

The Southeast Asia Council of the Association for Asian Studies

April 11, 2016

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

Dear Vice-Chancellor Brian Schmidt,

We are writing on behalf of the Southeast Asia Council of the Association of Asian Studies to express our surprise and concern at the proposals for substantial downsizing of what we know to be one of the premier international centers for the study of Asia and Southeast Asia in particular. We act as the official council representing Southeast Asia at the Association for Asian Studies, the largest international body of scholars of Asia, representing over 8000 scholars worldwide.

ANU has earned an enviable reputation as a premier center for the study of Southeast Asia through the work of the School of Culture, History and Language. ANU's administration over past decades has demonstrated leadership and a vision of the importance of Asia for life in the 21st century by building one of the strongest centers for Asian Studies in the world. We only wish that others would follow this example. The school offers a depth in the study of Southeast Asian cultures that is rivaled by few programs in the world. It brings together excellent scholarship from a diversity of disciplinary perspectives (history, anthropology, archeology, literature, linguistics, religious studies, cultural studies) unparalleled by any other program internationally.

The School's faculty represent some of the most respected names in Southeast Asian studies with award-winning publications and reputations for serving in leadership positions in the field internationally. The School has also earned a reputation for advancing the future of the field by hiring some of the strongest young scholars and promoting their research careers. This means that many have looked to ANU as a leader to envision the future of Southeast Asian Studies. Given this international reputation, our members were baffled to hear that ANU was considering substantial cuts to the School.

The core of this excellence in research and student training is language study. The choice to de-prioritize, or de-professionalize, language instruction particularly for Southeast Asian languages that are offered by few other institutions, poses a troubling threat to the future of scholarship. Not only does Australia's future lay in greater interactions with Asia and thus in students trained in Southeast Asian languages, language study forms the core of innovative and insightful future policy and research work.

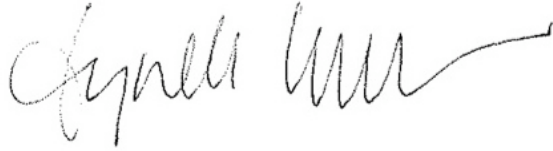
We are concerned not just for what the losses will mean for our colleagues and students in Australia, but also for their impact on the international field. Generations of the scholars we represent in the US, Canada, Europe and Southeast Asia have been inspired and shaped by the scholarship that ANU's CHL has produced. Your training, graduates and your faculty's research outputs have

substantial impact throughout the field. Substantial cuts in School will have detrimental effects on the future of scholarship for both specific countries (Burma, Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia) and on Southeast Asian Studies as a whole.

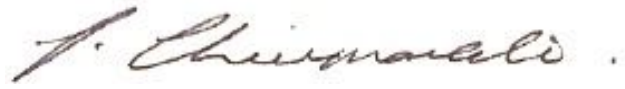
The international reputation that ANU has earned as a leader in the field of Asian Studies and Southeast Asian studies in particular has taken decades to develop. We would hate to see this reputation jeopardized for the sake of short-term financial rationalization. We would encourage you rather to build on the strengths of the School and the international standing and the respect it rightly brings the ANU as a whole.

Sincerely,

Members of the Southeast Asia Council of the Association of Asian Studies



Tyrell Haberkorn, Australian National University



Pattaratorn Chirapravati, California State University, Sacramento



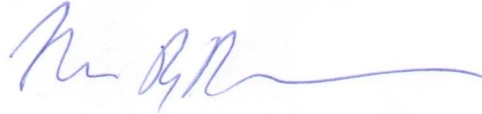
Alicia Turner, York University, Toronto



Erik Harms, Yale University, New Haven



Ian Baird, University of Wisconsin, Madison



Tom Pepinsky, Cornell University, Ithaca



Wen-Chin Chang, Academia Sinica, Taiwan

C. Michele Thompson, Southern Connecticut State University, New Haven

Oona Paredes, National University of Singapore

cc: Professor Veronica Taylor, Dean, College of Asia and the Pacific; Professor Simon Haberle, Director of the School of Culture, History, and Language.