The Finnish Matriculation Examination: An Essential Part of Finnish Education Since 1852
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The Finnish *lukio*, an equivalent to the American high school or the British upper secondary school, ends with a very important national examination, *ylioppilastutkinto*, or in English the Finnish Matriculation Examination\(^1\). This tradition with more than 160 years of history has become an important part of Finnish education and the lives of Finnish students. Students are prepared for the examination from their very first day at lukio; completing it has been thought of as a maturation rite as well as a status symbol. The examination affects the future of the students, because the results are taken into account when applying to post-secondary education and can also influence students’ future employment. In addition, the institution itself has long had an impact on Finland’s history: it was seen as a way to sustain and promote education and patriotism even when Finland was still a part of Russia\(^2\).

Most European countries have examinations at the end of secondary education: the French have the Baccalaureat, the Germans the Abitur, and the Brits their A-levels. What is the Finnish equivalent? How has it evolved? What kind of traditions does it include? How important is it to a Finnish student and the nation as a whole? How has its importance changed over time?

### The Finnish Matriculation Examination today

The Finnish Matriculation Examination is held biannually, every autumn in September and every spring between the beginning of February and the end of March (Finnish). The tests are held in each of the lukios and are supervised by local teachers. The teachers then give their initial evaluation of the tests, but all tests will be reviewed by members of the national Matriculation Examination Board as well, and their evaluation is the decisive one (Ylioppilastutkintolautakunnan 15–16). The tests are always taken at the same time everywhere in Finland (Finnish).

The examination is taken at the end of the three-year lukio education. While in practice there is no maximum number of tests that can be taken, it is compulsory to take at least four tests to complete the examination. The “mother tongue” test, which measures students’ skills in their first language, is compulsory to all. The three remaining tests can be chosen from the following: a second national language test, a mathematics test, a foreign language test, and a test chosen from the general battery of tests, which includes subjects of a scientific and humanistic nature. Students can also choose additional tests (Finnish). On average, students take five tests (Tästä); however, there are students who take even ten tests.

The mother tongue can be Finnish, Swedish, or Sami, and the second national language either Swedish or Finnish – but not the same as the chosen mother tongue. In addition, the foreign language test can be taken in English, German, French, Russian, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Latin, and Sami. The general battery of tests includes Biology, Geography, Chemistry, Physics, History, Social Studies, Psychology, Philosophy, Health Education, Religion (Evangelical-Lutheran or Orthodox), and Ethics (Finnish).

In several tests, there are two possible levels of difficulty (Finnish). In mathematics, lukio students can choose whether they study in a basic or advanced level. The basic level concentrates on calculations more useful in everyday life, whereas the advanced level has more courses to prepare students for post-secondary education in the scientific field (Mitä aikuislukiossa). Students can take the basic level test in a foreign language if they have studied it at least three courses in lukio (Kielikokeen 4); advanced level means that the test is based on
a curriculum of a language that the students have studied since elementary school\(^3\) (3). There are two levels in the second national language test as well, intermediate and advanced (Finnish). The intermediate level is based on the curriculum of the second national language which starts in grade 7\(^4\); the advanced level is defined in the same way as in foreign language tests (Kielikokeen 2). Students have to take at least one compulsory test at advanced level (Finnish).

For example, a possible combination might be 1) a compulsory mother tongue test; 2) a compulsory test in the second national language, advanced level; 3) a compulsory test in mathematics, basic level; 4) a compulsory test in a foreign language (e.g. English), advanced level; 5) an additional test in History; and 6) an additional test in Psychology.

The foreign language tests are divided into two parts. First, there is a listening comprehension test, and later a second test which measures the student’s written language skills. These tests are held on separate days. There are two parts in the mother tongue test as well: the first, which always starts the examination period, tests the student’s textual and analysing skills, whereas the second one is an essay on a given, current topic (Finnish).

Students receive a grade in each of the tests individually. There are seven possible grades for each test, with their names in Latin. They are given to the students according to the Gaussian bell curve – this means that a certain percentage of the students always receive the highest grade, for example, and the number of points needed for a certain grade varies every year in every subject. Below is a table of all the grades, the first one, Laudatur, being the highest, and the last, Improbatur, marking the test as “failed” (Finnish).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade and its abbreviation</th>
<th>Percentage of students that receive it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laudatur (L)</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eximia Cum Laude Approbatur (E)</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magna Cum Laude Approbatur (M)</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cum Laude Approbatur (C)</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lubenter Approbatur (B)</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approbatur (A)</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improbatur (I)</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Data source: Finnish; table by the author)

It is possible to retake a failed test twice within the next three examination periods. If the student does not pass the test in the time limit given, the entire examination must be retaken. However, a passed test can be retaken once without any time limit. In cases where a passed test is retaken, the better grade of the two will be entered on the Matriculation Examination Certificate. In addition, it is possible to add supplementary tests to an already completed examination. These can be either tests in subjects the student has not taken previously, or tests of a different level than he/she has taken previously (Finnish).

After passing all the compulsory tests, students receive a Matriculation Examination Certificate, which has grades of both the compulsory and the additional tests as well as an official stamp and the signature of the president of the Matriculation Examination board.
In 2011, over 80,000 students enrolled in at least one of the tests of the Matriculation Examination. This number accounts for all students: those who take all their tests in one period and those who take only some of the tests at once; those who have to retake a failed test and those who want to improve their grades; as well as those who are adding supplementary tests on an already completed examination (Toimintakertomus).

Instead of completing the Finnish Matriculation Examination, it is also possible to study in English in a so-called IB-lukio, which ends with an International Baccalaureate Diploma, not with the Finnish Matriculation Examination. The 3-year curriculum and the diploma are the same in 139 countries – except for classes in Finnish and Swedish (What). Similarly to the Finnish lukio graduates, the IB-lukio graduates can apply to post-secondary education (Country). However, only a minority of students choose an IB lukio: in the year 2011, 362 students graduated from IB lukios, as opposed to 32,413 students graduating from lukios with the Matriculation Examination (Lukiokoulutus).

In a nutshell, the sheer range of subjects and the large part of the Finnish population that take the examination every year contribute to the thoroughness of the Finnish Matriculation Examination. According to the head of the Matriculation Examination Board, Patrick Scheinin, the Finnish Matriculation Examination is one of the most thorough examinations in the world (Liiten).

**How the Matriculation Examination came to be what it is now**

The origins of the Finnish Matriculation Examination lie in the mid-1800s. There had been oral exams and interviews for those who wished to study in a university before that time as well, but in 1852 the entrance examination was tied to lukio education, thus marking the beginning of a new era in education and creating the Finnish Matriculation Examination (Ylioppilastutkinto 150 vuotta). The first examinations were held in the university in the autumn and in the spring. They included written tests in mother tongue and Latin or some other foreign language as well as oral tests in subjects belonging to the curriculum of the university (Kaarninen 63). Passing the tests meant that the students could study in the university. According to the website of the Finnish Matriculation Examination Board, the examination was taken in the 1850s by approximately 70 students per year (Ylioppilastutkinto 150 vuotta).

In 1874, it was decided that the written exams were to be taken in secondary schools. New subjects were added as well: a translation to the second national language and at least three mathematical problems were included in the examination. In the oral exams still held at the university, the students were questioned about their knowledge in religion, languages, history, and mathematics. Unless the students passed the examination, they could not study in the university (Vuorio-Lehti 53).

At the beginning, only male students took the Matriculation Examination; however, the first female graduate took the examination in 1870. Until 1901 female students had to request permission to take the examination, first from the Emperor of Russia, Finland being still a part of Russia, and from 1890 onwards from the vice chancellor of the university, placed in Helsinki, Finland. The vice chancellor permitted all women who requested it to study at the university, and 11 years later the need for special permission was omitted altogether (Sinisalo). Having got the same rights as men, the number of female graduates rose gradually in the beginning of the 20th century (Kaarninen 390).

According to Vuorio-Lehti, the future of the examination was discussed in detail during the next 30 years (54), but without any concrete changes (57). Some people thought that the oral exams were unnecessary; others argued that the traditional examination prevented the school system from evolving (55). In 1917, Finland became independent from Russia, and also went through a civil war in 1917–1918. As Vuorio-Lehti notes, the examination had been held solely in secondary schools during the war (Vuorio-Lehti 57), and the year 1919 saw the final days of
oral exams (Ylioppilastutkinto 150 vuotta). The Finnish Matriculation Examination Board was created in the same year to oversee and evaluate the examination, and other novelties were introduced as well: the foreign language of the examination no longer needed to be Latin, and the general battery of tests was added, though at that time the test did not include quite as many subjects as later on, and there were not separate tests for every subject but rather one with questions covering many subjects.

The purpose of the examination had changed slightly around the turn of the century: not all the graduated students wanted to study at the university anymore. The status of a lukio graduate was enough for quite many students because it guaranteed them a respectable position in society. In 1921, the nature of the examination changed officially: it became the final examination of lukios instead of an entrance exam to a university. Before this, the university had had to enter all the lukio graduates into its register. However, after 1921, this was no longer the case (Vuorio-Lehti 57–58).

Vuorio-Lehti notes that from the 1920s to the beginning of World War II, the examination became an important way to ensure that the knowledge of the newly graduated students was sufficient everywhere in Finland (60). During those years, the number of students completing the examination doubled, and for example in 1938 it was more than 2,500 (62–63). The education was seen as an important way to achieve equality in Finland: it gave the same possibilities to all, no matter their wealth, gender, or social status (66). However, even though the possibility to achieve a better life via education was same for all, before World War II actually being able to complete the examination meant a significant rise in one’s social status (74).

During the Second World War, adjustments had to be made to the Matriculation Examination. It was unreasonable to ask the soldiers fighting for Finnish independence to devote a great deal of their time to the examination, so for example in 1940 and 1942 all the students studying in their final year at a lukio were declared lukio graduates without having to take the examination; in 1943 this happened to all those third-year lukio students who were in service of the Finnish Army (Vuorio-Lehti 67). In 1944, a so-called “soldier examination” was introduced. Finnish Army soldiers who had finished their third year in a lukio could take this special examination, held thrice in a year. There were not as many compulsory subjects as in a normal Matriculation Examination (Sotilasylioppilaat), in addition to which the evaluation of the soldiers’ tests was a little looser (Kaarninen 231). The status of mathematics and general battery tests changed during the war – they became alternatives to each other; it was no longer necessary to take both tests. This practice remained even after the war (Vuorio-Lehti 67).

In 1947, the examination was remodelled. Vuorio-Lehti notes that the new obligatory tests to be taken were a test in mother tongue, in a foreign language, in a second national language, and either in mathematics or in a general battery of tests (75). This created a great deal of criticism, because students could now concentrate either on science or on humanistic studies; this threatened the objective of the examination as measuring the students’ knowledge in many different areas of life (76). Additionally, some people were against the obligatory status of the second national language, which was usually Swedish (77).

According to Vuorio-Lehti, almost 4,500 students completed the Matriculation Examination in 1945; after that the number grew by approximately 500–600 students per year (73). It was no longer possible for every student who had completed the examination to study at the university, and so one of the main advantages of the examination was slowly disappearing. Many faculties held their own entrance exams in order to choose the most suitable students (79).

Vuorio-Lehti notes that after the 1960s, only half of the new graduates could study at universities (125), which meant that only the best and the brightest could continue their studies after lukio (131). This produced a great deal of stress among lukio students, and the stress levels had already been very high: for example in the 1940s students were said to suffer from insomnia and a loss of social life because of their intense studying (86), and in the 1950s the
workload was said to be too heavy for students as well. The courses were said to be too broad, and the significance of the Matriculation Examination was seen as too big (101–102). In the 1960s, there was other criticism, too: some thought that the examination controlled the whole lukio, made the lessons less versatile, and was simply an ancient obstacle that hindered the development of the educational system (148).

Because the examination had lost its original purpose as entitling students to study in a university, and was widely criticised for other things as well (see the former paragraph), many people even suggested that the end of the examination was near. According to Vuorio-Lehti it was thought to be self-evident in the 1970s that the examination had seen its last days: however, the political parties did not reach a consensus over the matter, and the examination continued its journey through the history of Finnish education (Vuorio-Lehti 200).

In 1970 some new features were yet again introduced to the examination: for example the grading system changed from four grades to six, and the mother tongue test could now be taken twice by all the students with only the better one being the basis of the grade (Vuorio-Lehti 135).

One of the biggest changes in the history of the Matriculation Examination occurred in 1994, when all the tests did not need to be completed during one exam period. The students were given the chance to take the necessary tests under three consecutive periods (Ylioppilastutkinto 150 vuotta). In 2005, the mother tongue test was renewed: there were two tests instead of one (Äidinkieli). In the same year, the test in the second national language was made optional rather than compulsory, and a year later, the examination was changed even more radically: instead of just one test on all the scientific and humanistic subjects, there now was a test in each of these subjects separately, allowing the students to concentrate on subjects they thought to be most interesting and useful (Liiten).

The significance of the Matriculation Examination in Finnish society

Traditionally, lukio graduates have had a distinguished position in society. The Matriculation Examination certificate has been seen as a way to achieve better lives via education, and it has had an important role in promoting equality as well, as discussed above.

However, the more people have graduated from lukio and completed the Matriculation Examination, the less significant the examination has become. In the 19th century, when only a handful of Finnish youths completed the examination, they were rightly seen as the best and the brightest of Finland, and everyone looked up to them. But each year the number of the graduates rose gradually: according to the website of the Finnish Matriculation Examination, in the 21st century over 35,000 students per year have completed the examination (Ylioppilastutkinto 150 vuotta). It is only logical that all of them cannot enjoy the same privileges (e.g. direct entrance to the universities) or the same appreciation as before. However, in the life of individual people, the Matriculation Examination and graduation from lukio is still an important milestone on their way to adulthood. According to Suuri Perinnekirja, a book about important Finnish traditions, completing the Matriculation Examination is seen as a more important occasion in a student’s life than completing the Master’s degree in an university, for example, though of course the latter is academically much more valuable (Aalto 402).

The Finnish ylioppilas (lukio graduate) is a symbol of the Finnish cultural tradition (Vuorio-Lehti 15). “Cultural tradition” can be seen here in its broadest sense: the lukio graduates have learnt something fundamental about Finnish culture and education during their studies of many different subjects; about what it means to be a Finn both in the past and in the 21st century. They also have a broad all-around education offered by the Finnish education system. There is a strong link between the lukio graduates and patriotism even today: it is a tradition that every year during their graduation celebration, the new graduates pay their respects at cenotaphs.
built for soldiers who died protecting Finland. Additionally, every year on Finnish Independence Day graduate parades of lukio graduates march through towns in honour of the same soldiers (16).

Throughout its history, many committees have been set up to examine the future of the Matriculation Examination. According to the 1961 committee the significance of the examination lay in, for example, its ability to offer an objective and standardized way to evaluate all Finnish students. In addition, students could see concrete results of their work through the examination (Vuorio-Lehti 132).

Over time the status of the Finnish Matriculation Examination has changed. From the 1940s to the 1960s, there were many feature stories about the Matriculation Examination in for example Suomen Kuvalehti (Vuorio-Lehti 198). Feature stories for example followed a student’s journey through the examination, from preparing for the tests to graduation celebrations (152–154). The tone of the stories was solemn and described well the importance of the examination in the society. However, during the 1970s the tone changed. Suomen Kuvalehti, having published dozens of stories about lukio graduates a decade or two previously, only had two articles on them in the 1970s. The Matriculation Examination and the graduation were no longer seen as an answer to everything. However, the photos that the articles included were still very traditional, depicting the new lukio graduate with his/her student cap next to his/her family (198–199).

Although the examination has lost some of its glamour in the 21st century, it is still considered very important, as reflected for instance by its annual coverage in the Finnish media. Both national and local newspapers publish extensive lists of the names of all the graduates, and newspapers are also full of stories about famous Finnish people (e.g. athletes, singers, actors) who have completed their examination that year. In addition, magazines and journals pay attention to the graduates linked with their own fields of business (Kaarninen 362).

Each year there are a few really smart and hard-working students who receive 7–11 Laudaturs (the highest grade). The media always singles them out and they can enjoy their moment in the sun when they graduate: almost all the major newspapers print interviews with them, for example. However, these kinds of geniuses are few and far between – there are only a few of them every year. Their hard work is admired, and excellent examination results can affect their future employment positively. However, having even 11 Laudaturs is still no definite guarantee of a job or even of a chance to study in a university.

The significance of the Matriculation Examination can also be seen in many traditions that are linked with it, such as grand celebrations traditionally held on a graduation day (see later). The traditions can be seen as telling something about the respect society shows for lukio graduates.

The significance of the Matriculation Examination in accordance with university admission

As established previously, the Matriculation Examination no longer guarantees a study place in universities, but it does give the students a right to apply to them and is taken into account when deciding which students are accepted to universities. The way in which the grades of the
Matriculation Examination affect the acceptance process varies between different universities and different fields of study. The grade in mother tongue will be taken into account everywhere, and naturally the grade in mathematics will be important if applying to study Mathematics in a university, for example (Miten). Some universities can even acknowledge the four best grades of a student\textsuperscript{11} and give the students additional points for their entrance exam, thus making it easier to get in to the post-secondary education.

Nowadays most university programmes have entrance exams, so the grades of the Matriculation Examination are not the only thing that has relevance. Students do not have to get four Laudaturs to be able to get into post-secondary education, because they can compensate their examination results by succeeding in an entrance exam. However, there are fields which place an emphasis on the Matriculation Examination. For example, if a student has received a high grade in mathematics, chemistry or physics, he/she may get into some universities to study the respective field without having to take an exam (Miten). As for the significance of the Matriculation Examination in regards to university admission, it is said on the website of the Finnish Matriculation Examination to be gradually rising again (Ylioppilastutkinto 150 vuotta). Already in 2012 there were university programmes which did not have an entrance exam; instead they chose students based on their Matriculation Examination results, for example the Degree Program in Cultural Production and Landscape Studies in the University of Turku\textsuperscript{12}. According to the professor of Digital Culture in the University of Turku, Petri Saarikoski, the objective of this is to gain more applicants to the degree programme (Huhta).

However, competition for study places is hard: the statistics of the Matriculation Examination Board show that 60.3% of the new lukio graduates of 2010 did not qualify for a place in post-secondary education. 18.1% of them got into a university the year they graduated, 17.4% could continue their studies in a polytechnic, and 4.2% started studying in a vocational school (Ylioppilastutkinto 2011).

Traditions involving the Matriculation Examination

Unlike in some other countries, the celebration of the new lukio graduates in Finland is a very important social occasion. Even though the examination period ends in March in the spring and in September in the autumn, the official records will not come until approximately two months later. The last Saturday of the spring term is the day when the new graduates receive their diplomas, in Finland usually the last weekend of May or the first weekend of June. As Mervi and Pekka Kaarninen note in their book *Sivistyksen Portti: Ylioppilastutkinnon historia*, the celebration for those who graduate in the autumn term is usually held together with the celebration of the Finnish Independence Day (362).

Graduation day starts with a celebration at the lukios: the students receive their diplomas, both for the matriculation examination and for the lukio education, and their student caps (see later). They will also be officially announced as lukio graduates. The head teacher will give a speech, as does one of the new graduates as well. A traditional song to be sung to the graduates is Gaudeamus Igitur, which dates back to the 13th century. Although the song is originally from Germany, its lyrics are in Latin and it has become a very important part of the Finnish graduation celebration (Aalto 403–405).

After the event at school, graduates will have a party of their own. It is traditional to invite relatives and friends over, and offer them something to eat and drink. The new graduate welcomes all the guests with a glass of champagne and the guests can then give the graduate a rose and a gift (Aalto 406). According to tradition, the graduate gives his or her mother a small golden brooch in the shape of a lyre to thank the mother for her support during the graduate’s education (Lakkiaiset). The event is not overly formal and is held in daytime, so the women are instructed to wear a jacket suit or a dress (not an evening gown, for example), and the men a suit or co-ordinates (Paldanius). In the evening, the graduates normally leave their party and come together in a restaurant or a bar to celebrate with each other (Aalto 407).
The graduation celebration is important in Finland: it is usually planned months beforehand, and can be quite expensive if the graduate wants to rent a place for his/her party, for example, or have a catering company take care of the food. The dress or suit, hairdo, and makeup of the graduate can also cost a great deal of money. The costs can be as high as 6,000 euros (Mitä ihmettä?). However, this is up to the graduates themselves – the party can also be very modest.

The traditional Finnish student cap is a mark of lukio graduates. It is made of white velvet and has a border of black velvet and a black visor with a golden lyre\(^\text{13}\) attached to it. The cap was originally, at the beginning of the 19th century, a part of a student uniform. In the course of time it became the only piece of uniform still used. Early on, the student cap was blue, but the white colour has been dominant since 1875 (Paldanius). Until the 1950s, the student cap was worn throughout the summer as a sign of prestige. However, during the 1960s more and more students graduated from lukio, and the cap – as well as the whole examination – encountered a decline in appreciation. Nowadays the cap is mainly worn only on the carnival-like celebrations of May 1 (Valkolakki). In Finland, May 1 is the celebration of students and the working people (Aalto 135).

**Challenges of the future**

In its 160-year history, the Matriculation Examination has always tried to adapt to the surrounding circumstances. The next great challenge is the newly-technologized world of the students in the 21st century. Even today, students handwrite answers to all the tests, but the Matriculation Examination Board is planning new alternatives to this practice. According to a current plan of the board, in 2016 the tests of German, Geography, and Philosophy will be written on computers; by 2019 the change is supposed to concern the whole examination (Kolme). With computers and technology, the tests would concentrate, for example, on finding reliable information online and being able to modify it (Lehto).

Another problem that should be solved in the future is the decline in the popularity of certain subjects, such as for example less popular foreign languages, advanced Mathematics, Chemistry, and Physics. This is due to the evaluation system that only allows 5% of the students to get the highest grade, for instance. The fewer the students who take the exams, the harder it is to get good grades, especially because those interested in studying more demanding subjects are probably already above average. The Matriculation Examination Board has promised to look into the matter and possibly introduce some changes in the evaluation process (Kajantie).

The Matriculation Examination Board is also planning to introduce an altogether new test that would measure the all-round education of the students as well as their ability to find information and review its sources critically (Liiten).

**160-years-old and still running**

The biannual Matriculation Examination is an important part of Finnish history. Lukio graduates, having completed the examination, are seen as able to pass on Finnish cultural tradition as well
as knowledge on many different areas of life. During its 160-year-old history, the importance of the examination has changed a great deal, though there are some themes that have remained the same throughout the years. From an entrance exam for universities, completed by approximately 70 male students per year, it has become one of the most important maturation rites for the whole nation. In the past, the examination was a way for both the upper and the middle class to ensure one's high social status, but as the number of lukio graduates increased dramatically in the 1960s, the social prestige connected with it started to disappear. In the 21st century more than 30,000 students complete the examination every year. All of them cannot continue their studies in universities, so the purpose of the examination is nowadays to act as a final examination of the lukio.

The examination is an important Finnish institution for various reasons. It offers a way to evaluate the effectiveness of the Finnish school system, enables the objective evaluation of students of different regions, and creates a basis for post-secondary education. Its importance can also been seen through many traditions connected with it – the most visible being the black-and-white student cap.

The Finnish Matriculation Examination has adapted to the changing world throughout its history, and will continue to do so in the future as well. Nowadays there are a few more changes on the way, and if the past is any indicator, more are yet to come.

Notes

1 From now on, this paper will use the English term “Matriculation Examination”.

2 Finland was a part of Russia from 1809 to 1917.

3 In Finland, elementary school starts at the age of 7 and consists of classes 1–6.

4 In grade 7, students are approximately 13 years old.

5 There have been changes to the examination throughout its history; this section concentrates on the most important ones chosen by the author of the paper.

6 Swedish had been the official language of Finland for centuries because Finland was a part of Sweden until 1809. However, it had never been the language of the common people, and the Finnish people had to fight for their right to use their own language. Even today, there are many people who cannot understand why Swedish is still obligatory in Finland when only around six per cent of the population speaks it as their mother tongue.

7 The same things are criticised in the 21st century as well: see for example a column Tietobulimia pitää poistaa yhteiskunnan tautilistalta at <http://www.hs.fi/paivanlehti/kotimaa/Tietobulimia+pit%C3%A4+poistaa+yhteiskunnan+tautilistalta/a1364011296325>, in which a lukio student comments that lukio only prepares you for the examination and does not offer an all-around education as it should. The column is in Finnish.

8 6 December.

9 A popular Finnish magazine.

10 See for example an interview of Jere Järlström, who received 11 Laudaturs: http://yle.fi/uutiset/torniolaisella_jerella_on_eniten_allia/5566359 in Finnish. The interview is in Finnish.
See for example the University of Tampere, the programme of English Language: http://www.uta.fi/opiskelijaksi/valintaperusteet/ltl/eng.html. The site is in Finnish.

The programme is held in the University Consortium of Pori.

The lyre is a symbol of the Matriculation Examination.

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Followup Report

I chose my topic because I am really interested in education in general – I have been working as a substitute teacher in lukios and would like to be a teacher in the future. Finland has its own education system, different from all the others, and I have often struggled when talking to foreigners with explanations on how exactly it works. This was the biggest reason why I wanted to write a paper on the Finnish Matriculation Examination. Because the topic interested me on so many levels, I had quite a few research questions, including questions about the structure, the history, and the importance of the examination. However, I do feel that the paper answers them all.

In my paper, I describe how an entrance exam to the university, only taken by circa 70 male students in the 1850s, became a final examination of lukio, presently with more than 30,000 new graduates every year. The paper also introduces the different tests of the examination, illuminates the grading system, and tells shortly about statistics concerning the examination. In addition, the paper discusses the importance of the examination in Finnish society as a whole and more precisely in accordance with university admission, and the importance seen through traditions involving the new graduates, such as the Finnish student cap and the celebrations of the graduation day. Lastly, the paper takes a look at the future and the challenges the 160-year-old examination has to face in the 21st century. The main point is that even though the importance and the purpose of the examination have changed over time, it is still considered a very important part of Finnish society and especially the life of each individual student.

If I were to start writing this paper anew, I would definitely try to improve my time management – or rather, try to have fewer courses at the same time as this one. As it happened, I had to
write my Bachelor’s thesis at the same time, and it was very hard to find the time to finish both the thesis and the FIN1 paper during one semester. I had to write in a hurry, which is never a good idea for academic papers. Another possible change I would make is to outline my topic more precisely. If written again, I think I would leave out the history part of my paper altogether and concentrate more on the importance of the examination today. It was really hard to find information on the history that was neither too precise with hundreds of details so that the overall picture was really hard to see, nor too general with no specifics at all. Additionally, the education system in Finland is of course different from systems in other countries, and just deciding on what is necessary background information was challenging, let alone explaining it very shortly. If I had had more time, I would have spent a great deal of it only on this matter.

Still, I think the Finnish education system is an interesting topic to research if you just have a little more time. I think that writing a paper on the state of Finnish universities in the 21st century would be really interesting and even useful to people who are trying to decide where they want to study. Explaining the Finnish education system more precisely would also be useful for the exchange students coming to Finland to study. In addition, many studying-related words are hard to translate because they mean different things in different education systems, so translators and interpreters could also benefit from such research.

Another interesting viewpoint would be to compare the Finnish Matriculation Examination to the British A-levels, for example, or to the SATs in America. In what ways would they be similar, and how would they differ? Is the respect for upper secondary school or high school graduates in these countries different from the respect for lukio graduates in Finland, and would there be any similar traditions linked with graduation? This kind of information, if found neatly in one paper, would be useful for translators: after all, many books, television series and films deal with young adults facing final examinations, and there are many non-fiction books and documentaries related to the subject as well.