

Experiences and expectations of community engagement of post-grad international students and their families in Palmerston North, New Zealand

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ABSTRACT

International students accompanied by their families come with many expectations of new place of sojourn. Massey University, Palmerston North is one of the favoured destinations of international students accompanied by their families for Post-graduate studies in New Zealand. The majority of students in this group come from Asian and African countries. This paper explores the views on how student expectations are affected by the experiences these students and their families encounter in relation to engagement in the wider community. The results are based on a survey conducted amongst the students and their families as well as by interviewing community observers. Like other studies, this study also found that most international students have primary bonding with co-nationals or other internationals compared to host national. The overall amount of actual contact with host national, especially for the families is varied. Culture, language and lack of information appear to be the main barriers for intercultural interaction whereas structural connections with community agencies such as schools (for children) provide bridging opportunities. Enthusiasm for interacting with host culture decreases with the period of stay. Lack of early interaction and impression create disappointment among the families, which also reduces the future chances of their mixing with host culture, and may also negatively affect subsequent perceptions and attitudes towards the host culture. The findings also suggest that a lack of information restrained their active participation in the community but provision of regular information relating to potential connections within the host community promotes a sense of awareness of possibilities for connection. Community connector agencies like Rotary club, International Student Clubs, sports clubs, religious groups, and international friendship groups play important roles in bridging the student-culture and host-culture and promote intercultural interactions. The study also indicates agencies for intercultural bridging struggle to recruit suitable host community participants for intercultural connecting programmes comparative to the interest in attracting international students.

Key Words

International students, post-graduate, families, expectation, intercultural, community engagement