



ISANA INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

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Promoting Integration and
Education



Connecting, Networking, Integrating:
Enriching the relationship between
international Muslim students and
academic staff in health areas.

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THE NEWCASTLE CONTEXT

2006 Census

141, 752 persons residing in Newcastle Local Government area

Overseas born population 16, 092 persons (11.35%)

Religious affiliation

70.8% Christian
24.4% No Religion
0.452% Muslim

Less cultural diversity than the national average of 22.2%



THE UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE CONTEXT 2008

- 26, 000 students enrolled at the University
- 2, 600 international students studying on-shore
- Students from 100 countries represented on the Callaghan campus.



THE ISSUES

- New cohorts of students from Qatar
- Muslim international students studying in the Faculty of Health
- Increasing numbers of students from the Middle East particularly Saudi Arabia
- Significant growth in the number of international Muslim students studying at the University



OUR RESPONSE



KEY CONCEPTS



- Collaboration and successful partnerships within the University and broader community
- Maintaining a community focus / building relationships with key organisations
- The importance of external funding

COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS



- Information to support and orientate international Muslim students
- Information for the local community to better understand Muslim beliefs and practices
- Workshops to assist staff in the Faculty of Health
- Orientation for international students studying in health areas
- Support for international students in placement experiences

RATIONALE



- Desire of many international students to connect more meaningfully with domestic students
Chalmers, D., & Volet, S. 1997
- Loneliness and isolation
Sawir, E., Marginson, S., Deumert, A., Nyland, C., & Ramia, G. 2008
- Learning styles of Asian students
Ballard, B., Clanchy, J., 1984, 1999
- Feedback from international students at The University of Newcastle through the International Student Barometer

PROJECTS WITH THE FACULTY OF HEALTH



- Survey of staff in School of Medicine to ascertain concerns and issues in regards to teaching and interacting with international Muslim students
- Workshop developed and facilitated:
 - Community panel
 - Questions and answers
- Key points from the workshop collated into two new resources

ISSUES AND CONCERNS OF STAFF IN THE FACULTY OF HEALTH



- Understanding Muslim beliefs and practices; accommodating these in the educational setting
- Understanding cultural and religious practices around birth and death
- Getting the balance between academic integrity and accommodating religious practices
- Developing effective cross cultural communication
- Understanding the cultural and religious issues in clinical examinations
- The impact of dress in the educational setting

OUTCOMES OF THE WORKSHOP FOR STAFF



- Workshop was found to be valuable or very valuable.
- Comments:
 - 'It demystified the faith and increased my understanding of Islam.'*
 - 'I'll be freer to ask the students questions about what they are uncomfortable with.'*
 - 'I'll be more confident and relaxed in my communication and reactions with Muslim students.'*

ISSUES EMERGING FROM THE WORKSHOP



- Questions about the need for tailored orientation sessions for students
- Ensuring commencing students understand the requirements of the academic program
- Assisting students to develop skills and strategies to interact in social and academic environments
- Supporting students to manage cross cultural challenges

RESPONSE FOR STUDENTS



- Development and implementation of a tailored orientation session for international Muslim students in the School of Medicine as part of a two week program in 2008
- A scenario based session; small group discussions and feedback from a panel of senior students, academic staff and (Muslim) medical practitioners.

FEEDBACK FROM STUDENTS



Students reported that this session had been the most useful of the two week program.

Comments:

'It allowed us to be mentally and emotionally prepared for what was about to come.'

'The session gave me tips for changes in attitudes and behaviour such as ways to be more approachable.'

'I felt assurance [by listening to the experiences of senior students] that Australian people are friendly.'

DEVELOPING THE COLLABORATION WITH THE FACULTY OF HEALTH



- Expansion of the School of Medicine orientation program to include international students from across the Faculty.
- Collaboration to produce a resource to assist supervisors to better understand the needs of international students on placements.
- Delivery of cross cultural training sessions for General Practitioners who supervise students on placement.

DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY



- Employment of two Community Liaison Officers to assist Middle Eastern students
- Planning for the delivery of a tailored Community Orientation session for Middle Eastern students
- Expansion of cross cultural training for mentors and student facilitators within the University

DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY



- English language classes for Saudi Arabian women – partners of international students
- Broadening relationships
- Trialling of new resource, *'Understanding Australian Culture through a Muslim Perspective'* to complement the Community Orientation session for Middle Eastern students

RECENT OUTCOMES



- Funding from DIAC to update and re-print 10, 000 copies of the original resources
- Early projects highlighted in the National Action Plan (DIAC) kits featuring initiatives from across Australia that meet the objective of building on social cohesion, harmony and security.
- Maturing relationships and consolidation of projects within the University and broader community
- Recognition of project outcomes within the University

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE PLANS



Our work aims to:

- Increase cross cultural education by increasing skills and knowledge within the context of relationships
- Reduce barriers associated with uncertainty
- Build an approach that supports and enhances the intercultural exchanges between Muslim students, staff of the University and members of the broader community

Future plans include conducting research on the experiences of Middle Eastern students with particular focus on their desire and capacity to make connection with members of the host community.

LIST OF RESOURCES



- 'Welcome to Newcastle: Information for Muslim students and Families
- Understanding Islam
- Focusing on Islam: Answers to Frequently asked Questions
<http://www.newcastle.edu.au/islam.html>
- Teaching International Muslim Students in Health Areas
- Challenges for International Muslim Students in the Academic Environment
<http://www.newcastle.edu.au/islaminhealth.html>

THANK YOU

QUESTIONS



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