

LEARNING WITH INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

COURSE ASSISTANT PROGRAMME

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FACTS AND FIGURES

The Language Centre Course Assistant Programme is for international exchange and degree students from all faculties of the University of Helsinki. It has been offered since the autumn of 2013.

The idea is to invite international students, who are native speakers of certain languages, to assist in Language Centre teaching.

Over 80 students applied for the programme in the autumn term 2014 and over 60 of them were accepted.



Students attending the Spanish course *Curso preparatorio para estudios en el extranjero* by teacher José Ruiz Rubio, are talking with course assistant Daniel Rico (on the right) about the meaning of different gestures. Photo: Riikka Forss.

AIM OF THE PROGRAMME

The programme is one way to support university's internationalization and its aim is to:

- Integrate international students into the university community
- Give international students the opportunity to meet local students
- Promote internationalization at home for Finnish students
- Bring new aspects into language teaching and learning

MOTIVATION TO APPLY

Many applicants studying to be a teacher found that experiencing different ways of teaching a language is very important to them. Other reasons to apply are the opportunities to meet local students and learn about Finnish culture, as well as to share knowledge about one's own language and culture.

Assistants gain 1-3 ECTS credits and a certificate of completion for participating in the programme. It is also a great way to gain experience in presentation and intercultural communication skills.

THE ASSISTANTS' TASKS

The assistants are involved both in beginners' level courses as well as more advanced ones. Their tasks can include:

- Pronunciation practice
- Mentoring group work
- Involvement in oral exams as a native person
- Conversations exercises
- On-line tutoring, e.g., in Moodle courses
- Hosting of LC language clubs
- Presentations of different topics

FEEDBACK

Feedback regarding the programme has been gathered during the spring term of 2014 from local students attending Language Centre courses (N=120), course assistants (N=24) and teachers (N=6).

The best thing in the programme:

The assistants appreciated having the chance to meet Finnish people and being able to share things about one's own language and culture:

“Learning aspects of Finnish culture and other cultures. The interaction with Finnish students and professors gives you more depth to your experience abroad because due to language, you do not always get the chance to interact with Finnish students.”

Local students found the following things important:

- Conversations with a native person and pronunciation help
- The presentations by the assistants
- The encouragement and motivation to use a different language

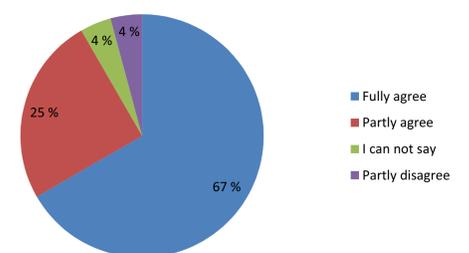
The teachers appreciated especially the current topics that the assistants bring along to the teaching.

WHERE TO GO FROM HERE?

According to the feedback, the local students would prefer the presence of more than one assistant for each course and a more active role for them.

The assistants felt that more emphasis should be placed on learning about different cultural issues and that the local students should be encouraged more to communicate with the assistants.

When asked *“Being an assistant gave me a good change to get to know Finnish people”*, the assistants answered (N=24):



Both local students and assistants wished for more joint social activities outside the classes.

From the coordination's point of view guidance and some small scale training for the assistants is needed.

The Course Assistant Programme will continue in the upcoming semesters. Feedback will be gathered also in the future to develop the programme.