

Theory Into Practice Strategies: Culturally Inclusive Social Events



University Community

The organisation and management of university events (even small social events) is a highly skilled undertaking and this guide to inclusive events can be used to enhance existing practices. While it is not always possible to cater for the whole range of cultural preferences, maintaining an awareness of cultural diversities, and providing what is practically possible at social events contributes overall to a culturally inclusive university.

A culturally inclusive university is one where staff and students value and explore diversity, and where staff and students actively seek to learn from other cultures.

Initial experiences at social events can leave international students with a negative impression of such events very early in their first year, setting a pattern of non-attendance in later years. It is therefore important to 'get it right' from the beginning. Social events are an integral part of university life, and it is the responsibility of faculties, schools, units and student groups to plan events for the university community that are relevant and appropriate for the diversity of people on campus. Creating and providing a culturally inclusive social environment encourages students to attend social events where they can develop contacts, make friends and enhance communication skills.

Consultation and planning

General points

- Consider diverse cultural interests when planning e.g. try to avoid dates that will coincide with religious and cultural festivals (check with University Chaplains)
- Find caterers that provide for special dietary requirements
- Plan specific cultural events in their own right (not always as part of overall 'multicultural' events)
- For student events, include students from diverse cultural groups in the planning (they will be able to offer valuable advice as well as use their own social networks to encourage greater participation)

Indigenous Australian Peoples

- Acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which the University of Newcastle campuses are located





Suggested wording for acknowledgement of the traditional custodians:

Callaghan Campus

"We acknowledge the Pambalong clan of the Awabakal people, traditional custodians of the land on which this campus is situated."

Ourimbah Campus

"We acknowledge the Darkinjung people, traditional custodians of the land on which this campus is situated."

Port Macquarie Campus

"We acknowledge the Birapai people, traditional custodians of the land on which this campus is situated."

- Reflect cultural norms in the design and operation of programs and projects, including the separation of men's and women's business where this is culturally required.

Venue

Venues play an important role in attracting students to social events. For example social functions or meetings held in hotels or similar venues can exclude students from some cultural backgrounds where entering such places is prohibited. On-campus venues are more neutral and therefore preferable. Venues should also be accessible to elderly students and those with particular mobility, medical or other needs.

The fear of being accused by others of engaging in irreligious activities is quite common in many cultures. The physical set-up of an event can be crucial to its success. Many students are concerned that should the alcohol and non-alcoholic drinks be served together, it may appear as though they are accessing alcohol. Separate the areas serving alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks, with the main gathering area in the middle.

Suggestions for choosing a venue

- Consider the needs of students from culturally diverse groups when choosing venues
- Opt for on-campus venues where possible
- Choose a venue with toilets that can be accessed by those with mobility impairments
- Create meeting places for diverse cultures, including Indigenous Australian people, throughout the campus.

You could start by displaying various flags, signs, brochures or posters in your area

- Engage students from a variety of cultures to assist with creating a suitable layout at the chosen venue
- Check whether parking for people with disabilities is available nearby
- Offer use of Uni Shuttle bus if required (subject to availability)

Catering

Halal and kosher foods

Diet is an important aspect of life for all students, but many students experience difficulties obtaining appropriate food. Despite the University's commendable efforts to provide for those with particular dietary requirements, there is still considerable uncertainty on halal, kosher and vegetarian foods. Muslims and Jews do not eat pork and are usually hesitant to eat at functions that serve pork because of the fear that the non-pork dishes may have come into contact with pork during preparation. Where possible, every effort is made to meet the needs of Muslim and Jewish visitors to the University.

Some elements of Jewish and Islamic dietary laws are common, while some are not.

See <http://www.eat-halal.com/kosher.shtml> for major differences. It is not only the ingredients that make food/s halal or kosher, but also the way it is prepared and how it is served.

The basic elements of Muslim 'halal' food exclude any form of pork - other meats must have been slaughtered in a particular way. Halal food also includes

- milk (from cows, sheep, camels and goats)
- honey
- fish
- plants which are not intoxicant
- fresh or naturally frozen vegetables
- fresh or dried fruits
- legumes and nuts like peanuts, cashew nuts, hazelnuts, walnuts, etc
- grains such as wheat, rice, rye, barley, oats etc

See <http://www.eat-halal.com/halal.shtml> for more information.

Focusing on Islam at <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/islam.html>.

The basic elements of Jewish 'kosher' food are

- no mixing of dairy and meat
- no pork or pork products
- no shellfish

For more information about kosher food, see <http://www.cyber-kitchen.com/rfcj/kosherfaq.htm>

It must be noted that if a product is kosher certified, it does not mean that it is automatically halal.

While it is true that kosher certification can be used as a tool for eating halal, one must be very careful. There are kosher certification agencies that certify products and ingredients that are not considered kosher by many Jewish people.

- Serve halal and kosher food separately from the non-halal and non-kosher food
- Provide separate serving utensils. The mixing of utensils may be an issue for a number of cultures

Vegetarian and vegan foods

Serving vegetarian and vegan food will cater for people from most religions and cultural backgrounds. Muslim and Jewish students are more likely to be comfortable with vegetarian food than with pork-free dishes among dishes with pork, while many students from South Asia, South-East and East Asia do not eat beef.

Note that people who are vegetarians generally will not eat anything that has to do with the slaughter of animals, including gelatine, animal-based stocks or rennet, while vegans, in addition to these restrictions, do not eat any animal products, including eggs, milk/ milk products or honey.

Provide varied and interesting vegan/vegetarian food. Simply providing salad, rice or bread is not really acceptable. Useful information (including caterers and recipes) is available on the Australian Vegetarian Society's website <http://www.veg-soc.org/>

In addition to addressing the requirements of diverse cultures, the needs of students with particular health-related dietary requirements may need to be addressed.

Food sensitivities such as lactose and gluten intolerance are surprisingly common, while some people are allergic or sensitive to particular foods, such as nuts, shellfish or egg protein.

Providing a detailed list of ingredients can allow people to select appropriate food and avoid the unpleasant and potentially dangerous consequences of eating foods containing known allergens.

Suggestions for inclusive catering

- Ensure halal, kosher and vegetarian food is on a separate table to meat dishes
- Where possible, use a separate BBQ plate for vegetarian/vegan foods. Many people find it unacceptable to have meat cooking alongside veggie burgers
- Label food eg halal, pork-free, beef-free, vegetarian, vegan, kosher
- Provide a list of ingredients whenever possible
- Engage students from a variety of cultures to be on hand to advise students who have questions about the food on offer
- Serve food such as fresh fruit and vegetables, foods that are low in fat, gluten-free and dairy-free

Alcohol and culturally inclusive events

The University has a policy on the serving and consumption of alcohol and it is the responsibility of the organiser of any function or

entertainment to be held on the University, whether on licensed or unlicensed sites, to uphold this policy. Further information is at: <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/service/ohs/policies/guidelines/drugalcoholguide.pdf>.

You may also wish to contact the Union for further advice.

Many international and local students feel uncomfortable with the focus on alcohol at university social functions. Many students have negative preconceptions of student alcohol consumption habits even before they start study at university. Some students make the conscious decision to avoid social activities where alcohol is served. Celebrating diversity can also be achieved by serving drinks that are popular in different countries eg cooling herbal teas from China, yoghurt mixes from India (eg lassi), sweet syrups from Malaysia.

Suggestions regarding serving alcohol at events

- Contact the Union for information about the University's policy on the serving and consumption of alcohol at student events
- Ensure non-alcoholic options are available and make this clear in any advertising
- Separate the areas for serving alcoholic and non-alcohol beverages

Marketing and encouraging student participation at social events

Many students are under immense pressure to perform well academically and are hesitant about participating in any activity that they see as unrelated to their academic work. Frequently, social events are seen as a distraction from study and a 'frivolous activity'. Some students can be unaware of the direct academic and professional advantages of socialising with fellow students.

'The skills learnt from socialising with Australian and other international students were a key factor in my employment success. These skills include introducing myself, listening, asking questions, maintaining a conversation and discussing contentious topics with someone with a different cultural perspective. Another important aspect of socialising is the network of friends and contacts one establishes on a worldwide scale.'

International student

The marketing strategies for many social activities on campus often focus on the easy availability of alcohol, food (usually meat) as well as a party atmosphere. Students from alternate cultures can be uncomfortable with this form of entertainment and for some it is strictly against their religious beliefs and therefore 'not negotiable'. Advertising which focuses on 'free beer, sausage sizzles and lots of fun' actively discourages attendance by some groups.

Suggestions for inclusive marketing

- Use signs that emphasise that the Newcastle community is multicultural and acknowledge alternate histories, events and cultural elements
- Advertise that non-alcoholic drinks will be available
- Advertise when vegan/vegetarian/halal/kosher food will be served
- Consider using a number of images and languages in the advertising to emphasise that all students are welcome. While it would not be practical (or possible) to use ALL languages, choosing those that are known to be widely used on campus or in your area can contribute to creating an inclusive environment
- Provide a reply slip, telephone, or e-mail contact to include an option for special dietary requirements
- Choose a font and font size that is simple and easy to read

Checklist for inclusive events

Consultation

- Consult with people who have knowledge of various cultures, including Wollotuka, NUSA, staff of International Student Support, and staff of Equity and Diversity, and include their advice in the planning and evaluation of your event
- Check with the Chaplaincy for events and festivities around your intended function– to avoid leaving particular groups out
- Ensure that the event adheres to the policies dictated by the University of Newcastle policies and procedures (a complete list of policies is at <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/policy/>)
- If the event is held on campus and coincides with a major religious event (eg Ramadan), consideration should be given to advising of the availability of prayer rooms

Venue

- Choose a venue that is likely to be comfortable for all students
- Display signs, posters or flags acknowledging that the Newcastle community is diverse
- Ensure that the venue is accessible and that accessible toilet facilities are nearby

Catering

- Ensure that a separate BBQ plate is used for cooking vegan/vegetarian foods
- Separate pork-free, beef-free and vegetarian dishes from the other dishes
- Provide separate serving utensils for each dish
- Label food correctly, listing ingredients where possible
- Invite student volunteers to reassure students who may not feel confident that the food served is halal or otherwise appropriate for them

- Follow the University's policy on serving alcohol at events
- Use separate areas for serving alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks, halal and non-halal food, and vegetarian and meat dishes

Marketing

- Stress the importance of attending social events by emphasising the skills to be gained and the opportunities provided
- Incorporate Indigenous Australian perspectives into Newcastle's community diversity celebrations
- Emphasise that non-alcoholic drinks will be provided, appropriate food will be served and that the function is for all students of the school, faculty etc
- Include student representatives from a variety of different cultural backgrounds in the planning and marketing efforts, to benefit from their knowledge and network of friends
- Use multilingual posters to encourage multilingual students to feel welcome and respected

References

- <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/service/equity/index.html>
- <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/policy/>
- <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/school/aboriginal-studies/>
- <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/service/chaplaincy/chaplaincy.html>
- <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/service/chaplaincy/index.html>
- <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/study/studentsupport/internationalsupport.html>
- <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/group/nusa/>
- Migrant Resource Centre <http://www.mrcnh.org/>
- Equity and Learning Programs (ELP), The University of Melbourne. http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/ellp/publications/edp_pubs.html
- <http://www.veg-soc.org/>
- <http://www.cyber-kitchen.com/rfcj/kosherfaq.htm>
- <http://www.eat-halal.com/kosher.shtml>
- <http://www.eat-halal.com/halal.shtml>
- Cultural Industries and Practices Centre <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/centre/cips/>
- Anti-Discrimination Board of NSW http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/lawlink/adb/ll_adb.nsf/pages/adb_index
- Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies <http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/>
- Inclusive Language Guidelines <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/policylibrary/000797.html>