

**Student City, Palmerston North,
The International Student Experience**

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International Education in New Zealand

Since the days of New Zealand government funded Malaysian students coming to study under the Colombo Plan in the 1950s, international education in New Zealand has had a reputation of creativity and kiwi ingenuity. In the late 1980s New Zealand's immigration and education legislation was changed to make it easier for international students to travel to New Zealand and study. In the 1990s a voluntary code of practice was introduced which became part of the Education Standards Act in 2001 and in 2002 the Code of Practice for Pastoral Care of International Students became the law as a compulsory minimum standard of care for international students. New Zealand as a destination has important advantages for students such as safety, friendliness, English speaking, natural environment, a British based education system, world class institutions, high quality living conditions and a warm and welcoming environment. New Zealand also benefits when international students chose to stay after their study. International education in New Zealand is currently estimated to contribute more than \$2.3 billion annually to the economy.

Massey University and Palmerston North City.

The student city of Palmerston North is a thriving vibrant city with a growing population of 80,000 and a buoyant economy. It is located in the geographical centre of New Zealand and one million people live within a 2 hour radius. The tertiary education sector provides \$1billion dollars to the economy through direct and indirect spending. Massey University Palmerston North has grown from a small agricultural college with 84 students in 1928 to become New Zealand's largest residential university spread over 3 cities and offers the only Veterinary Science and Bachelor of Aviation degrees available in New Zealand.

The city became a refugee resettlement destination in 2006 and with over 100 different ethnic groups forming part of the local community; cultural diversity is

flourishing in Palmerston North. Over 4000 international students and their families add to this mix.

The city has responded by targeting services, and improving visitor amenities. It created a local ethnic council in 1994, which has members from 30 different cultural or ethnic groupings. In turn, the ethnic council opened the Manawatu Multicultural Centre which provides language classes, advice, information and advocacy for new settlers and organises youth events, a newcomer's network and participates in ethnic community events. Massey University and the Palmerston North community have worked together to make Palmerston North a welcoming city for both international students and the groups of new settlers arriving.

As part of the City Council's promotion scheme through Vision Manawatu, a Student City Co-ordinator role was developed in conjunction with the tertiary education providers in Palmerston North, to promote Palmerston North worldwide as a student City.

The **Massey University Student Support Office** (part of Student Life Services) is staffed by 5 staff members. The Office is in charge of the pastoral care of international students from pre-arrival through to graduation (and beyond). We are responsible for meeting students on arrival, running orientation, administering an international student medical and travel insurance scheme, processing student and graduate work visa applications and organising events and activities for students and their families. One staff member is a dedicated Family Support Officer with responsibility for the welfare of the family.

City Organised Activities

The long standing history of team work between the staff and the community continues to ensure interaction between students, their families and the community at large, for the length of their study, whether it's for one semester or for five years.

- **Festival of Cultures** is the oldest local ethnic community event.

It has grown from a parade of national costumes and a display of cultural items in 1990, to a week of events and activities culminating in a day of performances, food and craft fair attended by thousands from Palmerston North and the surrounding district.

- Since 2004 each Palmerston North Mayor has hosted a **Mayoral Welcome** at the start of every semester inviting all the new International Students from both secondary and tertiary education providers in the city.
- **Ethkick**, started as a local football event to coincide with Race Relations Week in March 2009 and saw 39 ethnically diverse teams participating. The Massey University Omani team went on to become New Zealand's best ethnic football side when they won the New Zealand Communities Football Cup. Organisations such as NZ Police, Department of Internal Affairs, Sport Manawatu, Refugee Services, Ministry of Social Development, Central Football, Massey University, Universal College of Learning and the International Pacific College are all involved in this event today and it continues to thrive and grow.
- A **monthly women only swimming night** at a local pool was established for ethnic women in 2009. This event has proved very popular and now involves an aqua aerobics class and female only lifeguards.
- In 2009 the first ever **Rainbow Praise** event was held incorporating 'songs of praise' from Palmerston North's ethnic communities to celebrate their different faiths.
- And the Palmerston North City Council funds joint ethnic community events such the **Omani Expo** in 2010.

Joint Community and University Activities

Palmerston North Rotary Club

The Palmerston North Rotary Club which has jointly organised activities for international student since the 1970's, started with an annual international students Christmas party where all children were given a gift and afternoon tea was provided by the club. (This no longer continues due in part to the growth of families but also as a result of the many cultural differences). For many years club members also befriended students through the Massey University halls under the 'Flatting Friends' programme, where new students were contacted by local Rotary families and taken on excursions and outings particularly in the first 3 or 4 weeks of their arrival.

The Palmerston North club now organises two main events a year:

- A marae based hangi welcome meal at the start of the year with entertainment provided by a Maori cultural group,

- A family picnic trip to the world famous rhododendron gardens at Kimbolton with transport and lunch provided by the club.

Marion Rotary Club

The Marion club organizes a weekend event each year for 20 new International students who are struggling to settle in to stay overnight with Rotarians. The students visit a farm, have a shared meal cooked jointly by the students and their host families, followed by a barn dance.

Operation Friendship

When new international students are met on arrival at the Palmerston North airport they receive a welcome pack with a small gift from Operation Friendship.

During the year Operation Friendship organises several activities and events. These include Pot luck dinners, picnics, visits to the Wind Farm, and other local Church based activities.

International Postgraduate and Mature Students club

This is a Massey University Students club which is run jointly by International Student Support Office staff, students and members of the local community for the more mature students and their family members. The club has a regular newsletter and runs a regular bulletin service promoting and advertising activities that are being held at Massey University and in the City, assisting with accommodation issues, advertising furniture etc. They also organize family snow trips, potluck dinners, sports days and movie nights.

Community Links and Activities

Palmerston North Volunteer Centre

This centre organizes courses, assists in finding work, and has a drop in centre where new migrants can meet and talk. International students interested in helping the community are encouraged to become a volunteer.

Palmerston North City Library

The City Library offers an extensive array of literature, and events related to the arts and cultures of the city. The Library has an extensive collection of children's

literature in a range of different languages, and has remodelled its foyer area to include a welcome mural with greetings in many languages. During school holidays, the Library runs a very popular children's programme that most of our families use.

Migrant Work and Settlement Support agencies

These two government funded agencies are of particular help to students' families, where spouses are looking for employment, or access to community health or childcare facilities.

Manawatu Tenants Union

This is a free community agency providing advice about renting and tenant's rights and obligations. Students with housing and tenant issues use this service as they move from the University accommodation to town.

Islamic Centre at Massey Campus and the PalmerstonNorth Islamic Association

Massey University is the only New Zealand University with an Islamic Centre on campus, allowing Muslim students to meet for prayers during the day. The prayer centre is a very special part of the community where Muslim people from all corners of the world gather together to form one group which crosses all borders.

International Students Ministries (ISM)

This agency's focus is particularly on the welfare of international students and their families. They run a furniture bank where international students have access to free household items on the condition that they are returned or passed on to other students when the student returns home. They also organise emergency temporary accommodation for students on arrival, or need of respite.

Chaplaincy Centre ("The Centre") on Campus

The Centre offers two drop-in sessions a week (a pancake night and a soup and bread lunch), where international students can go and meet other students. The Centre has large array of community based activities and also links our students with local community Churches.

University based activities

Orientation

Community Welcome

Members from all of the above clubs and organisations provide an informal briefing session which culminates with a shared meal.

Senior international students welcome

Students come to talk about their experiences, life in Palmerston North, opportunities within the local community, and other relevant information. This forges a tie with new students them and many times our senior students end up becoming points of reference for our new students.

Information Folder

International students receive a comprehensive folder that contains all the contact details for the local churches, clubs and societies, ethnic groups, and other organisations, which may be of interest.

Other University Activities

The Unity and Diversity Concert:

This event, which is organised by the Student Association International Officer, for the local community, highlights and displays the cultures of the different ethnic groups of the university with 2 performances held in a local theatre.

Going Home and Farewell Function

An event for students who are leaving the University and returning home but not able to attend the University Graduation Ceremonies. At this function students are photographed with the Chancellor, Senior Staff members, receive a leaving gift from the International Student Support Team, a letter of appreciation, and a Goodwill Ambassador Certificate jointly from the University and the City.

Conclusion

Massey University is hugely appreciative of the investment international students have made in education and is continually striving to provide the best possible study experience. The quality of this experience is undoubtedly due to the friendly welcoming nature of Palmerston North city and its people.

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