Practical strategies:
Organising culturally inclusive social events

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, departments, 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.

If you are responsible for organising a social event the Checklist for organising culturally inclusive social events below will provide you with some essential factors to consider to ensure the event is culturally inclusive.

Consultation and planning

General points

- Consider diverse cultural interests when planning, e.g. try to avoid dates that will coincide with religious festivals.
- 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

The physical environment of the University is not culturally neutral. Encourage staff and volunteers providing services such as shops, clubs and committees to use appropriate Indigenous Australian terminology. See General information: Indigenous Australian people and appropriate terminology for further information.

Acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land on which Curtin campuses are located is a way that non-Aboriginal people can show respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage and the ongoing relationship of traditional owners with the land.

A typical Acknowledgement of Country statement can be:

- I acknowledge that this event is being held on the traditional lands of the (appropriate group) people.
- I acknowledge that this event is being held on Aboriginal land and recognise the strength, resilience and capacity of Aboriginal people in this land.

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 students with mobility impairments, older people, people with medical needs, wheelchair and/or scooter users.

The fear of being accused by others of engaging in irreligious activities is quite common in many cultures. The physical setup of an event can be crucial to its success. Many students are concerned that should the alcohol and non-alcohol 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 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 culture, including Indigenous Australian people, throughout the campus. You could start displaying various signs, flags, brochures or posters in your area.
• Engage students for a variety of cultures to assist with creating a suitable layout at the chosen venue.

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 halal, kosher and vegetarian food, there is still considerable uncertainty on these 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.

Some elements of Jewish and Islamic dietary laws are common, while some are not. See <http://www.eat-halal.com/kosher/> for the 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 and grains such as wheat, rice, rye, barley, oats etc. See <http://www.eat-halal.com/halal-or-haram> for more information.

The basic elements of Jewish ‘kosher’ food are:
• no mixing of dairy and meat
• no pork or pork products
• no shell fish.


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 Australia Vegetarian Society’s website <http://www.veg-soc.org/cms/html/modules.php?name=Content&pa=list_pages_categories&cid=17>.

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, shell fish 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 vegie burgers.
• Label food, e.g. 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

When organising a social event ensure that you understand and adhere to the laws such as the Liquor Licencing Act, not serving minors and responsible service of alcohol as well as food health and safety regulations, insurance and security requirements. Contact Curtin Health and Safety <http://healthandsafety.curtin.edu.au/general/contact.cfm> at Curtin for more information on health and safety requirements. Also contact the Class Management Office <http://cmo.curtin.edu.au/contact.cfm> for information such as the requirements associated with liability of contractors rigging marquees on site. Consult with the Guild President <http://www.guild.curtin.edu.au/Common/ContentWM.aspx?CID=40> in relation to food on campus. Consult with Curtin Security <http://properties.curtin.edu.au/security/> to discuss security and parking needs.

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 e.g., cooling herbal teas from China, yoghurt mixes from India (e.g. lassi), sweet syrups from Malaysia. Also, ensure non-alcoholic options are available and make this clear in any advertising. Separating the areas for serving alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages is recommended.

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 the Flinders 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 languages in the advertising (to emphasise 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.
### Checklist for organising culturally inclusive social events

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<th><strong>Tick</strong></th>
<th><strong>Consultation</strong></th>
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<td>Consult with people who have knowledge of various cultures, including the START team.</td>
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<td>Include their advice in the planning and evaluation of your event.</td>
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<td>Ensure that the event adheres to the policies dictated by Curtin’s policies and procedures and other relevant legislation.</td>
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### Venue

- Choose a venue that is likely to be comfortable for all students.
- Display signs, posters or flags acknowledging that the Curtin community is diverse.
- Identify cultural meeting places throughout the campus.
- 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 the food served is halal or otherwise appropriate for them.
- Understand and adhere to the Liquor Licencing Act, not serving minors and responsible service of alcohol as well as food health and safety regulations, insurance and security requirements. Consult with Edusafe [http://edusafe.curtin.edu.au/general/contact.cfm] at Curtin for further information.
- Use separate areas for serving alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks, halal and non-halal food, and vegetarian and meat dishes.

### Marketing and encouraging student participation at social events

- Stress the importance of attending social events by emphasising the skills to be gained and the opportunities provided.
- Incorporate Indigenous Australian perspectives into Curtin’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 department, 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.