

VIRTUAL VISITING DIPLOMAT PROGRAM

ORGANIZED BY THE INTERNATIONAL STUDIES CONSORTIUM OF GEORGIA (ISCOG)\* -  
CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF SERVICE TO THE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY

Proudly Presents

## LET'S TALK FINLAND

WITH



**KEIJO KARJALAINEN, DEPUTY CONSUL GENERAL  
CONSULATE GENERAL OF FINLAND IN NEW YORK**

Keijo Karjalainen serves as the Deputy Consul General of Finland in New York and has enjoyed a distinguished foreign service career. He has previously held positions at the Finnish Embassy in Washington, D.C., the Finnish Embassy in London, and the Permanent Representation of Finland to the European Union in Brussels.

In addition to his diplomatic work, Keijo Karjalainen is a published author, with two books to his name. His literary pursuits have led him to analyze the domestic and foreign policies of the fictional village inhabited by the comic book hero, Asterix. He has also delved into the intricacies of explaining the philosophy behind hopelessly bad jokes.

Mr. Karjalainen is married and father of two children.

**JOIN US ON WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2023 – 2:00 – 3:30 P. M. (EASTERN TIME)**  
**REGISTRATION DEADLINE, SEPTEMBER 26, 2023 . There is no registration fee to  
attend the program.**

[REGISTER HERE](#)

(in case you have difficulty registering, please send an email to [raj.sashti@reinhardt.edu](mailto:raj.sashti@reinhardt.edu))  
for a 90-minute interactive program in which diplomat Keijo Karjalainen will introduce the social, cultural, and economic footprint of Finland in the United States with a focus on the Southeast. Students attending the program will gain global competency skills to help them succeed in a dynamic and interdependent global economy. The program will also offer opportunities for career exploration, including government internships, for students attending schools in the Consortium.

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Please contact Consortium Executive Director [raj.sashti@reinhardt.edu](mailto:raj.sashti@reinhardt.edu) for any additional information.

**\*Consortium Universities and Colleges:** Reinhardt University, Albany State University, Alcorn State University (MS), Andrew College, Clayton State University, Columbus State University, Dalton State College, Edward Waters College (FL), Fort Valley State University, Georgia Highlands College, Gordon State College, Houston Community College (TX), Jacksonville State University (AL), Middle Georgia State University, South Georgia State College, Tennessee State University, University of North Georgia.

### **THE VIRTUAL VISITING DIPLOMAT PROGRAM**

The main objective of the Virtual Visiting Diplomat Program is to have a direct impact on the talented and accomplished students at Consortium universities/colleges and increase their knowledge and understanding regarding a country or a region or a global topic. The focus of the 90-minute interactive program (one hour of presentation followed by 30 minutes of question and answer) will be international and cross-cultural in nature. Visiting Diplomats will serve as presenters and resource persons for the program and will introduce the region/country and its social, cultural and economic footprint in the United States in general and the Southeast in particular to young men and women.

As a part of the program, the featured presenter will share his/her professional career trajectory to stimulate students to be creative and innovative and encourage them to aspire and reach higher levels of leadership as they pursue their own academic and professional goals. The purpose of the program is to provide students with unique experiences and opportunities not available in a textbook or in a classroom setting. The ultimate goal of the program is to assist young men and women acquire global competency skills and help them to adapt and succeed in a dynamic and highly-interdependent global economy.

### **FINLAND: COUNTRY PROFILE**

In spite of its relatively small population (5.6 million), Finland has been a trendsetter in many fields since independence in 1917. The country scores consistently well on international ratings for stability, freedom, public safety and social progress and its parliament was the first to adopt full gender equality, granting men and women the rights not only to vote but also to stand for election in 1906.

Finland declared independence from Russia in 1917. The country is a member of the European Union. Triggered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, it joined NATO in April 2023.

Home to the Arctic Circle, the Nordic country of Finland is off the radar for many visitors. Those who do visit this winter wonderland enjoy soaking up the magical sights of the capital Helsinki and exploring the wilderness known as Lapland. With its own unique culture and landscape, Finland is Northern Europe's hidden gem that should be on everybody's bucket list!

### **UNITED STATES – FINLAND BILATERAL ECONOMIC RELATIONS:**

Finland welcomes foreign investment. **Exports** from the United States to Finland include chemicals, electronics, machinery, instruments, apparatus, road vehicles and transport equipment, coal, medical equipment, food and beverages, metals and metal products, crude minerals, and metalliferous ores. **Imports** from Finland to the United States include machinery, paper and paperboard, instruments and apparatuses, chemicals, electronics, metals and metal products, petroleum and petroleum products, and road vehicles and transport equipment.

Finland is a member of the European Union. The U.S. economic relationship with the EU is the largest and most complex in the world, and the United States and the EU continue to pursue initiatives to create new opportunities for transatlantic commerce.

### **WHY SHOULD AMERICAN STUDENTS LEARN MORE ABOUT FINLAND'S EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM?**

The word "Finland" fills you with awe. Because everyone in the schooling profession knows that Finland is the international all-star of education. In 2006 the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) conducted a survey of 15-year-olds' academic skills from 57 nations. Finland placed first in science by a whopping 5% margin, second in math (edged out by one point by Chinese Taipei), and third in reading.

Comparisons that involve so many variables are difficult. Some might say impossible. Still, just a glance at PISA's scores year after year prompts the question: How does Finland churn out so many avid learners?

At first glance, the Finnish educational system looks like it would only produce hippie slackers. Check out the casual amenities: Schools often have lounges with fireplaces but no tardy bells. Finnish students don't wear uniforms, nor do they often wear shoes. (Since Finns go barefoot inside the home, and schools aspire to offer students a nurturing, homey environment, the no-shoe rule has some pedagogical logic.) And although academic standards are high, there's not the grind one associates with high-performance schooling. Never burdened with more than half an hour of homework per night, Finnish kids attend school fewer days than 85% of other developed nations (though still more than Americans), and those school days are typically short by international standards.

Finnish teachers enjoy an equally laid-back arrangement. They work an average of 570 hours a year, nearly half the U.S. total of 1,100 hours. They also dress casually and are usually called by their first names (Aino, Helmi, Viivi, Eetu, etc.). Is the secret massive financial investment? No. Finland spends only \$7,500 per student, considerably less than the United States' average \$8,700. So how does Finland produce the world's best young scholars via minimal hours and cash? Since PISA began ranking

nations and revealing Finland's special sauce, plane-loads of inquisitive teachers from every corner of the globe have been making pilgrimages to this educational mecca. Here's a taste of what they've observed

The level of respect accorded to Finnish teachers tends to grab attention, especially in America where teaching is viewed as a "fallback" profession occupied primarily by the lower third of college graduates. That equation is flipped in Finland, where teachers boast the highest vocational status (followed by physicians.) A full 25% of Finnish youngsters select teaching as their career goal, but only a fraction succeeds. Only 10% to 13% of applicants gain acceptance into the masters' degree in education program.

After all this hard work, the rewards are generous, but not necessarily financially so. Teachers earn a generous \$45 to \$50 per hour for elementary school, \$75 to \$80 for secondary school. Yet some far lower-performing nations such as Spain and Germany pay teachers more. Instead, Finnish teachers enjoy immense independence. Allowed to design their own lesson plans and choose their own textbooks (following loose national guidelines), Finnish teachers regard their work as creative and self-expressive.

### **Free Preschool and College**

Finnish toddlers have access to free preschools supervised by certified college graduates. Ah, you wonder — are the little innocents getting a jump-start there, reading and writing all day? Wrong! Truth is, Finland's preschools offer no academics but plenty of focus on social skills, emotional awareness, and learning to play. Remarkably, Finnish children don't approach reading until age seven (Waldorf nation?). They learn other concepts first, primarily self-reliance. One American observer noted that first-graders were expected to walk unescorted through the woods to school and lace up their own ice skates.

Twenty colleges exist in Finland, and they're all free. Imagine the financial relaxation this provides for both parents and children. Universities are not widely stratified either; the disparity between the "best" and "worst" is not terribly large.

Americans give lip service to the notion that "all men are created equal," but our appetite for competition creates an intense focus on ranking low and high performers — whether they're schools or students.

[Finland downplays educational competition](#) in a number of ways. Schools aren't ranked against each other, and teachers aren't threatened with formal reviews. At many schools, teachers don't grade students until the fifth grade, and they aren't forced to organize curriculum around standardized testing. [Gifted students aren't tracked](#) into special programs, invited into honor societies, or chosen to be valedictorians. Instead, struggling students receive free extra tutoring. After ninth grade, students attend either an academic program (53%) or vocational one (47%) — this flexibility results in a 96% graduation rate, dwarfing the United States' measly 75%. Finally, since there are no private schools to speak of, there's no sense that the best students are being skimmed off the top.

Overall, such attitudes go hand in hand with Finland's socialist-style egalitarian society, which focuses on meting out fees and services according to need rather than merit. Even parking ticket penalties are determined according to income: A wealthy sausage factory heir was fined \$204,000 for going 50 miles per hour in a 25-mph zone!

Also, Finnish schools lack some of the extracurriculars — such as sports teams or musical bands — considered so essential to U.S. high schools. But free lunches are available to all students. "School choice" doesn't exist; everyone goes to the neighborhood school. Students learn at least three languages: Finnish, Swedish, and English. Finally, Finland is a culture of readers, with a great library system and book mobiles reaching even remote locations.

Although the Finnish system seems antithetical to South Korea's (the Asian nation placed second in the 2007 PISA surveys), the two small countries share much in common. Both cultures hold teachers in the highest esteem. Both achieved independence relatively recently — Finland in 1917, South Korea 1946 — and both are resource-poor nations that decided education was the path out of poverty. Finnish and Korean languages are easy to read and spell; they don't have the illogical phonetics of English.

Comparisons: Is it fair to compare the small, homogenous northern nation to our roiling melting pot of diversity? Many experts say no. After all, given our higher immigration rate and wider socioeconomic stratification, our schools tend to become social experiments not simply for learning but also for many other social functions schools aren't designed to handle. Still, should these challenges prevent us from learning what we can from Finland's schools? If nothing else, it's worth noting the central importance of inspired, highly educated teachers and what keeps the United States from doing the same.

### **10 Facts About Education in Finland:**

<https://in-finland.education/10-facts-about-education-in-finland/>

### **Some Fascinating Facts About Finland:**

There are many misconceptions about Finland, often to do with the local language, culture, and geography. The most common misconception about Finland shared is that it is part of Scandinavia. This is definitely an easy mistake to make thanks to its geographical location. Finland is located quite close to the Scandinavian countries of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. But it is not one of them.

Confusingly, Finland is a Nordic country, along with the three Scandinavian countries and Sweden. Finland does not share the Scandinavian Peninsula, and so it is not considered part of Scandinavia. There are other cultural differences too, such as the language in Finland.

The Finnish language is one of the major differences between this Nordic country and the Scandinavian countries of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. Although they have their own languages, they are quite similar. On the other hand, Finnish sounds completely different.

Swedish Nomad points out that Finnish is not an Indo-European language. It is actually part of the Finno-Ugric language group. This means it shares more similarities with Estonian than it does with Danish, Norwegian, or Swedish. The majority of European languages are Indo-European.

Santa Claus, known in Finnish as Joulupukki, lives in Finland. While in the country, you can visit Santa's Village in the northern province of Lapland. There's even a Santa Claus Post Office there which receives around 700,000 letters per year. Opened in 1985, the village is located on top of the Arctic Circle, near the town of Rovaniemi. Santa's office is also in the village, and you can go in and chat with him (if he's in and not out to lunch). The village also boasts its own museum dedicated to

The Finns are very respectful of their country and nature in general. Both the cities and the countryside are rubbish free, and locals want to keep it this way. If you do leave a mess behind, expect to be told off about it! When you look at how beautiful the Finnish countryside is, it's not hard to see why the locals have such a great sense of pride in their environment.

There is something that comes as a total shock to most foreigners. While how much money you make is a closely guarded secret in many cultures, all that information is available to the public. It is legal to call the Tax Office and simply ask what somebody makes in a year. Yearly income is also used to establish the price of traffic infringement fines. If you get a speeding ticket, it will be calculated according to what you make a year. For some, this can turn out to be very expensive indeed.

The winter days in Finland are very dark, so the ski slopes have to be artificially lit up. But when you ski during the spring, you'll find that the sun seems to perpetually shine.

Interestingly, Finland is one of the best places in the world to be a new mom. It is the policy for all new mothers to be provided with a baby box on behalf of the state. These durable boxes contain diapers, sheets, toys, clothes, and a mattress, making them cozy beds for newborns to sleep in. According to Visit Finland, all mothers are able to stay home with their babies for a year while receiving either their full salary or benefits. It's also free to use public transport in most Finnish cities if you're traveling with a buggy and a child.