



Strategy of the Union of Students at the University of Akureyri

Work on the preparing the Strategy began in the fall of 2019 and it was approved by the Student Council in 2019–2020. The Strategy was then updated after a work meeting of SHA in 2020 where a diverse and representative group of students gathered. The Management Committee of SHA compiled the results of the work meeting and updated the Strategy of the Union of Students.

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Strategy of the Union of Students in international affairs

1. Exchange students

Each semester, a diverse group of students pursues exchange studies at UNAK. It is important that students at the University give a warm welcome to those who come here and encourage them to take part in the academic community. The International Coordinator is responsible for the exchange students, along with the International Committee of SHA, and the Chair of the International Committee shall actively communicate with the International Coordinator. It is important that SHA and its sub-unions always advertise their events in English in order to ensure effective information flow and access. See further information in the chapter *Strategy of the Union of Students in equal rights affairs*.

In recent years, UNAK has looked to implement an active “buddy system” within UNAK but because of the size of the University, this has not proved effective. It is therefore important that the International Committee is active in involving exchange students in the academic community. All the sub-unions of SHA, with the exception of Data and Forseti, shall have active representatives on the International Committee of SHA. Events such as culture night and language café are good opportunities for exchange students to get involved in the academic community.

2. UNAK students shall be progressive in international affairs

In order to strengthen the competence, skills and openmindedness of students at UNAK, it is important to encourage participation in the international community, such as by pursuing exchange studies or attending courses taught by instructors situated abroad. In spite of the International Coordinator regularly introducing such options to students, Icelandic students do not seek out exchange studies to a sufficient degree. SHA sees opportunities as regards introductions and personal experiences from students who have gone on a student exchange, as it may be assumed that many students think that exchange studies will be too challenging for them. Alongside this, it is important to introduce exchange studies more effectively to students; make the studies more visible. Exchange studies must be accessible for students in all the study

programmes of the University.

Strategy of the Union of Students in employment affairs

1. Study sessions

Study sessions within UNAK are numerous and diverse, as the Faculties of the University differ. SHA believes that with a flexible study arrangement, it is possible to make great improvements regarding study sessions and also that each Faculty should have at least one session with compulsory attendance each academic year. If attendance in study sessions is to be compulsory, there must, though, be something else offered to students besides a conventional lecture that students can retrieve online whenever suits them.

SHA believes that study sessions should be used for something diverse, new, progressive and useful for students and that sessions should definitely not be characterised by lectures. Students should see a benefit in travelling to Akureyri and strengthening their participation in the academic community at UNAK. SHA believes that sessions should be used for practical work, project work and for creating a connection to industry where visits to companies and/or institutions in the community would be a key aspect. There are also opportunities to use sessions to introduce possibilities that students have at the conclusion of their studies.

2. Community

It is important to use the unique status of UNAK as regards location and strengthen the ties of students with the community. Diverse means can be used in this regard, as is mentioned in the preceding section on study sessions. In addition, students regularly request more project work connected to industry; this represents an opportunity to connect with the communities of students, who live all over the country, through project work, which often benefits students more than standard final examinations. Also, SHA believes that it is important to enhance cross-disciplinary cooperation between the Faculties of the University.

3. The first steps in the employment market

Student Counselling Services regularly offer teaching for students in how to prepare a resumé, and it is important to promote such instruction effectively to students in collaboration with SHA. When it comes to presenting oneself to the business community, many aspects must be kept in mind, and SHA should consider offering lectures/instruction for students in this regard. SHA sees, for example, opportunities to connect such teaching to education forums organised at UNAK. There are furthermore opportunities to get in touch with former students of the University to benefit from their experiences after graduation.

Strategy of the Union of Students in family affairs

1. Flexible studies

UNAK has established a unique position as regards flexible study arrangement; this includes many advantages for people with families. Care must be taken, though, to ensure that all students have equal access; see further information in the chapter *Strategy of the Union of Students in equal rights affairs*.

2. Housing

It is important that Student Housing at the University of Akureyri (FÉSTA) offers a good range of family friendly apartments so that people with families have access to suitable apartments if they choose to reside in Akureyri. Students should see a benefit in moving to Akureyri and pursuing studies here, as Akureyri is a family friendly municipality where nothing is lacking. In promotions, there must be increased focus on the advantages that come with living in Akureyri.

3. Family friendly events

A diverse group of students pursues studies at the University of Akureyri and it is therefore important that SHA and the sub-unions organise diverse events. It would, for example, be ideal to hold events where families are welcome.

Strategy of the Union of Students in quality affairs

Quality is the key to good university studies and should always be at the forefront when decisions are made concerning enrolment of students and arrangement of studies.

1. Teaching methods

Diverse and modernised teaching methods shall be encouraged where quality is the main emphasis. It is important that teachers at UNAK are diligent in pursuing courses and continuing education that is available to them within the Centre for Teaching and Learning at UNAK (KHA), to the benefit of everyone. It is also important that lectures are regularly updated; SHA does not believe that it is advisable to use lectures from several years ago, as society changes rapidly and every year, new research emerges that should be used for support and as a frame of reference.

2. Workload in courses

In all of the University's courses, it is important that workload is consistent with the number of ECTS; one ECTS corresponds to 25–30 work hours.

3. Course schedule and access to Moodle/Canvas

It is important that students always receive a course schedule and timetable at the requisite time, as well as access to the teaching management system of courses in order to effectively prepare themselves. Care shall furthermore always be taken to coordinate the course schedule and the teaching itself.

4. Examination numbers

Because of the size of the University and the teaching methods used, which are much characterised by continuous assessment, it can be difficult to use examination numbers in all courses. SHA does, though, place an emphasis on examination numbers always being used in the case of competitive examinations.

5. Information flow between teachers and students

It is important that all students have access to the same information from teachers. Teachers should furthermore make use of coffee house chats in Moodle and/or Canvas to a greater degree where everyone can view questions from students and answers from teachers.

Strategy of the Union of Students in housing affairs

1. Student Housing at the University of Akureyri – FÉSTA

Student Housing at the University of Akureyri (FÉSTA) is a non-profit organisation that UNAK, enrolled students at the University and the Town of Akureyri are parties to. FÉSTA owns and operates student lodging and attends to various other services for students. A wide range of housing options are offered, from one-person rooms to three-room apartments. Accommodation is spread out over Akureyri so this is not a concentrated area of student housing. Available are 38 individual rooms, which are divided between the student lodging at Klettastígur and Útsteinn, and in fact numerous students seek out exactly this type of accommodation. The individual rooms have the disadvantage that students can not stay in them during the summer; instead, they have the option of moving to Útsteinn, with the accompanying inconvenience. Furthermore, there are apartments at Klettastígur, as well as in Tröllagil, Drekgil and Kjalarsíða, either two- or three-room apartments. These apartments are large and roomy and are well suited to people with families.

2. Cooperation between SHA and FÉSTA

Throughout the years, there has been insufficient cooperation between SHA and FÉSTA, but during the academic year 2019–2020, there was finally a change in this regard and a move of facilities and mutual offices of SHA and FÉSTA have had much positive influence. It is important to develop strong and efficient cooperation between SHA and FÉSTA as their services are very important to UNAK students. The Management Committee of SHA shall always ensure that representatives of students appointed to the Board of FÉSTA are active members of the Board, arrive prepared to meetings, contribute to discussions and keep the interests of students as a guiding principle.

3. Future vision and objectives

It is imperative to look to the future as regards FÉSTA. SHA believes that it is important to start planning for the construction of student lodging on the UNAK campus and it should be the objective of the Board of FÉSTA to start development in the dog walking area below the

University. In this way, student lodging would be directly linked to the University. It would be most advantageous to build smaller apartments but at the same time ensure access to family apartments. SHA sees opportunities in such student lodging where it would be possible to rent out apartments to students arriving for study sessions. If courses are taught at UNAK over the summer months this type of lodging would also be a great advantage.

Strategy of the Union of Students in equal rights affairs

1. Equality within the University

An active Equal Rights Committee operates within UNAK. SHA is obligated to uphold the [Gender Equality Plan for the University of Akureyri](#), [UNAK's Code of Ethics](#), as well as [Procedures on Responses to Gender-based and Sexual Harassment and Gender-based and Sexual Violence within SHA](#). It is important that SHA introduces these documents to students periodically, and the Management Committee shall summarise them at the orientation for first-year students. SHA also wants to point out that on the website of the University can be found a button that can be used to notify of bullying and violence.

2. Equal access to studies

Students at UNAK are a diverse group and the University has established a unique position as regards flexible study arrangement. It is important to ensure equal access for all students to programmes within UNAK and students shall never be discriminated against based on whether they are enrolled in on-site or distance studies. As regards recording of classes and lectures, it is important to ensure that recordings are always accessible and special care must be taken that students who make use of recordings do not miss out on discussions that take place in class; students must be given the opportunity to take part in discussions in real time using the appropriate equipment.

Within UNAK is a unique academic community where the size of the University plays a key role. Because of this, students are generally considered to have very good access to teachers and employees. It is important that teachers provide information to students on how it is best to contact them and at what times. It is also important to make use of discussion threads on Moodle/Canvas to a greater extent so that answers from teachers to enquiries are accessible to everyone.

3. Accessibility matters

Accessibility matters within UNAK are generally in good order. When changes are made,

care must, though, be taken to ensure equal access for everyone. As most events of SHA and its sub-unions are held outside the University, it is necessary that when selecting locations consideration is given to accessibility matters and that it is always ensured that everyone will have an opportunity to attend events and will not have to worry about accessibility.

4. Foreign students

Each semester, foreign students travel to UNAK to pursue exchange studies. There are certain limits to the range of courses exchange students can attend, as a large part of the courses offered by UNAK is taught in Icelandic. A higher number of courses taught in English would increase diversity in the studies of exchange students and enable them to pursue studies which are more consistent with those they pursue in their home universities.

Reception of exchange students is in the hands of the International Coordinator at UNAK. SHA has always enjoyed good cooperation with the International Coordinator and the Chair of the International Committee of SHA has served a key role in this regard, as well as managing social activities for exchange students and making sure that exchange students receive all necessary information in English. SHA and its sub-unions can, though, do better when it comes to disseminating information and posting advertisements in English.

In spite of an active International Committee, it often happens that exchange students form a kind of separate community and socialise little or not at all with other UNAK students. This situation must be improved and SHA should take a leading role in connection with this.

5. Support services

Active and professional student counselling is available to students at UNAK free of charge and it is important that SHA regularly introduces these services to students. This unit of support services is also visible during first-year student orientation every year. Accessibility matters and requests for special assistance for students are always handled by Student Counselling Services and it is important that SHA draws attention to this.

6. External promotion of the University's operations

UNAK has a diverse group of staff members and students. It is important that the promotional material of UNAK reflects this diversity, at the same time as it should emphasise the unique position of the University. It is also necessary to make it clear in all promotional and information material from UNAK what pursuing flexible studies entails.

The gender ratio of students is very uneven within UNAK, as well as within other universities in Iceland. It is important to attain a better gender balance and encourage men to pursue studies at the University; emphasis should be placed on this when promoting the University.

Strategy of the Union of Students in learning and teaching affairs

UNAK has established a unique position as regards flexible study arrangement. It is important to communicate effectively to applicants to UNAK what consists in flexible studies and reiterate this to all students when they begin studies at the University. Furthermore, different understanding of Schools and Faculties concerning what flexible studies entail has caused confusion in some areas and it is important that UNAK reviews and clarifies its strategy concerning this study arrangement. It is a privilege to be able to pursue university studies and should never be taken as a given.

1. Study sessions in Akureyri

A part of being an active participant in the academic community at UNAK is to be visible and participate in the community. Study sessions are a good opportunity to further strengthen this aspect. SHA also believes that one of the most important parts of university studies is team work and group learning as such participation prepares students for the business community. The arrangement of study sessions is very different between study programmes and this is to be expected. Students should, though, see a benefit in attending sessions in Akureyri. SHA believes that there should be compulsory attendance in at least one study session per year, but if there is to be compulsory attendance, it is necessary that the session includes something other than traditional lectures that can be retrieved online whenever is suitable. Here is an opportunity to connect with the community of the University to a greater degree. See further information in the chapter *Strategy of the Union of Students in employment affairs*. SHA and its sub-unions in particular shall ensure that social activities are available to students when they attend study sessions.

2. Study arrangement

It is important to keep diversity as a guiding principle in regard to study arrangement. Students must be motivated to attend and participate in classes, whether it be in classrooms, through telerobots or Zoom. Discussion classes and project work are generally very beneficial to students and the study arrangement should never be entirely based on lectures or a large final examination. It is possible to use diverse means as regards study

arrangement; in some courses, flipped teaching might be suitable where students view a lecture before class and then take part in discussions and/or project work with a teacher in class. If this is done, it must be ensured that distance students can participate via Zoom or telerobots.

3. Course assessment

Course assessment shall be carried out in diverse ways and consideration must be given to what kind of assessment is most suitable at each time. Also, special consideration must be given to integration of course assessment and teaching, course assessment and course schedules, as well as integration of course assessment and learning outcomes at each time. Results from course assessment should always indicate the knowledge and skills that students have assimilated at each time. It is furthermore necessary to ensure diverse course assessment and to avoid administering only large final examinations. Grades on final examinations on their own do not reflect the actual competence and knowledge of students.

4. Feedback

Feedback shall always be provided to students according to UNAK's rules on assessment. Students always have a right to receive feedback on their assignments and examinations, whether during the course of the semester or in a final examination/final assignment.

Strategy of the Union of Students in environmental and transport affairs

1. UNAK is a leader in environmental affairs

UNAK has achieved the Green Flag certification and all students at UNAK must familiarise themselves with the Environmental and Transport Policy of the University and SHA shall always uphold the Policy.

It is important that SHA has active representatives in the Environmental Council of UNAK who regularly inform SHA about the work and tasks of the Council and aim to empower and strengthen all students.

2. FÉSTA student lodging

At the end of 2019, the sorting facilities at FÉSTA's student lodging were finally improved, after many requests from students. It is important to effectively maintain this and to monitor refuse sorting in student lodging. It is also important to have accessible promotional material available concerning sorting for those who move into student lodging and are perhaps not familiar with refuse sorting in Akureyri. Representatives of SHA in the Environmental Council shall regularly post instructions and reminders in this regard on the social media of SHA.

3. Study sessions in Akureyri

Each semester, numerous students travel to attend study sessions at UNAK from various parts of Iceland and even from abroad. It is important that students carpool to contribute to better environmental practices and also to save money for students. SHA shall promote the Facebook group "Samferða Háskólinn á Akureyri" and encourage students to make use of that group to carpool to study sessions. The Management Committee does its best at each time to offer lodging at good prices for distance students. All special offers for students shall be visible on the website of SHA.

4. Environmentally-friendly ways to travel

In order to strengthen environmentally-friendly ways to travel for UNAK students, it is important to enhance transport in Akureyri. The route system of the bus service is very unsuitable for most students and staff at UNAK. It is also important to build a bicycle shelter at the University so that students and employees have the option of cycling to the University and are able to store their bicycles in a safe place. In the fall of 2019, the Environmental Council closed parking spaces at UNAK for one day; such an event and other events that encourage people to reflect on the environment should be organised regularly. SHA shall organise a competition on environmentally-friendly ways to travel in order to encourage students and staff members of the University to make better use of such means of transport.

5. Végeirsstaðir

The policy of UNAK on environmental affairs states that purposeful work shall take place to increase forestation on the land of Végeirsstaðir which is supervised by UNAK. SHA shall encourage students to take part in this community project and take the initiative in planting more trees.