



# Muslim Students' Religious and Cultural Experiences in the Micro-Publics of University Campuses in NSW

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- Are Muslim university students in NSW experiencing alienation and discrimination?
- Does the ambient Islamophobia of Western societies feed into isolation and non-belonging on campus?
- Can positive experience on campus assuage the effects of ambient Islamophobia, or do they provide a temporary respite?
- Do Muslim graduates emerge as more religious or less religious than when they first started their degree?
- Are they more or less religiously identifiable?
- If students graduate as more religious then these micro-publics in Australia might be better characterised as post-secular rather than secular.

- Micro-Publics makes reference to public places (e.g. parks, sporting fields, malls,...) where there are everyday mundane cross-cultural encounters.
- Post-Secular makes reference to the presence and influence of religion in the public sphere within a secular framework.





- Survey (2013-2014):
- 36 Questions on Qualtrics
- Promoted through flyers and Facebook.
- 447 participants accessed it on-line
- 324 valid survey responses.
- 51.5% were women, 48.5% men
- Close to 90% aged between 17 and 30 years.
- 80% domestic students, 20% international students.



**Table 1.** Country of birth (top 10), Muslim university student survey respondents, NSW, 2013–14,  $N = 288$

	<i>n</i>	%
Australia	148	51.4
Pakistan	21	7.3
Bangladesh	21	7.3
Lebanon	14	4.9
Iraq	13	4.5
Saudi Arabia	8	2.8
Afghanistan	9	3.1
Indonesia	9	3.1
Malaysia	6	2.1
Egypt	5	1.7

Source: Muslims on Campus Survey: University Life for Muslim Students in Australia.



**Table 2.** Non-English language spoken at home (top 10), Muslim university student survey respondents, NSW, 2013–14,  $N = 263$

First language listed in answer	<i>n</i>	Percentage of the valid sample
Arabic (and others)	118	44.9
Urdu (and others)	34	12.9
Bengali (and others)	30	11.4
Turkish only	17	6.5
Indonesian (and others)	14	5.3
Dari (and others)	11	4.2
Hindi only	8	3.0
Malay	7	2.7
Pashto (and others)	7	2.7
Persian only	2	0.8

Source: Muslims on Campus Survey: University Life for Muslim Students in Australia.

- One quarter of the participants had at least one parent who was born in Turkey or Lebanon.
  - The most common place of birth for participants' mothers and fathers was Lebanon, Pakistan and Bangladesh.
  - Although 80 per cent of the participants had identified themselves as 'local' (not international), only 16.1 per cent of them indicated that they only speak English at home.
- This indicates the strong multicultural, international, and polyglot backgrounds of Muslim university students from this survey

**Table 3.** Daily prayer habits, Muslim university students, NSW, 2013–14, *N* = 282

	In general		On campus	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
All five prayers on time	97	34.4	36	12.8
All prayers but sometimes not on time	90	31.9	27	9.6
Less than five times	43	15.2	92	32.6
Friday prayer only	16	5.7	19	6.7
Less than once per week	16	5.4	28	9.9
Never	20	7.1	80	28.4

Source: Muslims on Campus Survey: University Life for Muslim Students in Australia.





**Table 4.** Attending mosque and multi-faith facilities on campus, Muslim university students, NSW, 2013–14,  $N = 280$

	How often do you attend mosque?		How often do you attend a prayer room or multi-faith facilities on campus?	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Daily	19	6.8	50	17.9
Almost daily	29	10.4	50	17.9
Weekly	66	23.6	35	12.5
Occasionally	127	45.4	69	24.6
Never	39	13.9	76	27.1

Source: Muslims on Campus Survey: University Life for Muslim Students in Australia.

- Ninety per cent of participants recognised the importance of religion in their everyday life.
- Sample is highly religious.
- The majority (close to 70%) answered ‘sometimes’ and ‘most of the time’ to the question: ‘Are you identifiable as a Muslim (e.g. the way you dress, etc.)?’
- Close to 37% of students have become more religious since their enrolment at university (40% for women and 33% for men; 32% for international students and 38% for domestic ones).
- Close to 49% remained with the same level of religiosity, and 7% felt they had become less religious.

→ NSW higher education institutions are not micro-publics where students will certainly become less religious.

→ Overall, most students are confident enough to perform their religion and be identified as a Muslim on campus. This demonstrates the robustness of the religious diversity and tolerance on NSW university campuses.

→ Universities in NSW are providing religious facilities that are frequently used by a section of Muslim students.

**Table 7.** Experiences of discrimination due to religious identity, Muslim university students, NSW, 2013–14, *N* = 254

	Never (%)	Hardly ever (%)	Sometimes (%)	Often (%)	Very often (%)	Not applicable (%)
In your workplace or when seeking employment	23.9	23.9	18.5	9.5	9.1	15.2
In education, i.e. at a school, TAFE, university	27.2	34.6	26.3	9.9	0.8	1.2
When renting or buying a house	31.7	23.9	14.8	4.1	2.5	23.0
In any dealings with the police	33.3	22.3	10.7	6.6	7.0	19.3
At a shop or restaurant	28.8	30.0	28.0	4.5	5.3	3.3
In accessing health services	44.4	30.5	11.9	4.1	2.9	6.2
On the internet	29.2	24.3	20.6	5.8	15.6	4.5
By being called names or similarly insulted	26.7	26.7	25.5	9.9	8.6	2.5

Source: Muslims on Campus Survey: University Life for Muslim Students in Australia.



**Table 8.** Discrimination experienced by Muslim university students, by international and local students, and gender, NSW, 2013–14

How often have YOU experienced discrimination because of your RELIGION in the following situation: in education, i.e. at a school, TAFE, university?

	Never	Hardly ever	Sometimes	Often	Very often	Not applicable	Total
International	13 (33.3%)	12 (30.7%)	10 (25.6%)	2 (5.2%)	0	2 (5.2%)	39 (100%)
Local	53 (25.9%)	72 (35.4%)	54 (26.5%)	22 (10.8%)	2 (0.9%)	1 (0.5%)	204 (100%)
Total	66 (27.1%)	84 (34.6%)	64 (26.3%)	24 (9.8%)	2 (0.9%)	3 (1.3%)	243 (100%)
Female	34 (26.2%)	45 (34.6%)	35 (26.9%)	16 (12.4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	130 (100%)
Male	32 (28.3%)	39 (34.5%)	29 (25.6%)	8 (7.1%)	2 (1.8%)	3 (2.7%)	113 (100%)
Total	66 (27.1%)	84 (34.5%)	64 (26.4%)	24 (9.8%)	2 (0.9%)	3 (1.3%)	243 (100%)

Source: Muslims on Campus Survey: University Life for Muslim Students in Australia.

- Almost half (44 per cent) reported being called names or insulted on the basis of religious identity.
- The setting where Muslims students were least likely to experience discrimination was while accessing health services, and the next safest settings were educational services.
- The internet was the sphere of life where the greatest proportion of Muslims said they experienced discrimination very often.
- Female and local students tend to report a higher level of discrimination in educational settings.

- Muslim students as having strong religiosity
- At ease with showing external signs of their religion.
- Attending a university does not appear to reduce religious commitment.
- Positive attitudes about cultural diversity on campuses (close to 90%).
- This positive attitudes towards diversity suggest a resilience to the negative encounters to which they are exposed, and which may reflect a sensibility cultivated within a post-secular micro-public in Australia.



Table 1. Campus location, NSW, 2013–2014.

Location	N	%
City	89	27
Regional	19	6
Suburb	215	67
Total	323	100

Source: Muslims on Campus Survey: University Life for Muslim Students in NSW, Australia.



**Table 6.** Importance of religion in daily life, Muslim university students, NSW, 2013–2014, *N* = 281.

	<i>N</i> total	%	<i>N</i> city	%	<i>N</i> suburbs	%	<i>N</i> regional	%
Very important	189	67	50	66	125	67	14	82
Important	65	23	14	19	49	26	1	6
Somewhat important	22	8	11	15	10	5	1	6
Not important at all	5	2	0	0	4	2	1	6
Total	281	100	76	100	188	100	17	100

Source: Muslims on Campus Survey: University Life for Muslim Students in NSW, Australia.

**Table 7.** Identifiable Muslim, Muslim university students, NSW, 2013–2014, *N* = 277.

	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i> city	%	<i>N</i> suburbs	%	<i>N</i> regional	%
Most of the time	131	47	32	43	91	49	8	47
Yes, sometimes	62	23	18	24	41	22	3	18
No	84	30	24	33	54	29	6	35
Total	277	100	74	100	186	100	17	100

Source: Muslims on Campus Survey: University Life for Muslim Students in NSW, Australia.

**Table 8.** Religious perspectives changed since attending the university, Muslim university students, NSW, 2013–2014,  $N = 258$ .

	<i>N</i> total	%	<i>N</i> city	%	<i>N</i> suburbs	%	<i>N</i> regional	%
Became more religious	95	37	28	39	60	35	7	47
Became less religious	17	6	6	8	10	6	1	6
Remained same	126	49	29	41	90	52	7	47
Not sure	20	8	8	12	12	7	0	0
Total	323	100	71	100	172		15	100

Source: Muslims on Campus Survey: University Life for Muslim Students in NSW, Australia.

**Table 9.** Muslim students' attitudes on community relations and culture across types of university, NSW, 2013–2014.

	<i>N</i>		<i>N</i>		<i>N</i>		<i>N</i>	
	total	%	city	%	suburbs	%	regional	%
Do you agree that there is a drinking culture among university students (agree and strongly agree), <i>N</i> = 258	161	62	59	83	90	52	12	80
Do you disagree or agree that (agree and strongly agree)...								
there is racial prejudice in the on-line discussions that you are doing for your university subjects, <i>N</i> = 254	19	7	7	10	11	7	1	6
there is conflict between religious groups on your campus, <i>N</i> = 254	21	8	5	7	14	8	2	13
there is conflict between atheist and religious groups on your campus, <i>N</i> = 254	34	13	9	13	22	13	3	19
there is conflict between Muslim groups on campus, <i>N</i> = 254	40	16	13	19	26	10	1	6

Source: Muslims on Campus Survey: University Life for Muslim Students in NSW, Australia.

Bearing in mind the limitations of this study:

→ regional campuses are more likely to make a Muslim student more religious.

→ There is more tension between Muslim groups in a city campus than in a regional one.

→ The perception of a drinking culture on campus is also perceived to be stronger for Muslim students from city and regional campuses, than for suburban ones.

→ Various processes of secularisation and de-secularisation found on different types of university campuses.