

Undertaking Physical Examinations

All students develop skills that prepare them to practise and provide safe care to their patients. It is no different for Muslim students.

Factors that will influence how students approach learning tasks include their cultural background, personality and religion. Communication and understanding are part of any negotiation around learning tasks.

Shyness, fear of doing the wrong thing and being laughed at or ridiculed are some of the things that students worry about when they are learning – particularly when they are not from the same cultural background. Students will appreciate being shown how to do physical examinations, even though their natural inclination may be to avoid participating.

Where students need to learn new skills by carrying out procedures on people of the opposite sex it is important they understand the necessity of this for their learning and acquisition of skills for practice.

For further information on subjects relating to those contained in this publication, please go to www.newcastle.edu.au/islaminhealth.html

Preparation for Teaching Physical Examination Skills

All students need to know what they will specifically face when they are considering a program of study. Prospective students will make assumptions, so it is important to outline exactly what each course involves and convey the expectation that students will be required to participate in all aspects of their program, including undertaking physical examinations.

If students have difficulty in participating in this aspect of their academic program, it is possible to call on the support of members of the Newcastle Mosque who are willing to talk through this issue with the students. By doing this, their aim is to assist the students to feel more comfortable about participating in this important aspect of their academic program, so that the students feel they can participate fully and still maintain their religious adherence.

Maintaining Modesty in Dress and Providing Good Infection Control

It is an obligation for all Muslim people to dress modestly. Students will also need to ensure appropriate infection control standards are maintained. For example, students could consider replacing the hijab with a mask and theatre cap or wearing a shorter hijab.

In a situation where male and female students are required to scrub their lower arms it may be possible for male and female students to scrub separately and for the University to consider ensuring that examiners of this process are of the same sex to the students.



THE UNIVERSITY OF
NEWCASTLE
AUSTRALIA

This publication has been produced with support from the University of Newcastle Equity Initiative grants.

Teaching International Muslim Students in Health Areas

Most Muslim students will be able to integrate their studies with their religious duties, but there are specific challenges for students studying in Health programs such as Medicine, Nursing and the Allied Health areas. Some of these challenges can be proactively addressed. This resource provides information about the challenges students may face and some suggestions for how we can assist them.

Living and Studying in Australia

Islam is a flexible religion that allows followers to adapt to a variety of situations. Muslim students who have chosen to study in Australia have usually done so with the understanding that Australian culture and customs will be different, and that the responsibility for fitting in will largely rest on them. It will of course be greatly appreciated if members of the host community make new students feel welcome. This can be done by offering explanations of local culture so that new students understand what is happening and what they are expected to do.

Different Teaching / Learning Environments

Some Muslim students will have come from countries where the education system is more structured than in Australia. In these systems the students will have received considerable guidance and direction from their teachers. They will rarely have been expected to make decisions about their learning. Teachers are regarded with great respect and levels of imposed discipline are high. The image of the teacher is one of 'knowing the correct answer' with the students' task to ensure they hear, and commit to memory what has been taught. Even postgraduate students will regard their supervisors in this way.

By comparison the Australian education system is regarded as offering students considerable independence and freedom in their learning.

Building Communication and Connection with Muslim Students

Greetings

Muslim students will generally come from backgrounds where people do not greet by shaking hands. This is particularly true for people of the opposite sex. When meeting a Muslim student for the first time, it is best not to offer your hand.

Gaining Understanding

Students will generally be willing to answer questions posed by staff members about their beliefs, culture and practices. However it is important to ask questions with discretion and sensitivity and to approach any situation without assumptions.

Muslim students should be addressed in the same way as other students and questions should be freely asked to them as for others.

Female Teachers

Female teachers are held in the same high regard as male teachers by Muslim students. If teachers perceive that students are not showing appropriate levels of respect it could relate to the style of teaching; remembering that Muslim students are used to responding to direction and authority in the classroom.

Conversations

If the situation arises where a staff member and a Muslim student of the opposite sex need to speak privately, it is best to do this in a quiet but public place or keep the door to an office open during the conversation. If the staff member considers that it is important for an office door to be closed, then it is best to check that this is comfortable for the student. Students may vary in their response to this situation.

Touching / Consoling Students

Generally it is best not to touch students under any circumstances. This is particularly true for staff members and students of the opposite sex.

Muslim Practices

Prayers

Muslim students will usually be able to accommodate the demands of their academic programs and fulfil their prayer routines. While Muslims are encouraged to pray at the earliest possible time, they may delay a prayer to a time when they are less busy. Under extreme circumstances Muslims may combine two prayers into one.

However the Friday lunchtime prayer (1.15pm – 2pm) at the Mosque, is a very important time for Muslims and if it is possible to avoid lectures or examinations at that time, it would be appreciated.

Fasting

The fasting month of Ramadhan is very significant for Muslim students. The underlying purpose of the fast is to gain understanding of the situation of the hungry and poor people in the world. The fast should not be used as an excuse to avoid uncomfortable activity and it is not necessary for additional care to be offered to fasting students.

Breaking the fast during the evening is essential. Should students be required to attend classes in the evening, then consideration of how and when they can break their fast would be appreciated.