

Professor Brian Schmidt
Vice-Chancellor
10 East Road, Chancelry Building
The Australian National University
ACT 2601 Australia

Monday, April 11th, 2016

Dear Vice-Chancellor Brian Schmidt,

We are writing to express our concern about proposed cuts to the School of Culture, History, and Language at the Australian National University. As faculty members of the Council on Southeast Asian Studies at Yale University, the oldest area studies program of its kind in the United States, we are intimately engaged in the study of Southeast Asian culture and society, both as teachers and researchers. For this reason, we can speak with experience about the outstanding and globally important reputation of ANU faculty in the field of Asian studies, as well as the far-reaching impact of the language and area studies training offered by the School of Culture, History, and Language. We make no exaggeration when we say that the programs being threatened are not only important to ANU's international reputation, but are in fact globally important resources with far-reaching impacts felt all the way around the world. In the world of Southeast Asian Studies, the ANU's School of Culture, History, and Language is a central player in the field. It is what we Southeast Asianists, referencing the ancient mandala polities of the region, would call an "exemplary center."

The reputation of the faculty and the language and area studies training in the threatened programs at ANU has been built up over a long period of sustained commitment to careful research, study, and program development. The list of faculty in this program both current and emeritus reads like a "who's who" of our field. This is no minor resource, but one of the preeminent research and teaching resources of its kind. Scholars across North America look to the faculty and language teachers there as guiding lights in the field. Their works have opened paths of inquiry for generations of scholars and have quite literally defined the field. When North American graduate students complete their PhD dissertations in Southeast Asian Studies, for example, the ANU is recognized as a primary destination for future intellectual engagement. North American scholars regularly accept academic positions in Canberra specifically because they are drawn by the strong research reputation and the famed quality of intellectual engagement. We can assure you that they are moving to Canberra for one reason: because the strong attraction of the scholarly community that has been thriving in the School of Culture, History, and Language has drawn them there.

The proposal to cut these particular programs seems out of synch with developments in global research interests within academia as well as with more pragmatic concerns that are central to geopolitical and economic developments around the world, and especially for Australia. At a time when the world is making a so-called "pivot to Asia," when Asian commerce is increasingly central to global markets, and when geopolitical developments in the region command global attention, it seems especially important for ANU to support programs that will enable the university to make significant contributions to understanding the region. It takes very little effort to recognize the degree to which Asia is most definitely rising. One would expect to see ANU rise along with the opportunities and build on rather than reduce its existing strengths in the field. North American universities, for example, are currently expanding course offerings in Asian Studies and even establishing campuses and collaborations across Asia. They are also receiving record donations from alumni in Asian countries that add resources not only to Asian Studies but to programs in business, law, and medicine. These efforts have only been made possible by building on the shoulders of scholars on these campuses who have had long-term engagement in Asian societies, like the ANU.

This is a global trend. For example, a donor recently decided to give twenty million pounds to the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. The donor announced that he had benefitted from courses in Southeast Asian art history and felt that they had changed his life. The faculty at ANU have similarly changed the lives of many scholars, many who have gone on to leadership positions around the world. A prudent financial decision would be to invest in, and further support the work of your world class research and language training faculty.

Sincerely,

Michael R. Dove
Chair, Council on Southeast Asian Studies, Yale University

George N. Appell, PhD (ANU '65)
President FIREBIRD FOUNDATION FOR ANTHROPOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Ruth Barnes, D.Phil.
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