



Asian Studies Program, School of Languages and Cultures
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

7 April 2016

**To Professor Brian Schmidt,
Vice Chancellor, Australian National University**

We the staff and students of Asian Studies and affiliated departments at the University of Sydney are writing to express our serious concerns over the proposed changes to the School of Culture, History and Language (CHL) in the College of Asia and the Pacific at the Australian National University (ANU). A number of the undersigned are graduates of CHL. We are particularly worried about the impact these changes will have on staff and students at ANU, on Asian Studies throughout Australia, and on Australia's engagement with the region.

At a time when Australia is looking to orient itself further to the Asia Pacific region, cuts to this School could have disastrous effects. If Australia is meaningfully to engage with its neighbours as part of its participation in the Asia-Pacific region it depends on knowledge of Asia. The most recent of the many reports on Australia and Asia, the Henry Report, *Australia in the Asian Century*, emphasised that, "As a nation we also need to broaden and deepen our understanding of Asian cultures and languages, to become more Asia literate." (p.2). Part of the ANU's foundation is to serve as Australia's national centre for Asian Studies. If the ANU cannot provide this knowledge base, no one else will. While our university is currently making a major investment in supporting research and teaching on Southeast Asia and China and has maintained its support for Indonesian, in the last decade Hindi, Thai and Vietnamese Studies have disappeared, and Sanskrit can only be maintained through making use of the ANU's on-line offerings. Many other universities, including three in the greater Sydney area, have ceased teaching Indonesian.

The proposed changes at the ANU directly threaten the integrity of language courses. Already Tibetan and Javanese have been cut. Now other languages such as Burmese, Vietnamese, Thai, Hindi and Sanskrit will only be taught by short-term, rather than permanent staff, mainly through on-line offerings. Anyone who has studied a language knows how important face-to-face teaching is, and also that maintaining programs depends on staff security of employment. It looks like only one continuing member of staff will be left as the dedicated teacher of Indonesian language. Cumulatively, these are the languages of 1.5 billion people, including people in our multi-cultural society. To downgrade these languages would be to severely lessen our understanding and interactions with a major part of the world.

In the university sector, to divorce teaching and research is to weaken both. In most rankings, the ANU is the top or one of the top three universities in Australia. In the Asian region, that enviable reputation is based on the long-standing commitment of research on Asia, including the training of many Asian leaders. Undermining the critical mass of Asianists, and lowering morale through the process of cutting jobs or removing tenure,

School of Languages and Cultures
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Rm No 637, Brennan Building A18
The University of Sydney
NSW 2006 Australia

T +61 2 9351 2878
M +61 420 963 886
F +61 2 9351 2319
E adrian.vickers@sydney.edu.au
W
<http://sydney.edu.au/arts/slc/staff/profiles/adrian.vickers.php>

ABN 15 211 513 464
CRICOS 00026A



will have a direct impact on the esteem in which the ANU is held. The loss of staff would also be a loss of collective experience and engagement with the region. Each staff member brings to the ANU their own academic networks and in-country knowledge, which is vital both for international collaboration and for the running of short-term exchanges, such as those supported by the New Colombo Plan scheme. The threatened cuts would also be cuts in relationships with Asian universities and communities.

The threatened cuts are already having a direct impact on students, and their efforts to support CHL are admirable. While it may seem that our university would be the beneficiary of students leaving the ANU, this would not really be the case, as we, along with other universities in Australia, benefit from on-going collaboration with our colleagues in CHL, in areas such as seminars, joint research grant application, and the largely-undocumented collegial activities of thesis marking and sharing of intellectual resources. All these would be threatened by the proposed cuts.

We recognise that Federal funding formulae are resulting in serious underfunding of Australian universities. Nevertheless, within universities there are always opportunities for cross-subsidisation, for example most Faculties of Medicine in Australia would not be able to exist as self-sustaining units. The discipline of Critical Accountancy Studies has demonstrated how budgets and accounts can be manipulated as tools of power, and while we have received only varying second-hand versions of the budgetary situation, it seems that claims of a “deficit” cannot be taken on face value unless the whole of the university is taken into account. In addition, surely Asian languages and cultures are a vital national priority, and cannot be reduced to a monetary calculation.

We call on the ANU management to understand the greater value that CHL provides the ANU community, its importance to Asian Studies in Australia and its significant role in strengthening Australia’s ties with the Asia Pacific.

Signed,

Professor Adrian Vickers FAHA, Director, Asian Studies Program
Dr Mark Allon, Lecturer in Sanskrit and Buddhist Studies
Dr Olivier Ansart FAHA, Chair, Japanese Studies Department
Dr Lionel Babicz, Lecturer in Japanese Studies
Dr Siobhan Campbell, Research Associate, Asian Studies
Dr Thushara Dibley, Deputy Director, Sydney Southeast Asia Centre
Dr Dwi Novi Djenar, Chair, Indonesian Studies Department
Professor Michele Ford, Director, Sydney Southeast Asia Centre
Dr Keith Foulcher, Honorary Fellow, Indonesian Studies Department
Dr Vanessa Hearman, Lecturer, Indonesian Studies
Dr Su-Kyoung Hwang, Lecturer in Korean Studies
Dr Chiew Hui Ho, Lecturer in Buddhist Studies
Dr Nerida Jarkey, Senior Lecturer in Japanese Studies
Dr Mats Karlsson, Senior Lecture in Japanese Studies
Professor Michael Lewis, FAHA, Japanese Studies
Dr Duk-Soo Park, Senior Lecturer in Korean Studies
Dr Rebecca Suter, Senior Lecturer in Japanese Studies
Dr Wei Wang, Lecturer in Chinese Studies
Peter Worsley, Emeritus Professor of Indonesian Studies
Dr Seiko Yasumoto, Senior Lecture in Japanese Studies
Dr Xiaohuan Zhao, Senior Lecture in Chinese Studies



Professor Vivienne Bath, Director of the Centre for Asian and Pacific Law
Dr David Brophy, Lecturer in Modern Chinese History, NTEU Branch Committee
Professor Linda Connor, Chair, Department of Anthropology
Helen Dunstan, Emeritus Professor of Chinese Studies
Dr Robert Fisher, Senior Lecture in Human Geography
Dr Holly High, Senior Research Fellow, Department of Anthropology
Professor Meaghan Morris, Department of Gender and Cultural Studies
Dr Robbie Peters, Director of Development Studies, Department of Anthropology
Dr Jane Chi Hyun Park, Senior Lecturer, Department of Gender and Cultural Studies
Dr Andres Rodriguez, Lecturer in Chinese History
Dr Aim Shingpeng, Lecture in Comparative Politics, Dept of Government and International Relations
Dr Stephen Whiteman, Lecturer in Art History

Steve Dodds, PhD student
Sharon Elkind, DSS student
Natali Pearson, PhD student
Wayan Jarrah Sastrawan, MA (Research) student

Jermaine Craig, Honours student
Sayumi Hansen, Honours student
Vivian Honan, Honours student
Kip Maddox, Honours student
Shiffa Samad, Honours student
Michael Varnay, Honours student
Lauren Waring, Honours student
John Wilton, Honours student
Wendy Zhang, Honours student