

‘Bridging Differences: Saudi students and the Australasian Education Experience

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Mohammad Zeidan, International Student Adviser (Middle Eastern) at University of Canterbury is originally from Jordan where he completed his undergraduate studies in Physics. Mohammad worked at a secondary school teacher of Physics for four years prior to moving to New Zealand with his wife and young son in 2003. Prior to beginning his current position in 2007, Mohammad worked as a physics tutor at the University of Canterbury. He completed his Master’s degree in Medical Physics from University of Canterbury in 2009.

Waleed Wahsh, Student Advisor at Bridging Programmes, University of Canterbury has worked extensively with Saudi students since 2002 as a teacher of English and counsellor both in Saudi Arabia and New Zealand. Waleed has a B.Ed. in TEFL and a Diploma in Web Development. Waleed moved to New Zealand in 2005 as a project manager developing EFL programs for the Middle East. He has developed web-based systems to enhance student learning and his main areas of interest are student welfare and web-based educational solutions.

Abstract

For New Zealand and Australian education providers the Middle East and especially Saudi Arabia has become a major new market. With nearly 10,000 Saudi students studying in Australasia, the growth of this market in recent years has been good news for the tertiary education sector. However, such significant and sustained growth could be jeopardized if it is not accompanied by a solid network of support. The issues around Saudi students can be especially challenging. Support systems need to be robust and closely monitored to achieve success.

This interactive workshop will focus on the experience of Saudi students both culturally and educationally, as well as explore the challenges for accommodation and education providers.

Topics to be covered are:

- Accommodation adjustments, taking into account the viewpoints of homestay agents, host families, students and accommodation advisors
- Islam and its impact on the daily lives of students and accommodation and education providers
- Expectations and challenges students face while studying English and during the first year of degree study, again from the viewpoints of the EFL teachers, the degree teachers and the students.

Through a combination of video clips, discussion, and case studies, participants will:

- Gain a greater understanding of the Saudi students' expectations,
- Knowledge of the Saudi education system vs. a western education expectations, and
- Strategies for bridging the cultural and educational differences