

# VSG



The Vietnam Studies Group  
A Section of the Association for Asian Studies

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

Thursday, April 07, 2016

Dear Vice-Chancellor Brian Schmidt,

We, members of the Vietnam Study Group (VSG) of the Association for Asian Studies, itself the largest association for the study of Asia in the world, have long admired the quality of Vietnamese and Asian studies at Australian National University (ANU). Australia has shown a remarkable national commitment to the study of Southeast Asia. This national commitment spanning over six decades has made Asian studies at ANU globally respected and admired. It is precisely our admiration that leads us to express consternation about the proposed cuts to ANU's School of Culture, History, and Language.

In this letter, we would like to concentrate on ANU's reputation and past accomplishments in Vietnamese and Asian studies as well as the potential impact of cuts on future directions.

1) **Reputation:** Over the last six decades, ANU has built up an enviable reputation as one of the leading universities in the world to study Asia. The School of Culture, History, and Language is a key element of ANU's global reputation for excellence in Asian and Vietnamese Studies. Reputation takes decades to acquire, and requires continued investment to maintain. Without investment, it fades away. At a time when Asia is becoming more important, not less, it seems shortsighted to cut excellence.

2) **Accomplishments:** Reputation is built on accomplishments. Staff members in the School of Culture, History, and Language have both trained students and brought Vietnamese and Asian issues to both academic and policy audiences. (For example, school staff members have been involved in the Vietnam Update conferences, which are targeted at an academic, business, NGO, and government audiences.) Graduates of the School of Culture, History, and Language, or its predecessor, have both consulted for the Australian government or worked for it, drawing on their language and historical expertise gained at ANU.

3) **Our own members:** The proposed cuts to the School of Culture, History, and Language could affect some of our members. Vietnam Studies is a small field, and some of its leading practitioners, like Dr. Philip Taylor, Dr. Li

Tana, Dr. David Marr, and Dr. Ben Kerkvliet are members of the Vietnam Studies Group and of ANU's School of Culture, History, and Language.

4) **Future needs:** Looking to the future, Australia will face increasing need for individuals trained in Asian languages (including Southeast Asian languages!) to help the country understand the broader Asia-Pacific region. We need more experts, not fewer, who can learn Vietnamese and other Asian languages and can contribute to international understanding of these issues.

5) **Impact on future philanthropy:** The Vietnam Studies Group includes members who have had both scholarly and administrative experience. Some of us have been at universities that have undergone restructuring or painful cuts. Cuts can affect outside perceptions of a university's commitment to an area of study. Drastic cuts to the School of Culture, History, and Language would send the message of a diminished university and national commitment to Asia, which in turn could affect outside support from donors and foundations.

In conclusion, we respectfully suggest you to build on a strength of ANU, not gut it.

Sincerely,

*Christina E. Firpo*

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