Impressions matter a lot.

8 IDEAS

1. **MARKET SUBSTANCE-FREE EVENTS MORE THAN "TRADITIONAL" EVENTS** ★ ★ ★

   Tips for implementation: This approach is based on the idea that the so-called usual events, where alcohol is present, will attract a crowd either way, so less marketing is needed. This emphasis in marketing will also reflect a conscious decision and the organizer's values.

2. **USE VARIOUS COMMUNICATION CHANNELS** ★ ★ ★

   Tips for implementation: Social media might not be the most effective way to reach students who experience loneliness, as they may not be very active there. Therefore, event information should be posted not only on Facebook and social media but also on other channels, such as websites. If an event has multiple organizers, each organization's communication channels should be utilized to reach more people. Be sure to actively remind people of upcoming events.

3. **MARKETING EVENTS TO LONELY STUDENTS IN PARTICULAR** ★ ★ ★

   Tips for implementation: It is important to avoid putting labels on anyone, but sometimes it's also necessary to address an issue directly. It should be clearly expressed that this is an event for people who might not feel comfortable attending other student events. Many students who experience loneliness need confirmation that an event or concept has been created purposefully to meet their needs, and this aspect should be made clear in marketing.

4. **GUIDELINES FOR COMMUNICATION (E.G., SOCIAL MEDIA IMAGERY)**

   Tips for implementation: Event organizers should consider whether it's necessary, for example, to always encourage students to bring drinks with them and should think about the message they're sending with the marketing images.

5. **FINDING MOTIVATION IN EVENTS' AND ACTIVITIES' BENEFITS**

   Tips for implementation: It should be clearly stated why students should attend an event and how it will benefit them (besides having a good time). For example, what are the benefits of networking?

6. **PUBLISH STUDENTS' STORIES ABOUT EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES**

    Tips for implementation: Stories will make activities more approachable. They can be used to discuss what a particular event was like previously, how the author saw others reacting to the event, and what the author's impression of the event is in retrospect. Additionally, stories can reflect on making social connections on the campus, which events were helpful in it, and what tips the author has for others.

7. **EXPLAIN HOW AN EVENT OR ACTIVITY IS INCLUSIVE/LOW-THRESHOLD** ★ ★ ★

    Tips for implementation: It's good to contemplate and openly discuss the following: What makes a particular activity a low-threshold activity? How have different kinds of students been taken into consideration? What is the timetable for the event?

8. **SETTING GROUND RULES ALREADY IN MARKETING**

    Tips for implementation: Make it clear from the get-go how participants are expected to behave. For example, "be mindful of others," "also talk to people who you don't know," "avoid forming cliques," and so on. The event organizer's values stand out from these ground rules—are you being truly respectful of everyone?
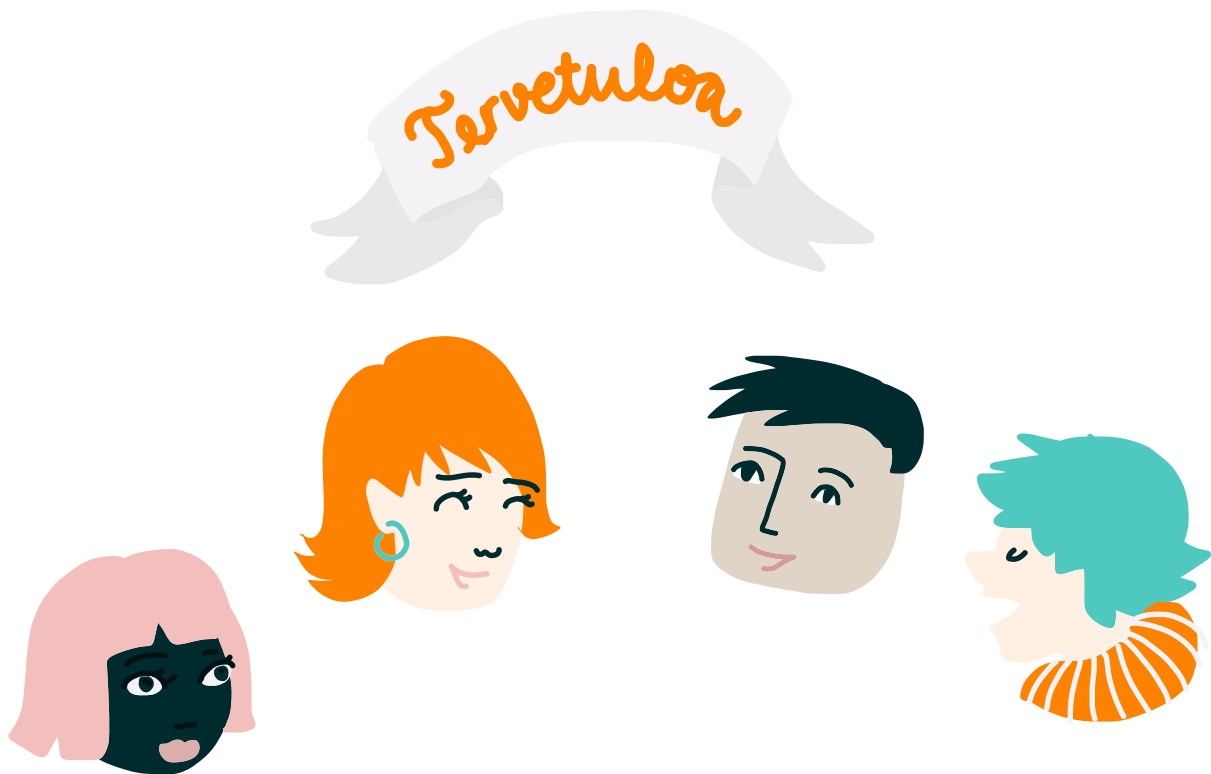
TEACHING STAFF'S ACTIVITIES

For whom? Teachers and their work.

Who realizes the ideas? Primarily, teachers in their own actions, but they can also utilize these ideas together or in third-party trainings.

The essentials: It's important that teachers recognize their role and responsibility regarding sense of community and the general atmosphere. There are many things that teachers can influence through their own actions and the example they set. By interacting with their students with dignity and respect, by focusing on positive interactions and encouraging them, and by treating everyone equally, teachers serve as responsible role models. Some teachers already do a lot to foster a sense of community, but the problem is that some teachers are unaware of their role and their influence on the matter. It is important to share the best practices among all teachers and to solidify them as part of the job.

20 IDEAS

1. **THE TEACHER ASSIGNS GROUPS** ★ ★ ★

   Tips for implementation: This was the most common wish for teachers: the teacher should divide the class into pairs or groups, as opposed to students choosing their groups. This protects students who feel lonely or are socially excluded from having to face public humiliation in class. Working with different people is also useful in developing social skills that are needed in the future at work. In general, teachers could make sure that group assignments are done in new groups each time.

2. **INTERACTIVE TEACHING** ★ ★ ★

   Tips for implementation: Students want various forms of interaction from their teachers in class (not monologues). For instance, use short discussion assignments and make time for getting to know the group (also through free-form conversations). Additionally, it would be good to learn the whole group's names if possible (this goes for the teacher as well).

3. **ADDITIONAL TRAINING FOR TEACHERS** ★ ★ ★

   Tips for implementation: Teachers need more training on their role in preventing students' loneliness. In the training, it's important to motivate teachers: Why is it necessary to recognize lonely students? What are the effects of loneliness and exclusion? What signs are there? What can I do as a teacher? The teacher also leads by example in genuine human interaction.

4. **SHARING BEST PRACTICES**

   Tips for implementation: Some teachers have the right idea, and some are completely unaware. It's important to list the best practices and share them among teachers to harmonize teaching activities. Sometimes, simply having a discussion among colleagues can move things forward.

5. **INCLUDING COMMUNALITY AS A THEME IN TEACHING**

   Tips for implementation: Teachers could dedicate a small portion of their lessons, for example, to being mindful of other people, to teamwork skills, and to tips for social interaction. The themes would be tied in with the rest of the course because these skills are necessary for both studying and work.

6. **SPENDING TIME TOGETHER AS TEACHERS AS STUDENTS**

   Tips for implementation: Positive and safe relations between students and teachers have an impact on the whole culture of higher education. There's a demand for more casual get-togethers for teachers and students. The answer could be, for example, a monthly breakfast gathering for a subject's students and teachers. Activity-wise, participants could have relaxed discussions about their field, studies, job searching, and so on.

7. **CASUAL MEETINGS WITH TEACHERS**

   Tips for implementation: Teachers and staff members can inform students that they are available at the student cafe at a given time on a given day (e.g., from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m.) so that students can come have a chat about their studies or something else. This provides an opportunity for a different kind of interaction between teachers and students.

8. **PEER CONSULTATIONS IN CLASS**

   Tips for implementation: The teacher assigns "peer consultants" for a class so that both students in each pair can teach each other something. The themes can vary between sessions. In addition to the actual topic of the lesson, students can discuss social skills, being mindful of others, how to cope with stress, and so on.

9. **ENCOURAGEMENT AND CHEERING STUDENTS ON**

   Tips for implementation: The teachers should encourage students, cheer them on, and help them focus on the positives instead of their failures. A positive atmosphere will also affect interactions between students. This could mean different exercises, discussions of personal strengths, and so on. If it's difficult to include the theme in the actual course, teachers could organize some events or study groups that address the topic.

10. **"SENSE OF COMMUNITY" THEME WEEK**

    Tips for implementation: Teachers can organize "sense of community" moments in class, for example, as a week-long themed campaign on the campus. During the week, 5–10 minutes out of each lesson is spent on discussing the meaning of communality and doing related exercises. Challenge the students. For example, "talk to someone you don't really know today."

11. **MORE EMPHASIS ON GROUP BUILDING**

Tips for implementation: It is worthwhile to focus on achieving a safe group experience because it has a direct effect not only on the students' well-being and ability to cope with work but also on study performances and motivation. If you make an effort at first to help students get to know each other and turn the group into a place that is comfortable and inviting for them, it will save time throughout the course. If the teacher doesn't know how to do this, they can ask, for example, wellbeing advocates and colleagues for help.

12. **MORE EXTENSIVE AND EFFICIENT PERSONAL STUDY PLAN TALKS**

Tips for implementation: HOPS meetings can be used to discuss other things besides the official personal study plans. You can ask students how they're doing on different fronts, getting to know fellow students being one.

13. **MORE ACTIVITIES WITH THE TUTOR TEACHER**

Tips for implementation: There should be more interaction with the tutor teacher, also in a less formal setting. For example, there could be a casual scheduled event that the tutor teacher attends (e.g., a picnic) once or twice per semester.

14. **MORE COOPERATION AMONG TEACHERS**

Tips for implementation: Teachers can join forces for certain courses so that there's more interaction between student groups. Could there be, for example, joined classes for Finnish-speaking and international students?

15. **COURSE PROJECTS ON COMMUNALITY**

Tips for implementation: Studies could include more course projects that aim, for example, to improve sense of community. Projects would be part of the coursework and a requirement for passing the course.

16. **GOALS FOR THE WHOLE COURSE GROUP**

Tips for implementation: Give the group a common goal at the start of a course. The whole group should aim to meet this goal by the end of the course. The goal can be divided into predetermined parts or assignments that the group can work on along the way. At the end of the course, group members get a reward for accomplishing the goal by working together.

17. **COMMUNITY POINTS FOR TEACHERS**

Tips for implementation: Teachers need to earn a certain number of community points from teaching activities during each semester. This can be either a fun challenge for the work community or a real competence marker for the job. Some higher education institutions, for example, in the Unites States, use college-wide community point systems.

18. **HOMEWORK ON COMMUNALITY**

Tips for implementation: Homework assignments can be used to discuss sense of community as a theme. The assignment can be directly linked to the course, or it can be a voluntary assignment, but there should be some motivating reward involved. The assignment could be introductory, for example, looking at literature or current news about the topic, a reflective task, or a practical assignment (e.g., getting to know others, asking someone to join you for lunch).

19. **MAKING COURSEWORK MORE FLEXIBLE**

Tips for implementation: For the most part, group assignments make it easier to get to know others, but sometimes mandatory group assignments, especially if the teacher doesn't assign the groups and the students form the groups, can contribute to the shame, the feeling of loneliness, and the stigma involved. It's important for the teacher to recognize these situations and to offer an individual assignment as an option.

20. **ACTION-BASED METHODS OF SOCIAL INCLUSION AND FEEDBACK**

Tips for implementation: Various web platforms, surveys, comment features, and feedback options should be utilized more in teaching. There are many programs and applications available that can contribute to students' experiences of social inclusion alongside the traditional, in-person methods.
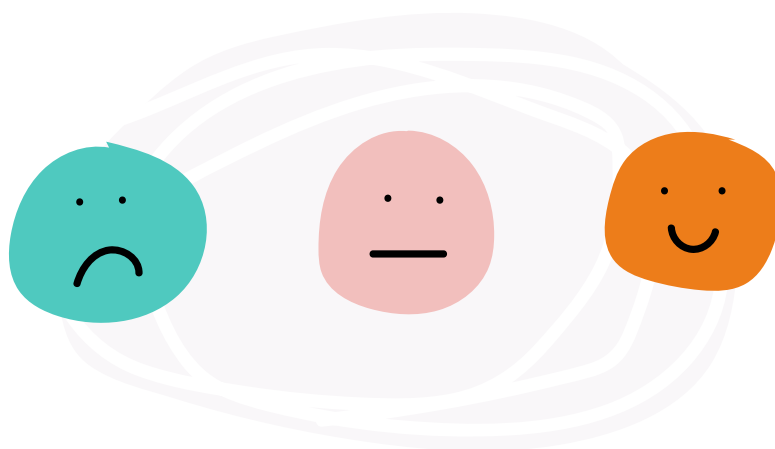
WEB-BASED ACTIVITIES

For whom? Students experiencing loneliness or exclusion. Can be a more wide-ranging effort, for example, to benefit all students at an institution.

Who realizes the ideas? Various actors, preferably in collaboration.

The essentials: Nowadays, more and more students are attending courses over the Internet, at least in part. It's also possible to organize many informal activities on the web. In fact, well-chosen web-based activities can be used to improve sense of community among students. You can and should organize new activities on pre-existing platforms and try to utilize existing web-solutions more effectively.

7 ideas

7 IDEAS

1. **A FRIEND APP**
   Tips for implementation: With the app, any student who feels lonely can network and connect to individual people or groups. Students can seek company, for example, to make music, go for a walk or a run, bake, have coffee, visit an art exhibit, or study at the library together. There can also be an option to swipe on activities instead of people.

2. **FACEBOOK GROUPS FOR STUDENTS IN THE AREA OR INSTITUTION**
   Tips for implementation: These groups can be closed groups meant specifically for students who are looking for new friends or large groups for students enrolled in a particular institution.

3. **AN INTEREST-BASED PLATFORM**
   Tips for implementation: There can be a web-based platform where users can create and find groups based on their interests. Some groups can be restricted based on the city or institution, and some can be geographically open. Use pre-existing platforms, such as Discord and Facebook.

4. **MODEL FOR WEB-BASED TUTORING**
   Tips for implementation: It's necessary to develop a model for web-based tutoring that takes promoting communality into account specifically. The model would help people solve the challenges that come with increased distance learning and multiform learning.

5. **FRIEND FORUM FOR SEVERAL INSTITUTIONS**
   Tips for implementation: The Friend Forum would allow students to create a profile or a personal ad and to then get to know other people on the forum anonymously over private messages. A group chat option on the Friend Forum would also be a good feature. This system could also be used for just one institution.

6. **VIRTUAL COFFEE ROOM**

   Tips for implementation: This could be a place for informal discussions about studies, friendships, coping with work and stress, and other themes. There could also be separate, theme-based coffee rooms. Participants could also organize in-person meetings if they so choose.

7. **UTILIZING EXISTING APPLICATIONS MORE EFFICIENTLY** ★ ★ ★

   Tips for implementation: There are already many great applications that can be used to improve sense of community. Yet, they haven't been fully utilized. Try, for example, Brella at www.brella.io.

INFLUENCING ATTITUDES AND ATMOSPHERE

For whom? Activities are meant for anyone who studies or works at a higher education institution.

Who realizes the ideas? Various actors, preferably in collaboration.

The essentials: An institution's general attitudes and atmosphere are affected by every person there: students, faculty members, and every active member in student associations. It's important to get everyone to recognize their role in promoting communality and to convince them that even small gestures can make a difference. It's essential that all target groups are reached in order to foster a true change in the general atmosphere.

13 ideas

13 IDEAS

1. **"PAY IT FORWARD" CAMPAIGNS**
   Tips for implementation: Have discussions about what we can do to help others and what those good deeds can mean for us and others. Provide a concrete method of offering help to others.

2. **WEEKLY THEMED POSTS ABOUT EXCLUSION ON SOCIAL MEDIA**
   Tips for implementation: The topic should be addressed visibly, and these posts can explain different aspects of the issue and raise awareness on how to make a difference.

3. **DISCUSS THE IMPORTANCE OF GETTING TO KNOW PEOPLE**
   Tips for implementation: An effort should be made to motivate people and raise awareness of the positive effects. How can we benefit from getting to know others, and how can we get going?

4. **ENCOURAGE MAKING THE FIRST MOVE WITH A CAMPAIGN**
   Tips for implementation: Raise students' awareness of their own role in combating social exclusion. Motivate students with why it's important that students who already have a social circle and networks around them make the first move.

5. **ENCOURAGE BEING MINDFUL OF OTHERS WITH A CAMPAIGN**
   Tips for implementation: Inform people of why it's beneficial for the whole community and us as individuals that we are mindful of others.

6. **DISCUSSIONS OF LONELINESS AMONG STUDENTS** ★ ★ ★
   Tips for implementation: Many people are unaware that some of their fellow students are left completely alone in their studies and of the long-term consequences it can have. If you're unaware of the issue, you also can't understand how big your role in it might be. Discuss the importance of small gestures, such as greeting someone.

7. **WELLNESS DAYS WITH LONELINESS AND COMMUNALITY THEMES**
   Tips for implementation: Organize themed days that address loneliness and sense of community. Offer various activities that examine the themes.

8. **COOPERATION WITH VLOGGERS TO DISCUSS, FOR EXAMPLE, ACCEPTANCE OF DIFFERENCES**

   Tips for implementation: It is important to influence institution-wide attitudes and atmosphere. Well-known vloggers can help reach a wider audience.

9. **CAMPAIGNS FOR COMBATING LONELINESS**

   Tips for implementation: Provide students who experience loneliness with practical advice on how they can influence their own situation, and inform others of what they can do to help.

10. **FRIEND GROUP CHALLENGES**

    Tips for implementation: Host a challenge campaign that addresses how existing groups and friend groups can open up their clique to new people. Provide direct advice on what to do, and host, for example, a friendly competition among groups.

11. **PROMOTE A CULTURE OF SAYING "THANK YOU"**

    Tips for implementation: Do a campaign or create long-term guidelines for how we can get people to say "thank you" in higher education institutions. Provide ready-made materials and easy methods to as many people as possible.

12. **CHALLENGES FOR THE SOCIALLY CAPABLE**

    Tips for implementation: Challenge students with great social skills to use their skills to benefit the whole community. List tips and best practices to share with others (for example, making the first move, tips on successful interactions).

13. **CHALLENGE MYTHS AND MISINFORMATION**

    Tips for implementation: Question prevailing expectations and notions: Is it true that it's easy to make friends in higher education and that it happens almost automatically? Is it true that all students like to meet new people by partying? It's important to relieve the shame that comes from these issues and to abolish wide-spread myths.

PHYSICAL SPACES

For whom? Ideas for physical spaces can relate to various groups. They address, for example, student associations' and teachers' use of spaces, caretakers' duties, and the use of campus restaurants.

Who realizes the ideas? Various parties, together.

The essentials: Physical spaces can also be used to promote a sense of community. Does the campus have enough places to sit, comfortable seating areas, and study spaces for meeting other students? Have students been able to influence the design of physical spaces on the campus? Are the spaces available, for example, for students' exhibitions with various themes? In addition to these questions, many separate ideas and testing them in practice can make a real impact on the campus' operational culture.

8 ideas

8 IDEAS

1. **COMFORTABLE LIVING ROOMS**

   Tips for implementation: Truly cozy spaces for all students, not just for active members of student associations. Centered around hangouts, socializing, and serving coffee and snacks. At times, these spaces could have hosts guiding the feel of the room. Seasonal and other themes could be utilized.

2. **FURNITURE LAYOUTS AND PURCHASES THAT PROMOTE SOCIAL CONNECTIONS** ★ ★ ★

   Tips for implementation: While teaching, you can use, for example, a horse-shoe-shaped desk and chair layout instead of the usual rows. Take a new approach to furniture purchases (e.g., exercise balls, yoga mats, bean bag chairs etc.) to support the creation of a positive and relaxed atmosphere in class and otherwise.

3. **TRAYS THAT PROMOTE COMMUNALITY**

   Tips for implementation: Student restaurants could offer trays (or other identifiers) in two colors so that students could communicate that they are open for interactions in an "even strangers can approach me in a friendly manner over lunch" way.

4. **TABLES OR BENCHES SPECIFICALLY FOR MAKING FRIENDS**

   Tips for implementation: Have a marked bench that signals to others that the person sitting there is interested in socializing with others (even strangers) (cf. friend benches in comprehensive school). These benches could be placed at cafeterias, cafés, and corridors.

5. **LUNCH ROULETTE**

   Tips for implementation: A cafeteria raffle where participants get assigned a random student as a lunch companion for a specific day. This could be part of a campaign.

6. **MESSAGE WALL**
Tips for implementation: An anonymous message wall on campus so that students can post questions for each other and for faculty members. Can also be a digital wall or, for example, a wall in a class where a teacher guides its use.

7. **COMPANION DOGS FOR ALL FINNISH CAMPUSES**
Tips for implementation: Animals are well-known icebreakers for human interaction, and they bring people together, relieve stress, and so on. Campuses could consider partnerships where spaces would be used for this type of activity (while keeping in mind those with allergies). At least for individual events, it's relatively easy to actualize the companion dog idea.

8. **ART EXHIBIT OR COMMUNAL ART INSTALLATION**
Tips for implementation: Higher education institutions' spaces could be used for a loneliness-themed art exhibit or a communal art piece that allows everyone to easily take part in creating art together. Put, for example, the wall spaces on corridors to good use by raising awareness of an important topic through art.

INSTITUTIONAL OPERATIONS AND INTERNAL POLICIES

For whom? Higher education institutions' management, supervisors, and various groups that plan and execute operations have a key role in shaping the overall operational culture at these institutions and deciding what issues get attention and resources.

Who realizes the ideas? Institutions' management, supervisors, and faculty members both individually in their work and together.

The essentials: Students' sense of community isn't promoted only at events or in classrooms. In many cases, the institution's internal policies and modus operandi guide the creation of an operational culture and attitudes. The structures, conventions, and internal processes in a higher education institution can have an effect on what opportunities students have for getting to know each other and also what kind of readiness and resources various actors have for promoting a sense of community among students.

16 ideas

ryhmätyöt

vuorovaikutteisuus

yhteiset kurssit
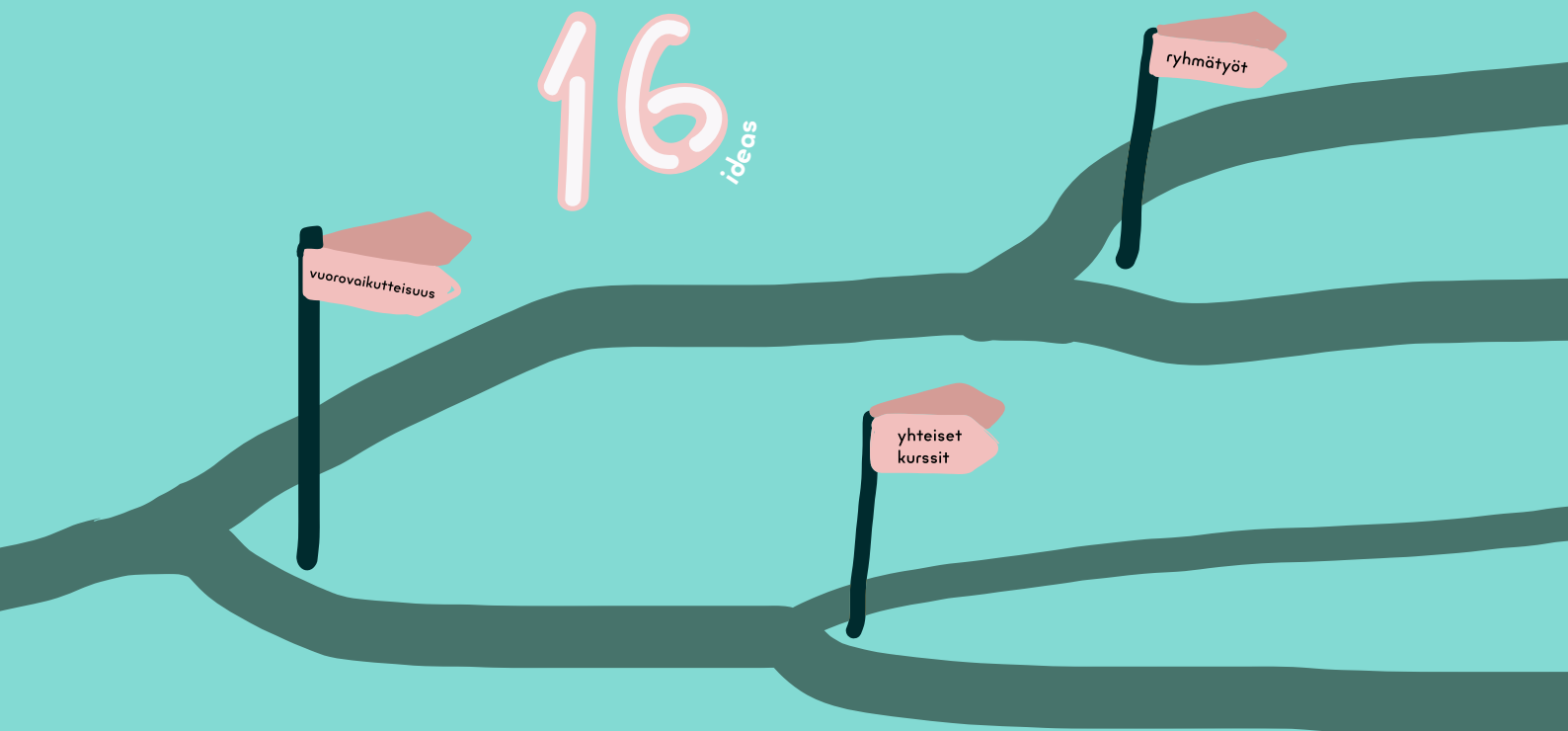
16 IDEAS

1. **MANDATORY WELLNESS LECTURE FOR ALL STUDENTS**
   Tips for implementation: In order to not place the responsibility for considering others and promoting a sense of community only on students of certain disciplines, it's important to discuss the topic and its impact all over. This way, every student can learn some basic skills that allow them to influence their own circumstances as well as their fellow students' situations.

2. **OFFER ACCESSIBLE CONVERSATIONAL THERAPY**
   Tips for implementation: Higher education institutions have to be able to provide their students with readily available low-threshold conversational therapy services that can support students in getting to know others and in combating loneliness.

3. **MAKE COMMUNALITY AN INTEGRATED AND OVERARCHING PART OF STUDY ACTIVITIES ★ ★ ★**
   Tips for implementation: Higher education institutions need to create a practical strategy for how we can make promoting communality a permanent part of educational activities and not leave it as part of a soon-forgotten festive speech. It's important, for example, to highlight interaction in lectures and teaching, the importance of group assignments, and keeping groups together all the way through their studies (not just the first year or two); to ensure that staff members have the skills and training they need to address the theme; and to create structures that fundamentally support students' connections to a study-related group.

4. **TUTORING FOR NEW MASTER'S STUDENTS**
   Tips for implementation: It is common to allocate the majority of resources to first- and second-year students and to offer close to no support for getting to know other students in later years. There could be some sort of starter weeks, "post-graduate tutoring," and carefully planned activities at the start of master's level studies to get a more comprehensive picture of students' current circumstances. It's important that support is available according to the low-threshold principle also after the first few years.

5. **CONNECT VOLUNTEER WORK TO STUDIES MORE FIRMLY**
   Tips for implementation: Connect volunteer work and participating in club activities more clearly and firmly to studies. In other words, acknowledge that expertise and skills can be developed through different activities. Then, credits would be available for participating and reporting one's activities. This could encourage more collaborative activities.

6. **MAKE SOME RECREATIONAL EVENTS MANDATORY**

   Tips for implementation: Currently, it's mainly up to each individual whether they participate in any organized activities, for example, in the first year. If parts of the so-called voluntary programming were mandatory instead (for example, an end-of-the-year gathering with tutor teachers where everyone is required to discuss an informal event they attended), it would make it clearer why it's important to take part in organized activities. This would also require event organizers to ensure that they offer a wide range of activities where students' different needs have been considered (as opposed to just parties).

7. **STUDENT SURVEYS EARLY ON**

   Tips for implementation: A survey could be sent at an early stage to examine, for example, study skills, life management, relationships, and coping with stress. Based on the answers, students would receive individual feedback or the survey would direct them to relevant sources of information. The survey could also be used as a needs survey of sorts, and notable themes could be addressed in orientation planning.

8. **INTRA-INSTITUTIONAL WORK ON EXPERIENCES OF LONELINESS AND COMMUNALITY**

   Tips for implementation: Data should be collected regularly on how an institutions' students experience loneliness and sense of community. The data would be passed along to students and faculty members, themed activities would be organized, and new solutions and actions would be sought. Permanent structures and operations models as such create a safe and trusting atmosphere where students can rely on the fact their wellbeing is a genuine matter of interest.

9. **SOCIAL EVENTS ORGANIZED BY DEPARTMENTS**

   Tips for implementation: The institution or department could organize regularly (e.g., once a month) a social event with some snacks and a space where students can socialize among themselves and with faculty members. At times, the events could have a theme, for example, the process of growing into a professional, work community skills, or outlooks for the future.

10. **STAFF INTRODUCTIONS IN CLASS**
   Tips for implementation: Let's reinforce the idea that "there's a person I can go see if I need something" or "I could ask that person for advice."

11. **REGULAR "CONSULTATIONS" FOR STUDENTS**
   Tips for implementation: Professional-led activities that are informal by nature. The discussions could revolve around things that weigh on the students' minds, for example, study motivation, coping with the stress of studying, getting to know others, and so on. The key would be to normalize the activity and to have a neutral approach in a "you don't need to have a problem to come here" manner.

12. **COMMUNITY MANAGERS OR COMMUNITY AGENTS AS PART OF HIGHER EDUCATION**
   Tips for implementation: Implement rotating community manager or community agent duties for certain disciplines or practical learning periods so that institutions always have a few of these people around. Their duties would include promoting a sense of community among students and acting as inspirations, initiators, and connectors between different parties.

13. **IMPROVING WELLBEING SERVICES' COMMUNICATIONS AND RAISING THEIR PROFILE**
   Tips for implementation: Existing operations and services should be marketed better, and the threshold for using the services should be lowered. For example, weekly wellbeing campaigns are a good way to highlight important themes and related service providers.

14. **VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS OF COMMUNALITY**
   Tips for implementation: Visual identifiers should be used in fostering a sense of community. Students' overalls and overall patches are a traditional way of highlighting a certain communality, but the other side of that coin is that they can make students who don't identify with the "overalls crowd" feel even more excluded. Some other symbol or sign could unite everyone, both students and the staff, and say "feel free to approach me" or "you can talk to me if you need a listener." The symbol could be used all the time or as part of themed days or weeks.

15. MORE ALUMNI ACTIVITIES

Tips for implementation: Alumni activities should be utilized better in themselves and also as a means of bringing together students and those who are already in the workforce for interesting activities. The alumni could offer advice to those who want it, also beyond career advice, for example, study tips and discussions of what they would have done differently if they were studying now. Regular alumni discussion opportunities should be provided, and alumni activities should be connected more firmly to daily student life.

16. EMPLOYER'S SUPPORT FOR PROMOTING COMMUNALITY AMONG STUDENTS ★ ★ ★

Tips for implementation: Employees should be bound in their work to an institutional strategy that acknowledges sense of community, and they should receive sufficient resources: "Promoting a sense of community" is added to the job description, training is offered to staff members, the topic is added to performance reviews, support is provided for new work duties, and the comprehensive human, financial, and social effects of promoting students' sense of community are acknowledged.

CLOSING WORDS

We hope that the ideas we have compiled here gave you ideas on how to develop your activities. Some ideas might already be in use, some you were going to adopt soon enough anyway, and some of your own ideas weren't even listed here, which is great. Every effort to cultivate a sense of community among students is important. The most important thing is that efforts are being made. Hopefully, you can find inspiration and even more motivation for your efforts in our list of ideas. Often, the most effective methods for supporting communality among students are neither complex nor high-effort processes but simply small actions. We hope to see more of these small gestures on every campus.

The "Yhdessä yhteisöksi" project is producing and has already produced other materials for improving students' sense of community. Check out more tips and materials at www.yhdessayhteisoksi.fi.

The YHDESSÄ YHTEISÖKSI project (2018-2020) fosters and strengthens students' experiences of communality and inclusion. The aim is to change overall attitudes and operational cultures and to increase the higher education community's readiness and know-how in improving sense of community.

The project is carried out by Nyyti ry.