

## Bicultural Issues

### Feedback Report

#### Report on Maori Student Attendance at the New Zealand Psychological Society Annual Conference

29 - 31 August 2008  
Christchurch



Written by Karyn McRae, on behalf of Te Roopu Matai Hinengaro, Psychology Department, University of Waikato

#### Background

Maori staff and students of the Department of Psychology (University of Waikato) have actively supported and participated in the Annual New Zealand Psychological Society Conference. This is particularly so in the last five years. This cohort has formed a cohesive and visible collective lead by Maori and non-Maori staff of the Maori & Psychology Research Unit and the Department of Psychology. Attending these conferences for many students is not enough and actively engaging as presenters has become an important part of student academic development ensuring opportunities to engage with their research, peers and colleagues. The active presence of Maori students from Waikato University has inspired other Psychology Departments to consider ways in which they can promote and support their Maori students to conferences of the like.

When we consider early funding arrangements supporting Maori students to such conferences we think of staff salary recovery, project grants through the Maori and Psychology Research Unit and funding from the broader Psychology Department budget. This resourcing has been complemented in the past few years by student led fundraising activities and included planning committees made up of Maori students and the Kaupapa Maori Student Advisor (employee of the Psychology Department). Their role was to decide upon conference attendance, student interest and commitment, required monies and plans to generate necessary funds. The 2008 conference required funding to cover conference registration, marae accommodation, kai, airfares and transfers (Hamilton to Auckland airport return and Christchurch airport to Te Puna Wanaka Marae return). In addition to Maori student fundraising efforts, the roopu successfully pursued funding from other groups including Te Aka Matua (FASS Maori Support) through the Pro Vice Chancellor Maori Office and the Waikato Student Union (WSU).

The 2008 New Zealand Psychological Society conference in Christchurch was the fifth successive conference for this particular student roopu. This year's roopu comprised of 12 students from undergraduate, graduate and post graduate study and the student demographic has broadened in recent years to include Pacifica and non Maori students from psychology and international students from Spain and Japan. This inclusiveness reflects the roopu's recognition that our strength is not only in our culture but in the culture of others as well<sup>1</sup>.

A copy of this report will be given to Te Aka Matua, the Pro Vice Chancellor Maori Office and the WSU in appreciation and acknowledgement of their financial support.

#### Aims

The overall aim of attending the conference was to support successful participation of Maori and Pacifica students in their academic and professional development.

Specific aims were to:

1. Gain exposure to different areas within the discipline of psychology
2. Provide an opportunity for students to meet psychologists (both practising and academics)
3. Facilitate whanaungatanga amongst roopu members, and
4. Support Waikato student presenters

#### Haerenga feedback

Students that attended the conference as part of our roopu were asked for their thoughts and comments about how their participation has contributed to meeting the aforementioned goals. Their comments have been provided here and are noted under the four goals.

<sup>1</sup> While we are interested in supporting other groups, they are encouraged to seek funding for themselves as the focus of fundraising activities resides in supporting Maori students first and foremost.

## **Exposure to different areas of Psychology**

Students were exposed to ten different streams throughout the conference: Disorder and Health; Bicultural; Education/Developmental; Anxiety Disorders; Community; ACC; Industrial/Organisation; Environmental; Forensic; Social Psychology and Clinical. Not all of these areas of psychology are taught at Waikato, so student exposure to these affords them the opportunity to broaden their sights as to the area of psychology they may like to pursue at graduate level or as a practitioner. Feedback from the roopu highlights how conference events such as this provide learning opportunities and career directions for budding psychologists. As well as inspiration and drive for further academic success.

*"The connection and networking I encountered at the conference has had a profound effect on my ability to discern which area within psychology I would like to head into. Without the opportunity to be part of the conference I doubt that this clarity would have been established. I am extremely grateful for the experience". (3rd Year Student)*

*"Watching and listening to the presentations was an eye opener. Not everything presented was new to me but the way some presenters worded concepts and ideas encourages me to think about things in a different way. All of the presentations contributed greatly to developing and enhancing my learning and understanding of wellbeing". (Honours Student)*

## **Opportunity to meet other psychologists (practitioners and academics)**

Attending the conference facilitated the opportunity for students to dialogue, interact, and meet with academic and practicing psychologists. Students experienced this through; 1) active participation in workshops, 2) presenting their own research, 3) one on one and group discussions, and 4) dialogue with presenters and attendees throughout the conference.

The following korero reflects the opportunities, insights and benefits gained from attending the conference, and how these opportunities reaffirm student's chosen academic direction.

*"The conference enabled me to learn about the current themes, trends and issues being researched and addressed by fellow academics and practitioners. It also provided the opportunity to meet with experts and authors to discuss issues that I have only read about in journal articles". (Masters Student)*

## **Facilitate Whanaungatanga**

Social support plays a crucial role in Maori and Pacifica student success within academia. Attending the conference facilitated the; 1) strengthening of existing relationships and established new relationships within our student roopu, and 2) built networks with other students/academics/practitioners.

Students' experience/s of social support is expressed in the following korero. It positions whanaungatanga, one form of social support, as pivotal to students' academic success.

*"I travelled down to Christchurch as part of a group from Waikato University who I now refer to as 'whanau'. I say with absolute confidence that without the whanau my experience of the conference would not have been as fulfilling as it was. It gave me the opportunity to connect with the whanau (this was my first time with the whanau) and allowed me to see the support that was there for me and how willing this support was given. Knowing that there is support and role models there for me has inspired me to strive higher in regards to my Honours degree. More importantly, working together as part of this group has given me inner strength and motivation to want to give back the support I have received and more importantly, stand up and initiate support for other students who are coming through the academic system". (Honours Student)*

*"Attending the conference with my whanau from Waikato University has taught me the value of social cohesion which has contributed greatly to my wellbeing. I left Christchurch on a high because I was full of motivation and inspiration and also because I left feeling like a part of a strong Waikato University family". (Honours Student)*

*"I consider these people (the roopu) to be whanau and without their ongoing support and nurture I would not be able to endure the challenges that I face constantly in this world of academia". (3rd Year Student)*

## **Supporting Waikato student presentations**

Supporting our student presenters has always been an important part of the roopu attending these events as this forum provides an opportunity for many to put themselves and their research 'out there' for scrutiny. Five students (two doctoral, two post graduate diploma and one masters) presented research at the conference. The

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streams they presented in were Bi-cultural, Community, Organisational and Environmental.

### **Those who gave presentations**

While students are able to observe and learn from watching other speakers, there are huge gains made to students' confidence both within themselves and their research.

*"Presenting my MA proposal provided the opportunity for experts in my field (organisational psychology) to offer advice and critique my research strategy. I was amazed by the positive and constructive feedback given by the audience. I was given insight into the possible difficulties I may encounter, literature sources, critique of my methodology, and contacts of people who are completing similar research topics to mine".*  
(Masters Student)

### **Those who observed student presentations**

Having Maori graduate students of Waikato present to an audience of peers meant Waikato undergraduates were inspired to consider the same. This positive role modelling as student presenters set a standard for undergraduates to consider as real and possible (and also inevitable). The following korero from an undergraduate student sums up the experience.

*"I always thought presenting was about getting your stuff out there, I never thought about how it provides you with the opportunity to learn more about your own research or how it cements what you already know".* (2nd Year Student)

### **Unexpected and additional benefits of attendance**

Students' academic development was enhanced by all the presentations of the conference. Students' knowledge of psychological theories and models as well as research methodologies and processes reaffirmed their chosen pathway. This was highlighted by the connectedness students felt with one presenter (Suzanne Pitama) and her model (Meihana Model) on how psychology and health in particular could better work with and for Maori. This is what they had to say.

*"I briefly looked around the room when Suzanne Pitama was presenting and I saw that every person was captured by, and engrossed in, her presentation. What she presented located Maori, their values and aspirations at the centre. How she presented was clear, concise and most importantly simple and easy to follow. I thought*

*to myself, this is the kind of Maori presenter/ lecturer I aspire to be".* (Masters Student)

*"One presentation/workshop that stood out for me at this year's Annual New Zealand Psychological Society's Conference was presented by Suzanne Pitama. Her presentation on the Meihana Model was in short, enlightening and inspiring. An example that most stood out for me is how when working with youth Pitama noted that when asked to bring whanau, youth tend to bring friends. She highlighted that this demonstrates a support network of utmost importance in their lives and should not be dismissed because they do not fall under the traditional category of biological family. I most enjoyed examples like this because I think it acknowledges the diversity of Maori rather than constricting Maori clients/whanau on a spectrum of 'Maoriness' which is inherently problematic and racist to boot".*  
(Doctoral Student)

### **Conclusion**

The consensus from the roopu is that attending the conference either reaffirmed students' decision or encouraged students' to pursue higher academic studies and a career in psychology. The conference facilitated insights into the diverse opportunities offered by psychology and affirmed or clarified direction for others. The whanaungatanga experienced by the roopu during the conference was highly valued, and the student feedback recognises the importance a Maori social support network is in creating a sense of whanaungatanga that encourages high academic standards. By attending events like the NZPS conference, the roopu challenges the discipline to consider the needs of Maori not just as a client group but a developing workforce as well.

*Queries about this report can be directed to:*

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