Session: Building connection and trust (offline part)

Aim of session: The session explores, from the psychological point of view, the importance of being part of the group and how the universities can respond to this need by organising integration activities. The session should also present and promote various types of activities that support building connection and trust.

Material needed: flipchart, flipchart paper, markers, post sticks, blue and black pens

Time of session: approximately 1,30 hour during a physical training

Description of session: warm-up task, brainstorming, discussion, working in groups, presentation

In the beginning of the session the participants should be split into 3-4 groups. Each group member gets a piece of paper with the sentences to complete (attachment 1). During the session the participants are made to work in different groups during each task, to give them an experience of how students feel in the new environment.

Instructions for the participants:

Each of you gets a piece of paper with some sentences which needs to be completed with names. To do that you should firstly search for matching people in your group (write names in blue). If you are not able to complete the sentences within your group, then take a black pen and search for people from different group/groups. You have 10 minutes to do that.

The exercise is followed with the discussion with the participants based on the following questions:

- Was it hard for you to find the people matching the same criteria?
- Was it stressful for you to search for them?
- Did you focus on the task or on your fear that this person is a stranger and you not feel self-confident enough to start a conversation?
- In your opinion is it important to integrate foreign students with local student?

The groups is given the post sticks in two different colours with information that :

- On green post sticks they should write strong sides of integration process of students.
- On orange post sticks they should write week sides/challenges of integration process of students.
- Is it easy to integrate the students in your institution with the local environment?

During this activity the focus is to show the benefits of being a member of a community. People feel more secure when they know that they have others around them who share their goals and care about their progress. That is one reason why it can be so stressful for students to make decision of applying for student exchange programmes and move to a different country for a mobility. It is important to remember how hard it is for the students to be far away from the formal and informal groups they belong to every day. For the same reason, it is a fundamental task for us as administrative staff and teachers to give students the opportunity to belong to the groups and feel as a part of the community in our universities.

Presentation of good practice:

Hosting institution should prepare examples of activities from their institution that help building the group identity between incoming students from different countries and cultures.

After the presentation the participants are asked to provide 3 strong and 3 weak sides of that activity from their point of view.

An example: Christmas Guest action consisting in inviting the international students for Christmas by the members of the university community so that they could learn about the culture and tradition. The experience was shared and discussed from two viewpoints: hosting family and the student.
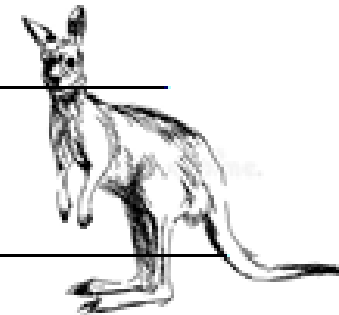
Attach 1

Find the person who....

Has the same eyes color _____

Name is on the same letter_____

Has the same foot size_____

Was born in the same month_____

Is the same height_____

Has brother/sister or is the only child_____