



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

**Sydney
Southeast
Asia Centre
*2012-22***





We recognise and pay respect to the Elders and communities – past, present, and emerging – of the lands that the University of Sydney's campuses stand on. For thousands of years they have shared and exchanged knowledges across innumerable generations for the benefit of all.

Sydney Southeast Asia Centre *2012-22*

What we do

Why Southeast Asia?	4
SSEAC's approach	5
Our members	6
On the ground in Southeast Asia	7

Supporting research excellence

Enabling high-quality research	9
Advancing disciplinary excellence	22
Publishing highlights	27
Fostering multidisciplinary teams	28
Sharpening skills	32

Driving engagement

Flagship forums	36
Public events	38
Online seminar series	40
Sharing our members' research	42
Leadership training	44
Showcasing the University	46

Building Southeast Asia literacy

Postgraduate support	49
Undergraduate support	51
Beyond the classroom	52
Embedding Southeast Asia in the curriculum	54

“SSEAC brings together scholars and students who share a passion for Southeast Asia. We help drive research that is genuinely collaborative and that makes a real difference in the region.”

Professor Michele Ford
Director,
Sydney Southeast Asia Centre





What we do

SSEAC works to put the University of Sydney at the forefront of Australia's academic engagement with Southeast Asia. Bringing a truly multidisciplinary approach, the Centre acts as a catalyst for new research, partnerships and initiatives that connect people across disciplinary boundaries and address real-world problems.

Why Southeast Asia?

Southeast Asia matters to Australia.

With more than 680 million people, Southeast Asia is home to almost 10% of the world's population. Located between China and India, the region is central to Australia's economic, strategic and foreign policy interests.

Many of the region's pressing challenges, including climate risks, the movement of people, and the spread of infectious diseases, are also challenges facing Australia. Collaboration with regional partners to address these issues of global concern will be vital in the years ahead.

Education, tourism, business and cultural links between Australia and the region are also increasingly important. In the 2021 census, among Australians born overseas, the Philippines, Vietnam and Malaysia were among the top ten countries of birth.

Southeast Asia is one of the fastest growing economic regions, with Indonesia alone forecast to become the world's fourth largest economy by 2045.

The Australian Government has identified deepening economic engagement with the region as a top priority. In 2020-21, five Southeast Asian nations (Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia) were among Australia's top 15 trading partners.

680+ million

people

10%

of the world's population

Hundreds

of languages and ethnic groups

US\$3.2 trillion

combined GDP

\$100 billion

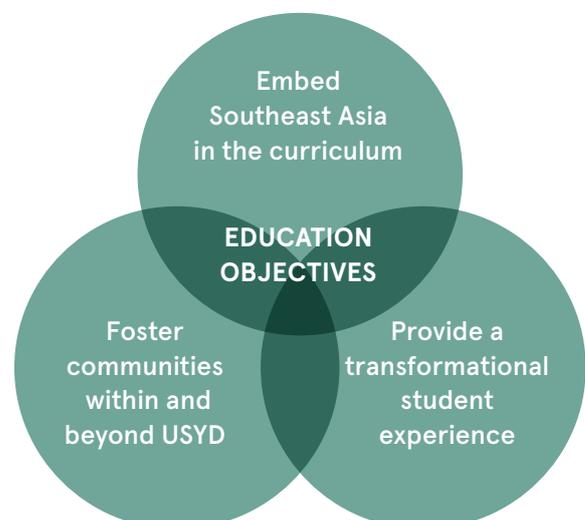
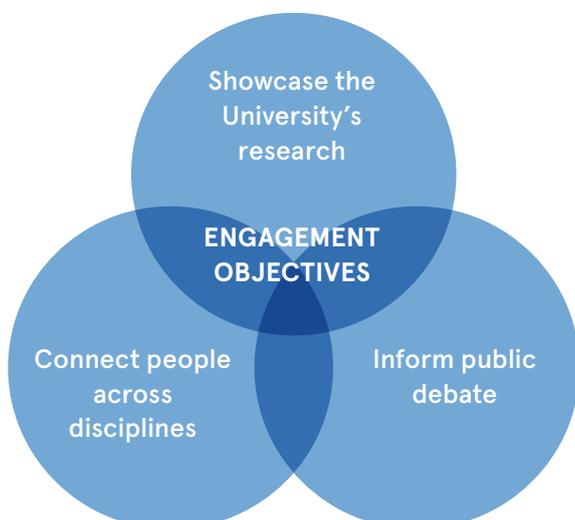
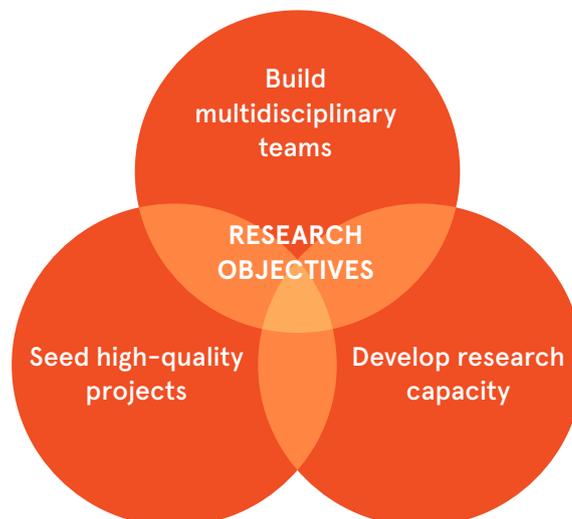
in trade with Australia in 2020



SSEAC's approach

In the last ten years, SSEAC has consolidated the University of Sydney's reputation as a hub for studies in and of Southeast Asia. We build intellectual communities that support Australia's understanding of, and engagement with, our region.

Our activities range from seeding high-quality research to training the next generation of scholars, leading interdisciplinary field schools, and showcasing new ideas through podcasts and panel discussions.

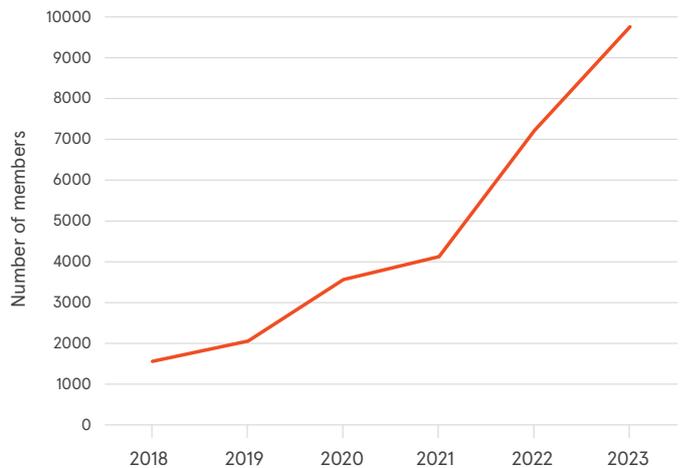


Our members

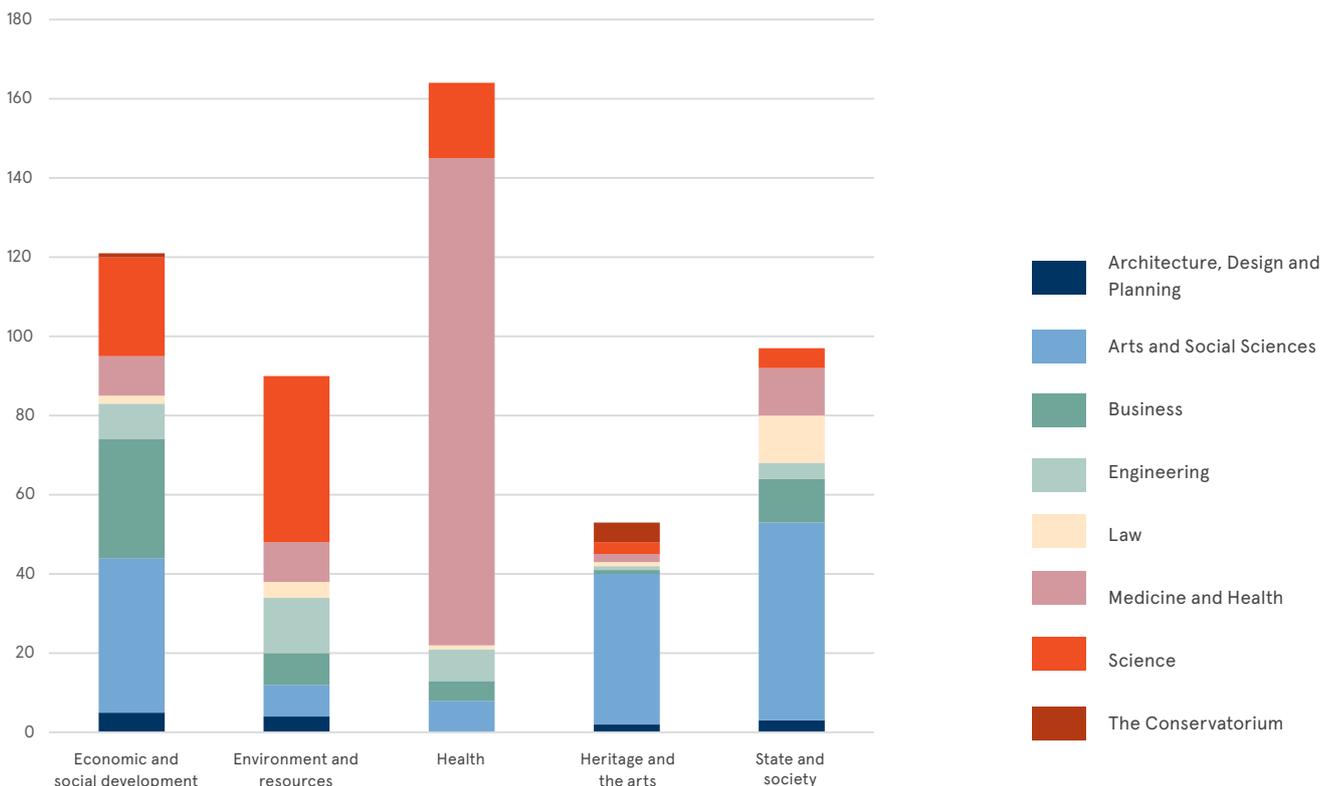
SSEAC’s core membership includes over **390 academics** from across the University engaged in research on Southeast Asia. Our members work across five thematic areas: economic and social development, environment and resources, health, heritage and the arts, and state and society.

As of December 2022, our total membership was **9,759 people**. This number includes academics, students, affiliates, and professionals. This community ranges from businesspeople and journalists to diplomats, activists, and NGO staff, working in or passionate about Southeast Asia. The more than three-fold increase in our membership numbers since 2018 underlines the increased visibility of the Centre and its activities.

SSEAC membership growth



Disciplinary spread of SSEAC members at the University of Sydney





Map of Southeast Asia showing the number of University of Sydney academics with research interests in each country.

On the ground in Southeast Asia

Our researchers work across Southeast Asia, applying their disciplinary expertise to tackle practical problems, improve policies and strengthen livelihoods. This work is hugely diverse, ranging from agriculture to archaeology, immunisation and food security, languages, architecture, business management and environmental conservation.



Supporting research excellence

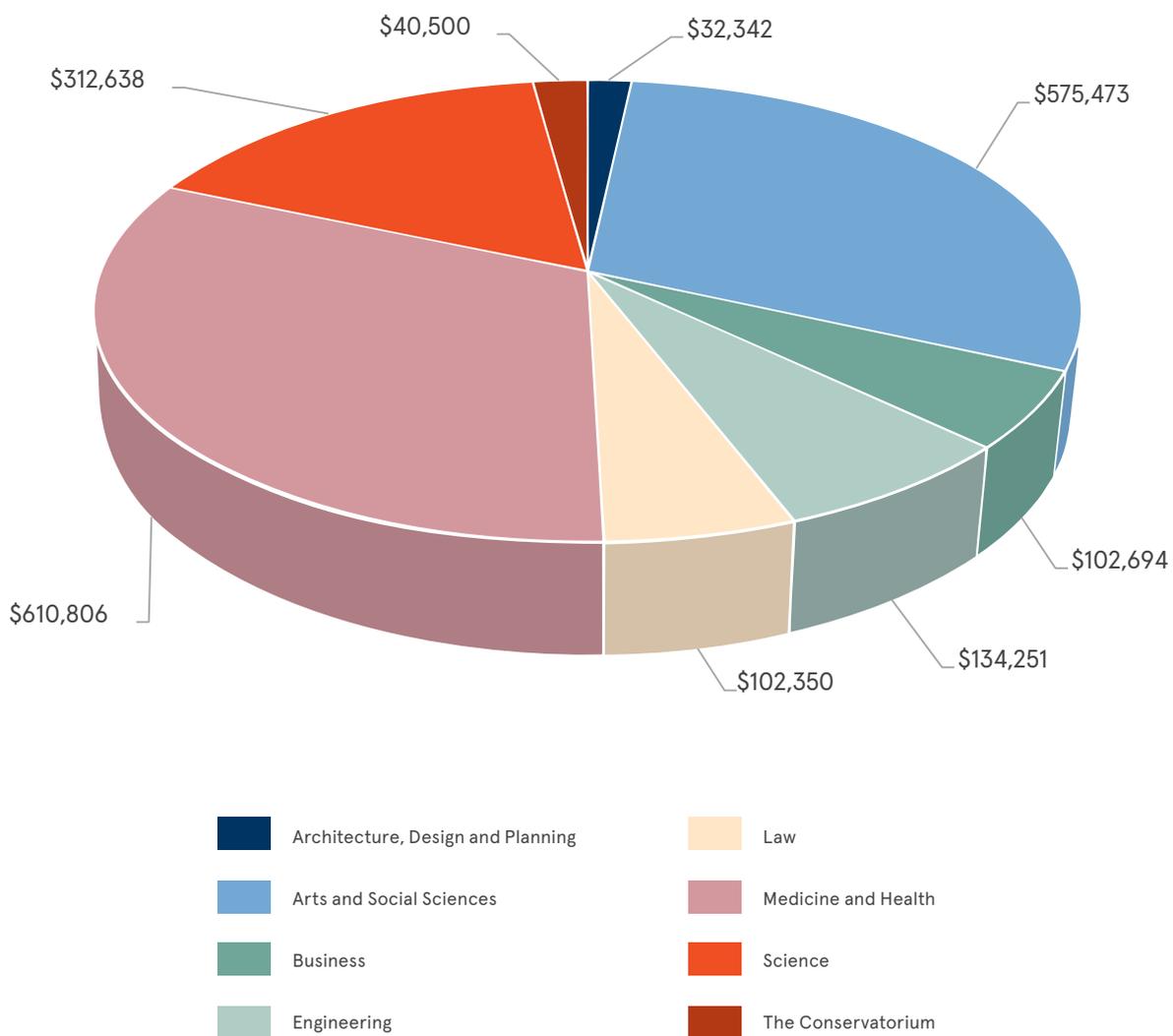
We nurture multidisciplinary research teams,
identify and respond to funding opportunities,
provide logistical and strategic advice,
and actively foster new approaches and techniques.

Enabling high-quality research

We support our members' engagement with Southeast Asia through a comprehensive grant scheme offering funding for new research projects, academic travel, workshops, language, writing residencies, and more. Our grants encourage multidisciplinary academic collaboration across the University and innovative partnerships with industry, civil society, government agencies and others in the region.

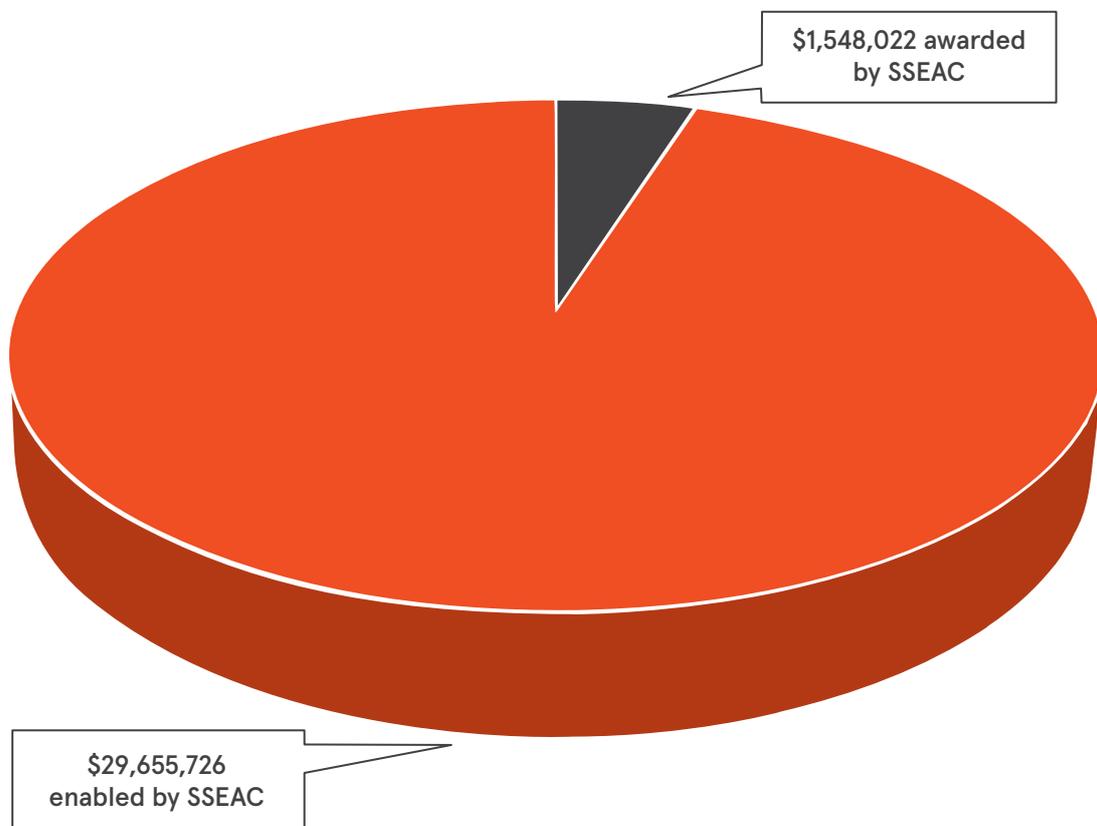
In a snapshot

Since 2013 we have awarded:
\$1.55 million in research grants
\$321k in mobility grants
\$42k in language grants



Turning good ideas into major projects

The modest but important seed funding we contribute to help launch members' projects has been leveraged to secure major external grants. This support has translated into over **\$29 million** in external funding from bodies including the Australian Research Council, the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research, the National Health and Medical Research Council, the Australian-ASEAN Council and the Aus4Innovation Program.



Building on the connections, strategic advice and practical support offered through SSEAC channels, our members have also gone on to secure major international funding from prominent bodies including the Asian Development Bank, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the World Health Organization, and UNESCO, as well as industry giants such as Facebook and Pfizer. This has led to diverse and multifaceted research spanning the breadth of Southeast Asia, with projects ranging from health and hate speech, to factory-based art, microfinance and animal disease.

"I was a Chief Investigator on a small SSEAC research grant that included support for a PhD student from Indonesia to complete a chapter of his thesis. The student has graduated and secured a high-quality post doc in the USA for the past two years. The SSEAC grant allowed him to use a cutting-edge technique (which was expensive because it was new) for his methodology – this gave him the edge for getting a post doc."

Associate Professor Joy Becker
School of Life and Environmental Sciences

"My research activities in Burma/Myanmar have benefitted directly from SSEAC grants. Apart from financial support for my research, I have also benefitted from the sense of community of scholars and area specialists that SSEAC provides, including the regular news updates."

Associate Professor Mark Allon
School of Languages and Cultures

"SSEAC has been instrumental at breaking down silos in the University. Due to the opportunities provided, I am now finding myself working closely with colleagues in Medicine, Science and Education. These links would not have been in place without the support of SSEAC. The work we are doing supported by SSEAC is impacting upon health policy and practice in a measurable and tangible way."

Professor Patrick Brennan
School of Health Sciences

"SSEAC is truly like no other, and its influence goes far beyond Australia. Its existence has helped so many early career scholars like myself, and has therefore shaped the present and future of Southeast Asian Studies globally. Through its many activities it has gained immense social, academic, and economic capital for the University of Sydney as well as Asian Studies. I am so grateful for the work it has done and continues to do for both emerging and established scholars."

Dr Cheng Nien Yuan
Singapore University of Technology and Design

"SSEAC has been critical to the development of media and communications (MECO) research at USYD. The Centre's expertise and pilot funding has paved the way for MECO to position USYD as a leader in digital media research in the ASEAN region, resulting in securing of major grants."

Professor Gerard Goggin
School of Art, Communication and English

"SSEAC has been key to connecting me to other researchers at the University. The Centre has opened my mind to new and diverse ways of collaborating and has helped inform my teaching practice. It is the perfect environment for me to learn, apply and experience interdisciplinarity first-hand."

Dr Maria Florencia Amigo
Education, Enterprise & Engagement

"SSEAC supported my interdisciplinary research with initial seed funding in food safety in Vietnam, leading to me securing a larger grant with CGIAR. I also had three PhD students and five Honours students supported by SSEAC mobility grants to do their field research in Cambodia."

Professor Daniel Tan
School of Life and Environmental Sciences

"Just wanted to tell you how much I have personally appreciated and been supported by SSEAC. My work in Cambodia and Vietnam would not have been possible without the Centre's support, and the connections made through the Centre have been central to the development of my research programme."

Dr Fiona Gill
School of Social and Political Sciences

"SSEAC has been instrumental in extending and enriching my expertise within my field. [It has] provided the opportunity to extend my work independently within parts of the region through the additional contacts established."

Professor David Evans
School of Education and Social Work



Economic and social development

Seeding success



Russell is a microeconomist mainly focused on the microeconomics of private sector development. Through SSEAC, he established connections that cut across disciplinary boundaries, leading him to collaborate with colleagues in Business, Engineering, Geosciences, and Law. In 2020, Russell was awarded US\$3.5 million by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to co-lead a three-year research project on the impact of interoperable digital finance schemes on emerging economies, including Myanmar and the Philippines.

“As a researcher focused on the Asia-Pacific, for me SSEAC makes the University of Sydney special. It’s a hub of activity and connections that has benefitted me and my students in terms of networking, funding, training, and improving and gaining attention for our research and policy engagement on the region.”

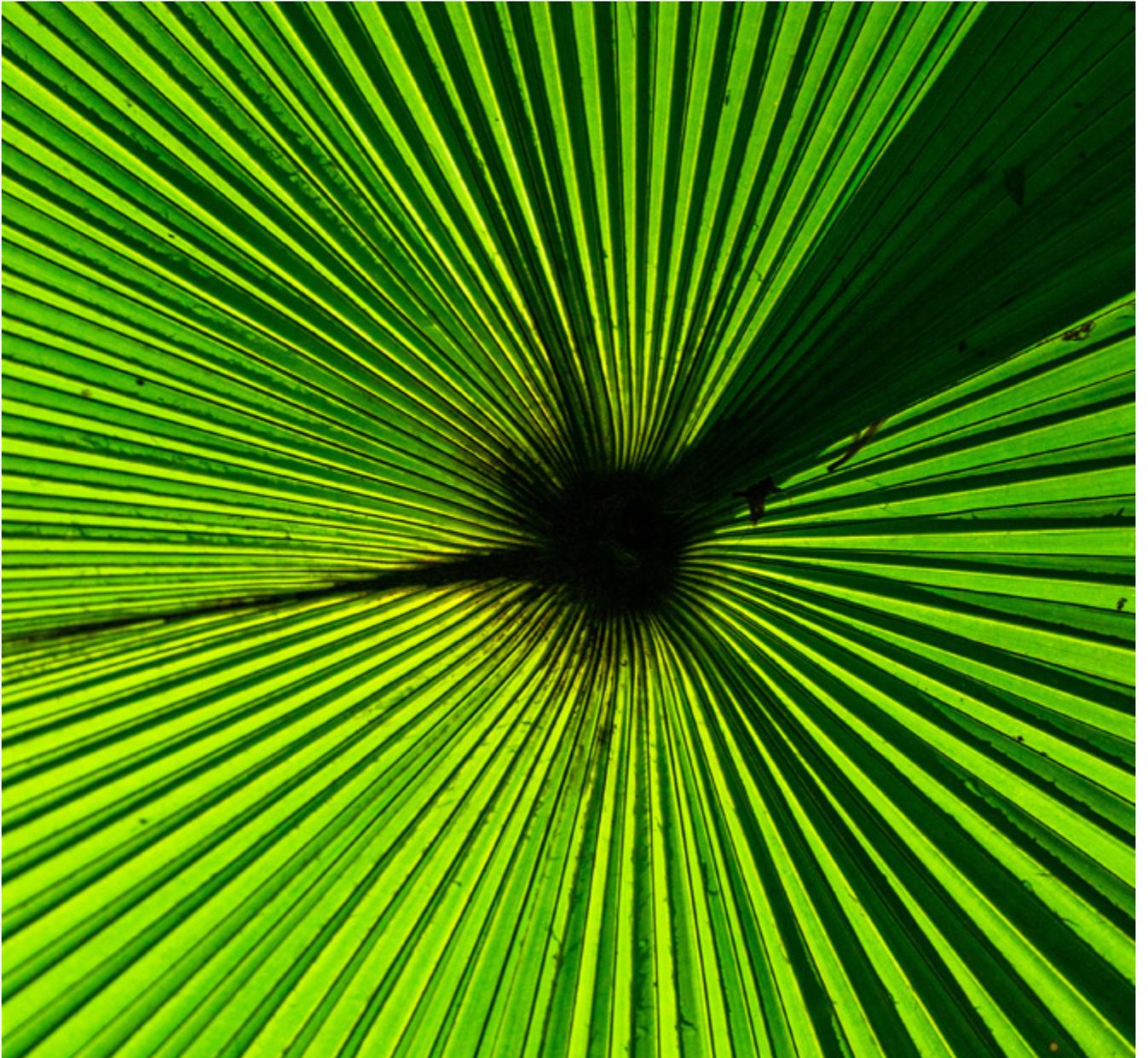
Dr Russell Toth
School of Economics



Jenny-Ann is an expert in veterinary epidemiology whose research has focused on biosecurity, emergency animal diseases and zoonoses in Indonesia, the Philippines and Timor-Leste. SSEAC has supported Jenny-Ann to pursue multidisciplinary research at the intersection of agriculture and health, and she served on SSEAC’s Executive Committee from 2013–16. In 2020, Jenny-Ann secured a \$200k Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) grant to improve animal health surveillance in Timor-Leste, with a focus on addressing illness in pigs in rural communities.

“SSEAC facilitates connections with colleagues across the University that are important for supporting research and teaching initiatives in the region. The country specific gatherings are particularly valuable to learn from the experience of others about the country context and implications for approaching partnerships with government and non-government agencies.”

Associate Professor Jenny-Ann Toribio
School of Veterinary Science



Environment and resources

Seeding success



Sophie is a human geographer, with a research focus on the political economies of climate change and international development assistance in Southeast Asia and the Pacific. SSEAC funded Sophie to investigate the 'smart city' policy in Jakarta in 2018, and to study Indonesian language in-country. In 2021, following her participation in SSEAC's Fellowship Hothouse mentoring initiative, Sophie secured a \$533k Discovery Early Career Researcher Award (DECRA) from the ARC to investigate urban resilience infrastructure, with Indonesia as a case study.

"SSEAC provides an intellectual home for engaging in research and teaching about our region. Through their workshops, events, funding schemes and mentoring programs, SSEAC has helped me build a multidisciplinary network and community at the University of Sydney, helped me navigate the complexities of early-career research, and sustained my engagement with Indonesia despite the current complexities of international research."

Dr Sophie Webber
School of Geosciences



Aaron lectures in humanitarian engineering and leads the Humanitarian Frontiers Lab at the University. His research seeks to improve global disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation with a focus on safe and equitable housing. With SSEAC funding, Aaron has worked to investigate informal sheltering practices in post-conflict and post-disaster contexts in the Philippines, and improve local planning and responses. In 2021, he secured a \$94k grant from the Asia-Pacific Network for Global Change Research to help advance local flood risk decision-making for disaster risk reduction, with case studies in the Philippines and Indonesia.

"SSEAC has connected me with a unique multidisciplinary network of scholars working on pressing issues in our region. The Centre has afforded me unparalleled mentorship to develop my research ideas, enabled the translation of my work to influence practice, and fostered engagement with policymakers in Australia and across Southeast Asia."

Dr Aaron Opdyke
School of Civil Engineering



Health

Seeding success



Sonja is the Director of the University's Biopolitics of Science Research Network, with research interests across law, life and science in a globalizing world. SSEAC supported Sonja to advance her interdisciplinary research on bioscience in Indonesia, and the impacts of precision medicine in Southeast Asia. Sonja was selected from more than 1,500 candidates worldwide to join the Institute of Advanced Study in Princeton (2020-21) and research the global transfer of human biological material, with a focus on Indonesia. She used the application she developed during SSEAC's Fellowship Hothouse to secure this prestigious position.

"I am immensely grateful for the support SSEAC has provided me throughout the years. SSEAC enhanced my research on Southeast Asia and showcased its findings through events and podcasts that reached a truly global audience. The amount of hard work and enthusiasm from the team is rare to find."

Professor Sonja van Wichelen
School of Social and Political Sciences



Justin is an infectious diseases expert, with research interests in fungal infections, clinical trials and tuberculosis. SSEAC has supported Justin's work through multiple seed grants, including funding in 2018 to develop Aspergillus research capacity in Vietnam and lay the groundwork for improved diagnostics and future collaborations. Justin secured a \$750,000 National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) grant in 2020 to examine the disease burden of chronic pulmonary aspergillosis in tuberculosis survivors in Vietnam, and advance diagnosis and treatment.

"My involvement with SSEAC over the last few years has been really positive. I've received support in the form of seed grants, networking opportunities, and even a writing retreat. SSEAC's seed funding for mycology workshops in Vietnam improved my chances of getting the NHMRC investigator award and directly led to an award from DFAT to develop a laboratory network."

Associate Professor Justin Beardsley
Sydney Medical School



Heritage and the arts

Seeding success



Jane researches innovative and sustainable approaches to contemporary creative practices through industry and community collaborations. In 2015, SSEAC provided \$9,000 in seed funding and logistical support for her project connecting artists with manufacturers in Vietnam to experiment with new materials and technologies. In 2019, Jane launched her 'Manufacturing Creativity' exhibition at Ho Chi Minh City Museum, supported by UNESCO and the Vietnam Institute of Culture and Arts Studies, that featured design and artworks utilising clean waste and factory materials in new and unexpected ways.

"From my work in Vietnam, I've seen the deep impact SSEAC has had on the University's reputation as a centre for Southeast Asia expertise. The Centre acts as a conduit for researchers to connect and is an attractive flagship for partners. It's clear that my affiliation with the Centre has added to partner understandings of the University's commitment to establishing long-term research-led and person-to-person relationships in Vietnam."

Associate Professor Jane Gavan
Sydney College of the Arts



Josh specialises in contemporary Chinese-language theatre and literature. SSEAC supported Josh to study Burmese and Indonesian languages, to research performance practices among ethnic Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, and to conduct archival research in Manila, Jakarta, Xiamen and Yangon examining the practice of Chinese opera in Sino-Southeast Asian communities. Following his participation in SSEAC's Fellowship Hothouse, Josh secured a DECRA in 2021 with funding of \$467k to investigate Sino-Southeast Asian self-representation in performance arts.

"With its extensive mentoring programs, international research networks, and breadth of scope, SSEAC is a gem for researchers, students, and visitors to the University of Sydney. My work on Southeast Asia has been greatly enriched by SSEAC's grants and programs to conduct fieldwork, archival work, study language, and organise workshops with colleagues in the region and globally."

Dr Josh Stenberg
School of Languages and Cultures



State and society

Seeding success



Simon is Director of the Centre for Asian and Pacific Law and has been an integral member of SSEAC, serving on the executive from 2015–22. He has received a number of SSEAC grants to support his work on Indonesia, including on anti-corruption reform as well as a new project exploring the impact of customary law recognition on land access and rural livelihoods. Simon secured an ARC Future Fellowship (2015–21) with funding of \$917k to study the effectiveness of Indonesia’s corruption courts, with the findings to be detailed in a forthcoming book.

“SSEAC has been instrumental in helping me obtain funding from external sources, including the ARC Future Fellowship and Linkage Programs, and then providing opportunities to disseminate my research. The Centre has facilitated engagement with external stakeholders, and helped me amplify the impact of my work.”

Professor Simon Butt
Sydney Law School



Aim specialises in digital media, disinformation and political participation in Southeast Asia, and is SSEAC’s Thailand Country Coordinator. Since 2015, Aim has utilised multiple SSEAC grants to advance her research and outputs on digital activism, social media use, social movements and democracy in Southeast Asia. Following her participation in SSEAC’s Fellowship Hothouse, Aim secured a DECRA in 2021 with funding of \$379k to research the impact of digital repressive technologies on activism in autocracies. In 2019, she was the first USYD researcher to obtain funding from Facebook, for a project on hate speech that resulted in policy changes at the social media giant.

“SSEAC has been pivotal to advancing my career, expanding my intellectual and creative horizons and an anchor to my life in Sydney. The Centre, especially its director, Professor Michele Ford, have taught me what it means to be a well-rounded and impactful scholar. SSEAC leads by example and through its many activities, the Centre has become an invaluable part of my career at USYD.”

Dr Aim Sinpeng
School of Social and Political Sciences

Advancing disciplinary excellence

SSEAC's Fellowship Hothouse

In 2019, SSEAC established a mentoring initiative to support the University's future leaders in their efforts to secure competitive funding offered by the Australian Research Council (ARC).

The Fellowship Hothouse is led by SSEAC Director Michele Ford, who served on the ARC's College of Experts from 2015-17. The Hothouse is open to all academics conducting research on Southeast Asia.

Seven Fellowship Hothouse participants have successfully secured ARC grants as at the end of 2022 (worth a combined \$3.75 million), based across the schools of Geosciences, Humanities, Languages and Cultures, Law, and Social and Political Sciences.

Hothouse successes

Researcher	Award	Project
Dr Jessica Melvin (School of Humanities)	DECRA 2020 \$418,988	Islamist Militias, the Military and Indonesia's Authoritarian Turn
Dr Rosemary Grey (Sydney Law School)	DECRA 2021 \$621,784	Reproductive Crimes in International Law: Lessons from Cambodia
Dr Joshua Stenberg (School of Languages and Cultures)	DECRA 2021 \$467,786	Southeast Asian Performance, Ethnic Identity and China's Soft Power
Dr Sophie Webber (School of Geosciences)	DECRA 2021 \$532,893	Building Urban Resilience: Adaptation Economies in the Asia-Pacific
Associate Professor Holly High (School of Social and Political Sciences)	Future Fellowship 2021 \$922,400	Cultural Values, Birth and Parenting: Reproductive Health and Lao Socialism
Dr Elisabeth Kramer (School of Languages and Cultures)	DECRA 2022 \$403,553	The Politics of Tobacco Policy in Indonesia
Dr Aim Sinpeng (School of Social and Political Sciences)	DECRA 2022 \$379,229	Cyber Repression and Political Protests in Thailand

“The feedback I received in the Hothouse was invaluable. My DECRA application was far more persuasive, coherent, and methodologically precise as a result. This is due to the Hothouse’s interdisciplinary nature, and would not have been possible if I had only received mentoring within my faculty. The extent of individualised advice and mentoring surpassed anything I have experienced as an early career academic.”



Dr Rosemary Grey
Sydney Law School

“SSEAC’s Fellowship Hothouse allowed me to work on my application in the kind of environment that academics crave. I felt mentored. I also felt inspired by the companionship of great colleagues. Michele created an environment that was at once rigorous (sometimes frighteningly so!), supportive, good-humoured and effective. I can confidently say that, thanks to that support, I produced an application that was the best it could be.”



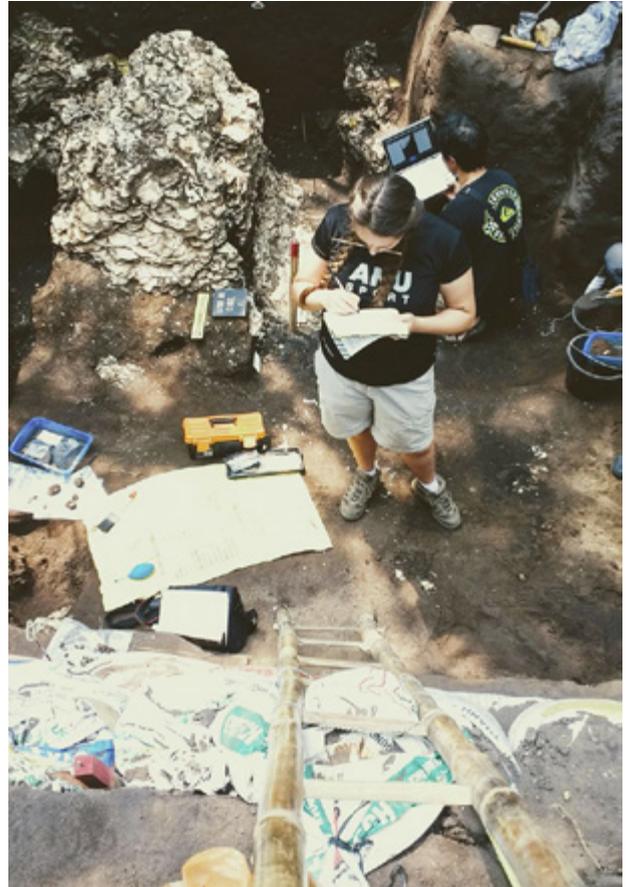
Holly High
Associate Professor,
School of Social and
Political Sciences

Supporting emerging talent

We bring outstanding Southeast Asia-focused emerging scholars to Sydney through our **postdoctoral fellowship scheme**. These positions are highly competitive, with over 160 applications for a single vacancy in 2019.

The postdoc contributes to the life of the Centre, and is supported to advance their research, connect with scholarly networks, and build their career. Our postdocs have performed exceptionally well:

- **Dr Jess Melvin (2018-19)** secured an ARC DECRA for her research into Islamist militias and the Indonesian military.
- **Dr Kristy Ward (2018-19)** secured an ARC Linkage Project Grant for a project assessing gender-based violence in Cambodia's construction sector.
- **Dr Benjamin Thompson (2019-20)** secured an ongoing position lecturing in human geography at Monash University.
- **Dr Melandri Vlok (2022-23)** was co-lead author of a paper detailing the oldest known case of surgical amputation, published in *Nature*, which attracted widespread international media coverage. She is currently awaiting the outcome of her DECRA application.



Bioarchaeologist Dr Melandri Vlok, SSEAC's Postdoctoral Research Associate for 2022-23.

“The SSEAC postdoctoral program has been a critical building block in my career. It has enabled me to focus deeply on my research and prioritise key research, leadership and engagement opportunities and outputs. The research environment at SSEAC is second-to-none for ECR scholars focused on Southeast Asia.”

Dr Kristy Ward

SSEAC's Writing Fellowship supports outstanding early career researchers to write a journal article based on their PhD work. Launched in 2021, the fellowship includes a grant of \$5,000 and has so far supported five talented scholars to work on a range of exciting Southeast Asia-related proposals, from music to archaeology, health, ethnicity and the environment.

2022-23



Dr Adam King (Australian College of the Arts) will explore interpretations of *kendang bebarongan*, a form of Balinese drumming that involves the performance of improvised, rapid-speed hand patterning that accompanies the dance of the mythical lion-type creature *Barong*.



Dr Mai Nguyen (Ministry of Health in Vietnam) will examine the factors that influence people to choose private over public health services in Vietnam, including the social factors that affect consumer choice.



Dr Ben Dharmendra (University of Sydney) will seek to address a gap in our understanding of the significance of settlements to Southeast Asian history, proposing several methodological and theoretical techniques and the incorporation of insights from modern settlement studies.

2021-22



Dr Paul-David Lutz (University of Sydney) wrote about the interethnic dynamics of a multiethnic Khmu and Akha village in the uplands of northern Laos, against the backdrop of Laos' recent history of war, revolution, and development.



Drawing on her fieldwork in Singapore, Dr Jamie Wang (University of Sydney) explored the conceptualisation of the more-than-human city in the context of sustainable development, climate change and environmental injustice.

Writing retreats



SSEAC holds **biannual writing retreats** for early and mid-career researchers working on Southeast Asia to make meaningful progress on their academic writing. The retreats include daily work in progress discussions and goal setting, as well as targeted professional development. Some 156 academics have taken part since 2020.

Participants frequently commend the retreats as a unique opportunity to receive constructive feedback from peers of different disciplines and be exposed to new perspectives on writing and productivity.

We also launched our **writing residency workshops** in 2021, designed to support emerging researchers to write an outreach or journal article based on their Southeast Asia research. Delivered by SSEAC-affiliated academics, this online program includes modules on structuring and editing journal articles, the peer review process, and how to write and pitch compelling outreach articles.

As a result of the workshops, participants have successfully published a range of impressive work, including on the Deaf community and disasters in Vietnam; political theatre in the Philippines; and how communities recovered from a deadly volcanic eruption on Java, Indonesia.

In a snapshot

8 writing retreats since 2020

156 academic participants

26 dedicated writing days

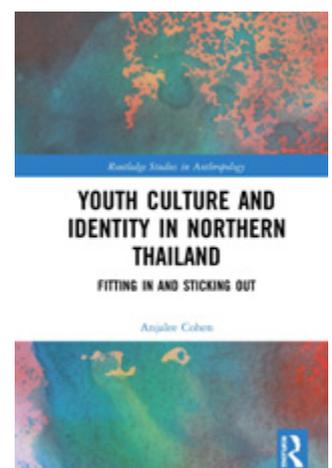
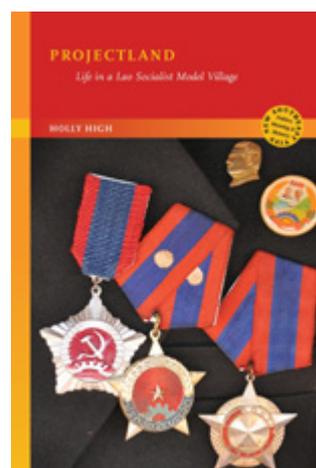
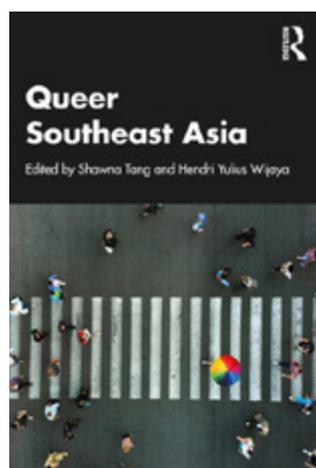
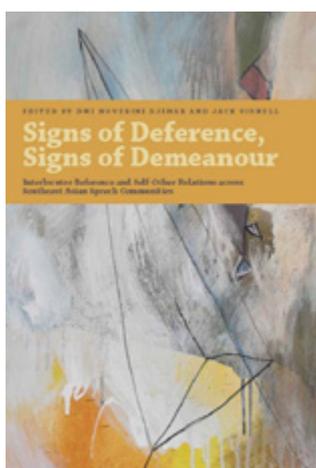
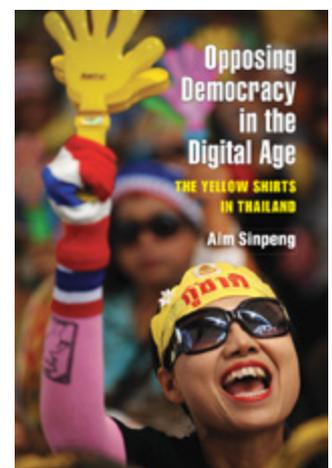
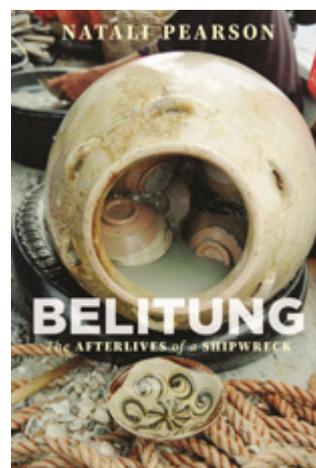
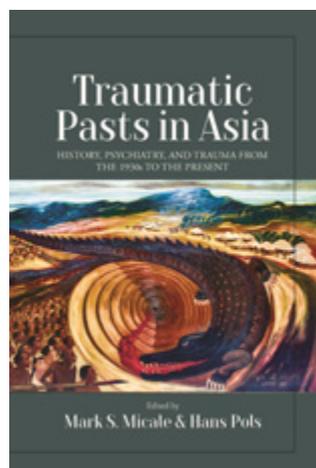
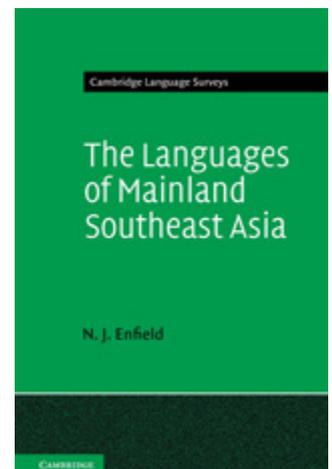
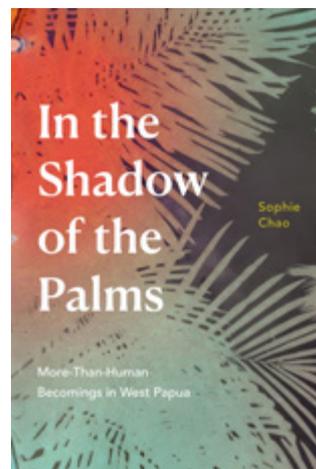
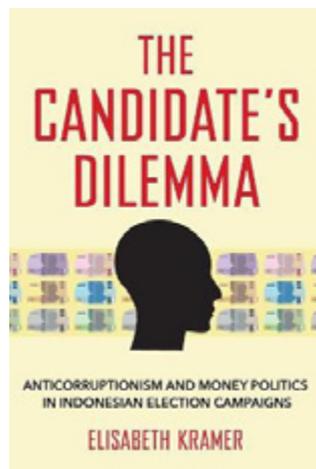
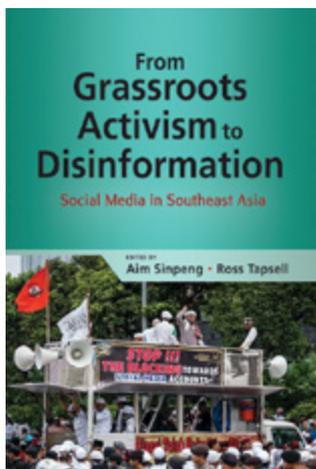
3 residency workshops

“This was a fabulous learning and writing opportunity. I learned new skills around planning and organising my writing. I also received amazing tips and ideas from senior academics and mentors and felt that my work and thinking was enriched by engaging with academics from other fields.”

Writing retreat participant, 2022

Publishing highlights of our members

SSEAC supports members to produce high-quality publications on Southeast Asia. We fund workshops, offer skill-building programs and hold writing retreats that help scholars translate their research into print. From 2012–22, SSEAC members published over 2,600 works relating to Southeast Asia. From 2018–22, we directly enabled 337 published works, including 22 books and 216 journal articles, on a huge variety of Southeast Asia subjects.



Fostering multidisciplinary teams

SSEAC has seed-funded 27 collaborative research projects that draw scholars together from across varied disciplines to tackle key issues confronting the region, from mental health in Thailand to pollution in the Philippines, obesity in Indonesia, and food safety in Vietnam. By actively facilitating connections across disciplines, institutions and countries, we help researchers kickstart or scale-up their Southeast Asia research.



We enabled...

Professor Patrick Brennan (School of Health Sciences) to survey more than 100 breast clinicians and radiologists from 12 large hospitals across Vietnam. The data pointed to poor mammographic diagnostic efficacy. Patrick's team was subsequently awarded a \$383k grant from DFAT in 2019 to improve breast cancer diagnosis in Vietnam.

Dr Shawna Tang (School of Philosophical and Historical Inquiry) to investigate how rising levels of homophobia and transphobia in Malaysia are being validated by Islamic LGBT research. This led to the co-edited publication *Queer Southeast Asia* (Routledge 2022), which significantly furthers the development of queer studies in the region.



We connected...

Associate Professor Nicola Hancock (School of Health Sciences) with researchers and NGOs in Jakarta working on recovery-oriented mental health practices. This laid the groundwork for a project to develop social media campaigns for better mental health in Indonesia, funded by an Australia-Indonesia Institute grant in 2022.

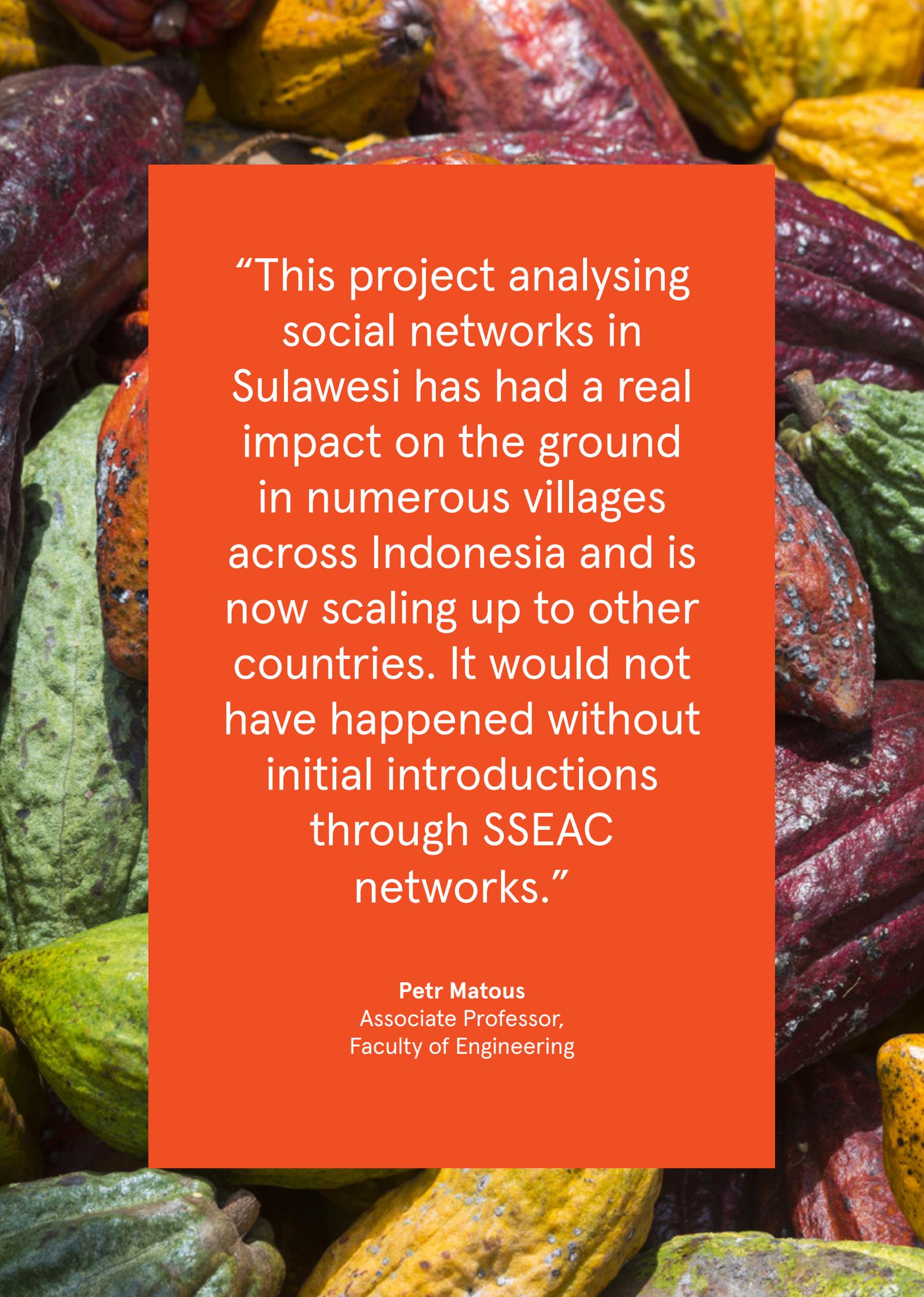
Professor Luke Nottage (Sydney Law School) with a number of legal researchers and experts from Thailand and other countries in the region. This helped facilitate a major co-edited book project, *International Investment Treaties and Arbitration Across Asia*, published by Brill in 2018, as well as a Cambridge University Press monograph.



We funded...

Professor Benjamin Oldroyd and Dr Rosalyn Gloag (School of Life and Environmental Sciences) to undertake joint research into the Asian honeybee in Indonesia. This led to an ARC Discovery Project, awarded in 2019, to research invasive Asian honeybee populations in Australia, working in partnership with Indonesian universities.

Professor Marina Kennerson (School of Health Sciences) to conduct research into motor neuron disease (MND) in Malaysia, working closely with the University of Malaya. This enabled Marina and her team to establish an MND genetic and patient management program in Malaysia which has helped synthesise invaluable information on the disease.



“This project analysing social networks in Sulawesi has had a real impact on the ground in numerous villages across Indonesia and is now scaling up to other countries. It would not have happened without initial introductions through SSEAC networks.”

Petr Matous
Associate Professor,
Faculty of Engineering

SSEAC drives projects that promote local and international research partnerships between scholars, business, industry and communities.



Improving food safety in Vietnam

Associate Professor Tihomir Ancev (School of Economics) is leading a research project, with seed funding from SSEAC in 2021, that takes a One Health approach to identify food safety risks in Vietnam and develop measures to improve food safety. The project team includes researchers from the Sydney Business School, School of Life and Environmental Sciences, Sydney Medical School, and the Sydney School of Veterinary Science. The project will contribute to better health outcomes, agricultural productivity, and safer food systems.

Investing in Women project

SSEAC formed a multidisciplinary team involving Professor Marian Baird, SSEAC Director Michele Ford, Dr Elizabeth Hill and Dr Sandra Seno-Alday to examine women, work and entrepreneurship in Southeast Asia. Awarded over \$1 million from DFAT (2016-19), the project analysed work/care regimes, corporate governance, gender bias and gender diversity in organisations in Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Vietnam. The project exemplified SSEAC's capacity to leverage expertise across the University to pursue ground-breaking scholarship that engages policymakers in Australia and the region.



Oral health in Timor-Leste

Dr Brad Christian (Sydney Dental School) is co-leading research with Professor Alex Broom (Sydney Centre for Healthy Societies) on improving oral health in Timor-Leste. The project will include a Tetum-language survey and explore the choices and beliefs that inform oral health practices. The findings will inform policy to integrate oral health care into Timor-Leste's primary healthcare system. The team includes scholars with expertise in dentistry, nutrition, sociology and anthropology and close collaboration with Timorese partners.



Therapeutic opioid use in Indonesia

SSEAC has assembled a team of nine researchers, led by **Dr Elisabeth Kramer** (SSEAC), to determine how legal, policy and socio-cultural factors influence the use of therapeutic opioids in Indonesia. Funded by an ARC Linkage Project grant in 2022, the project involves Sydney scholars from health, law and science, researchers based in Queensland, South Australia and Indonesia, and a partnership with the International Pharmaceutical Federation, an NGO representing over 4 million pharmacists and scientists globally.

Work and disability in Timor-Leste

A multidisciplinary research team led by SSEAC Director **Michele Ford** is identifying policy and practice interventions that lead to decent work for people with disability in Timor-Leste. The team includes scholars with expertise in disability, social work, policy, law, labour studies and occupational therapy, who will work in partnership with the Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa'e and Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA. The project will produce the first comprehensive analysis of how people with disability experience seeking employment in Timor-Leste.



Digital inclusion and disability

Professor Jen Smith-Merry (School of Health Sciences) and **Professor Gerard Goggin** (School of Art, Communication and English) are leading research on digital inclusion for people with disability in Southeast Asia, involving a collaboration with NTU Singapore. Initiated with SSEAC funding, the project brings together researchers from across disability studies, sociology, social policy, governance, and media and communications. It will provide a scoping study of the policies, practices, and challenges for digital inclusion in the region, with fieldwork to commence in Singapore in 2023.



Sharpening skills

SSEAC runs creative and practical professional development opportunities for early career researchers working on Southeast Asia. Our workshops have covered wide-ranging topics of scholarly relevance, from maximising productivity to digital research strategies, academic writing, pitching for funding, object-based learning and public speaking.

Our professional development opportunities not only seek to build researchers' skills but foster a sense of scholarly community. An example was our **Human Rights Masterclass**, held in 2019, which brought together scholars of Southeast Asia from five Australian universities to explore how to incorporate a rights-based approach into research and teaching practice.

Drawing on the significant human rights expertise at the University, this one-day workshop featured rich collaborative discussions. Participants welcomed the chance to constructively reflect on their teaching methods, and remarked on the valuable interdisciplinary connections made on the day.

“It was really refreshing to be in a room where everyone is passionate about human rights and extending it to their teaching and research. The discussions and presentations have already got me thinking on how I should look more into multidisciplinary work and also the ways I can change how I have been delivering the Human Rights Law class to make it more practical.”

Academic participant
Human Rights Workshop, 2019



Language learning

Our language training programs have improved members' capacity to collaborate with colleagues in the region and conduct high-quality field research. Since 2015, we have awarded 30 language grants covering Burmese, Indonesian, Khmer, Lao and Vietnamese, including short intensives, longer courses, and in-country study.



“My research aims to help Cambodian rice farming communities make informed and safe decisions when managing plant diseases. During field work, I found that I was limited to non-verbal communication with the farmers. SSEAC helped me overcome the language barrier. In 2019, SSEAC funded a two-day intensive Khmer language course, where I learnt basic conversation and discipline-specific language. Overall, my ability to conduct research in Cambodia has improved; making me more confident in working collaboratively with Cambodian stakeholders for my upcoming experiments.”

Daniel Howell
PhD candidate, School of Life and Environmental Sciences



Driving engagement

We showcase the University's research on Southeast Asia through innovative events and initiatives that inform public debate and foster a strong sense of community.



Event spotlight: Aung San Suu Kyi in Sydney

One of the early major public engagement initiatives SSEAC helped to lead was the hosting of prominent Myanmar pro-democracy figure Daw Aung San Suu Kyi at the Sydney Opera House in November 2013.

This occasion was the culmination of many months' work. SSEAC Director and the International Portfolio Director travelled to Myanmar to deliver the invitation and liaise with the Australian Ambassador to Myanmar, who lent her support to the event.

In her first public address in Australia, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi spoke to a capacity audience about her experiences under house arrest and the challenges ahead for Myanmar. The Nobel Peace Prize winner was awarded honorary doctorates by the University of Sydney and UTS.

The vast majority of those seated in the stalls from Sydney were SSEAC country coordinators or members of its Myanmar country group, its Executive Committee and its Board of Management. Many from the Australian Burmese community were also among the 2,000-strong audience, having had a separate dialogue with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi earlier in the day.

Staff from the University of Sydney, UTS and the Sydney Opera House worked tirelessly to bring the event to fruition. Vice-Chancellor Dr Michael Spence also devoted many hours to perfecting his opening address in Burmese – a gesture that was deeply appreciated by the Australian Burmese community.

Flagship forums

ASEAN Forum

Our annual ASEAN Forum brings together academics, policymakers, businesspeople, and civil society representatives to explore a major theme impacting the region. Featuring a panel discussion and keynote address, the forum has focused on issues including environmental sustainability, the rise of digital technologies, government responses to the pandemic, human rights, and Australia's engagement with the region.

The event attracts a mix of scholars, students and professionals, as well as government representatives. It has helped showcase the work of dozens of Sydney academics over the ten events held since 2013. We have also drawn on partnerships with the China Studies Centre, the Sydney Environment Institute, Sydney Ideas, and the ASEAN-Australia Strategic Youth Partnership to enhance the program's offering and reach new audience members.



In a snapshot

10 events held since 2013

100+ guest speakers

175 average registrations per year





Politics in Action

This is our feature event for timely political updates on Southeast Asia targeting academics across the disciplines and the general public. Each year we invite talented speakers from around the world to provide expert analysis on key political, social and economic issues in Southeast Asian countries. The sessions are designed to be concise, making them ideal for a general audience.

To take advantage of the expertise present on the day, we host adjacent events for postgraduates and early career researchers to help them connect with academics working in and on the region. Since our inaugural event in 2016, academic speakers have joined us from tertiary institutions in Australia, Denmark, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Italy, Malaysia, Myanmar, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, Sweden, the UK, and the US.

“The expertise at Politics in Action is unparalleled, with scholars and practitioners offering insightful commentary on the latest pressing issues, from economic pressures to the use of social media. Not only do I rely on the talks to keep current, but I regularly assign the talks to my students so that they can learn not just from articles, but from brilliant speakers as well. Politics in Action is just a gift for researchers and teachers.”

Dr Susan Banki
School of Social and
Political Sciences

In a snapshot

7 events held since 2016

45 guest speakers

30+ universities represented

10 countries covered

Public events

SSEAC hosts an action-packed roster of public events each year, putting the University at the centre of Australia's Southeast Asia engagement. We partner with research institutes, government, business, NGOs and the diplomatic community to run high-impact public events that respond to policy priorities, intellectual challenges and emerging issues relevant to the region.

Thai Studies Conference, 2014

SSEAC organised the 12th International Conference on Thai Studies at the University in 2014. A major scholarly initiative, the conference attracted over 330 delegates from around the world.

Among the speakers were renowned Thai academic Professor Thongchai Winichakul, former Australian foreign minister Bob Carr, and Australia's Ambassador to Thailand James Wise. The conference helped place the University on the map for Thailand scholars around the world.

Conference on Human Rights, 2018, 2019, 2021

SSEAC has partnered with the University of Jember (Indonesia) on several occasions to convene the Conference on Human Rights. This regional conference has grown significantly over the years, playing an important role as a space for academics, activists and policymakers to grapple with human rights issues in Southeast Asia and beyond.

The 2021 iteration featured more than 90 papers on a range of rights-related topics, from the refugee experience to the role of online technologies, held in hybrid form at Jember and online.

In 2023, we are co-organising the 6th Conference with a range of partners at the University of Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta.



ASAA Conference, 2018

SSEAC convened the largest ever biennial conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA) in July 2018. Hosted in collaboration with the University's China Studies Centre and the School of Languages and Cultures, the conference brought together over 1,100 Asian Studies academics and practitioners from the region and around the world.

Reflecting the University's commitment to multidisciplinary, we involved scholars from right across the disciplinary spectrum. Standalone roundtables focused on some of the region's biggest challenges, including urbanisation, climate change, democratic decline, and big tobacco.

Many attendees described the event as the best they had ever attended, citing its "intellectually vibrant panels", "superb organisation", "welcoming environment" and "dynamic atmosphere."

Public diplomacy initiatives

We have worked with the diplomatic community to hold a range of high-profile public events focused on Australia-ASEAN relations. Alongside a number of institutional partners, we co-organised the ASEAN-Australia Dialogue in March 2018, featuring speakers from academia, business, media and government, including then foreign affairs minister Julie Bishop and Indonesia's former foreign affairs minister, Dr Marty Natalegawa. SSEAC led an opening panel discussion on political developments, featuring rising stars in Southeast Asian studies from Australia and the region.

In 2019, we partnered with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to host the official launch of the Australian Government's Australia Now public diplomacy program, focused on strengthening ASEAN-Australia engagement. Then foreign minister Marise Payne and celebrity chef Adam Liaw were keynote speakers at the event that was attended by over 130 people, including the University of Sydney's senior management, SSEAC academics and alumni, school students, and diplomats.

The Centre has excellent relationships with several consulates based in Sydney and has partnered with the Indonesian and Filipino Consulates on several public events.

“Through our collaboration with SSEAC and participation in the Centre’s activities, we have been able to network with many individuals, groups and institutions, in particular those who have interest or who are doing work on the Philippines. In the activities we co-organised with SSEAC, we have been able to reach a wider audience. I find the presentations and discussions in the forums and seminars organised by SSEAC very relevant and a useful way to obtain updates on developments in the region.”

Ms Anne Jalando-On Louis
Former Philippines Consul General

Connecting with community

From film screenings and book launches to panel discussions and art exhibitions, we host a broad range of public programs each year that build community connections and generate interest in Southeast Asia.

To name a few: we co-sponsored the Singaporean Film Festival in Sydney in 2015; hosted the Bali 1928 project launch in 2018 to document and restore early recordings of Balinese music and dance; supported an all-day roundtable on the Khmer Rouge Tribunal in Cambodia in 2019; and teamed up with a local gallery to explore Myanmar protest art in 2021. As COVID-19 hit, we initiated a series of online forums to hear how Indonesian, Filipino and Vietnamese community members in Australia were grappling with the pandemic.

Our wide-ranging events draw on a host of partnerships, including with Southeast Asia diaspora and community groups. We have also engaged with primary and high schools across Australia to support the embedding of Southeast Asian-related content into teaching.



Australian foreign minister Marise Payne speaking in 2019.

Online seminar series



In 2021, SSEAC established partnerships with leading universities in Europe, the United States, United Kingdom, and Southeast Asia to launch online seminar series on Indonesia (IS4), Thailand (TS4), and the Philippines (PhilS4). These three webinar streams bring together social science scholars from across the globe to share their research and connect with a wider audience.

The webinars have explored rich and varied subject matter across all three countries. In total, 35 webinars were held over 2021–22. Working in partnerships has greatly increased the reach of this initiative, and the live audience Q&A has generated productive and dynamic discussion, helping to draw out substantive ideas and areas for further research.

The Indonesia-focused iteration is sponsored by SSEAC, the Cornell Southeast Asia Program and the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies. Webinar highlights have included explorations of child marriage, Indonesian historiography, solidarity movements in farming and fishing communities, and the wearing of religious headscarves. A total of 13 webinars were held up to December 2022.

The Philippines' series has featured a similarly diverse range of presentations, including timely analyses of the Filipino political scene

in the leadup to the country's election in May 2022. Alongside SSEAC, PhilS4 is co-sponsored by the University of the Philippines Diliman, Humboldt University of Berlin, and SOAS University of London. Webinar highlights up to December 2022 included examinations of the role of YouTube in shaping political engagement, narratives of urbanisation, and the consequences of political dynasties.

Finally, our Thailand series, co-sponsored by the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies and the New York Southeast Asia Network, has showcased a variety of cross-disciplinary research. Highlights included webinars on the workings of the Thai election commission, the issue of hate speech, the role of language choice as a political tool, and gender-based violence in the country's pro-democracy movement. A full roster of seminars across all three country streams is underway in 2023.

In a snapshot

35 webinars across the series

15,900+ views on YouTube

7 institutional partners

3,000+ virtual attendees



Sharing our members' research

SSEAC Stories

Our SSEAC Stories podcast delves into the wide-ranging research of our academic members. Conversational in style and accessible to a general audience, the podcast has expanded significantly since launching in 2019, with over 100 episodes to date, registering over 210,000 downloads to December 2022.

It has been hosted as a special series on the US-based New Books Network since March 2020, and is now monthly. Guests include a mix of emerging and established scholars connected to SSEAC who share a passion for Southeast Asia. They discuss their research, collaborations and approach in the region, mixed with personal insights of how they came to their topics of study – from bioarchaeology to food security, puppetry, piracy, animal health, archives, elections, and conservation.

SSEAC Director Michele Ford also co-hosts the New Books in Southeast Asian Studies program on the New Books Network, which features in-depth interviews with scholars of Southeast Asia and has a global audience. Past guests have included Associate Professor Jane Ferguson on ethnic Shan identity and Associate Professor David Reeve on his vivid biography of an Indonesian public intellectual, alongside Sydney academics including Dr Anjalee Cohen, Professor Nick Enfield, Dr Natali Pearson, and Dr Aim Sinpeng. Thirteen episodes had been recorded to December 2022.



In a snapshot

100+ SSEAC Stories episodes

210k+ downloads

27+ institutions represented

13 episodes on New Books in Southeast Asian Studies

“I regularly listen to the SSEAC Stories podcasts, which stand out for their remarkable quality, diversity and accessibility. I also assign some of these podcasts as essential listening in undergraduate and postgraduate courses that I teach at the University of Sydney.”

Dr Sophie Chao
The University of Sydney

“What an extraordinary job you’ve been doing with the SSEAC podcasts. There’s simply nothing to compare with this collection of interviews on so many interesting Southeast Asia-related topics. Fabulous stuff.”

Professor Emeritus Philip Hirsch
The University of Sydney



Leadership training

We build the leadership, policy and advocacy skills of partners in the region through tailored training programs delivered in Australia and Indonesia. Since 2015, we have successfully delivered 13 short courses supporting women NGO leaders, disability activists, university executives, public servants, researchers, and students. These training programs have empowered participants and strengthened organisations, as well as built SSEAC's connections with Australian and Indonesian government agencies, NGOs and universities.



“The training is incredible. It is extremely important for the NGO female leadership cadre in Indonesia. Everyone has the opportunity to be a leader – a leader that must be able to hear, and not just be heard.”

Juliana

Association of Women's Resource Development Centers, Sumatra

Empowering women leaders

SSEAC has supported over 75 emerging female leaders from NGOs focused on women and gender issues in Indonesia. We have run several iterations of a training course for women through the Australian Government's Empowering Indonesian Women for Poverty Reduction (MAMPU) program, funded by DFAT. Drawing on the expertise of SSEAC staff and members, the training has improved participants' leadership, management and organisational skills, built NGO capacity, and deepened connections between civil society in Australia and Indonesia.

In a snapshot

320+ participants trained through our programs

4 leadership courses delivered for disability activists in Indonesia

3 leadership courses delivered for women leaders in Indonesia

80+ activists and academics trained on research methods



Supporting disability advocates

SSEAC has trained over 80 emerging leaders from disabled people's organisations across Indonesia since 2016. Funded by DFAT's Australia Awards program, our short courses have supported participants to develop skills and strategies to more effectively tackle disability-related policy challenges and affect lasting change.

Crucially, the program has brought activists and policymakers together to share perspectives and work collaboratively on common goals. It has sparked and enhanced advocates' campaigns for inclusion and empowered them to disseminate new knowledge and assume leadership positions in the disability movement in Indonesia. Through field visits, workshops and engagement opportunities in Australia, the program has also forged meaningful connections between Indonesian and Australian disability activists and organisations that inform and enrich the disability sector in both countries.



“These two weeks have been full of so much knowledge and so many experiences that have equipped our organisations with the ability to empower and advocate for the rights of people with disabilities.”

Edy Supriyanto
SEHATI, Central Java

Showcasing the University



We champion closer ties with Southeast Asia by receiving visiting government and university delegations from around the region. SSEAC works closely with the Office of Global Engagement to host regular visits which help foster links between Sydney academics and policymakers. Since 2012, we have hosted 75 meetings with diplomats, parliamentarians, and other high-level representatives from Australia and the region to discuss our work on Southeast Asia.

We have also contributed to Australian policy development on Southeast Asia by making submissions to government and parliamentary inquiries. For example, in 2013 we submitted to a DFAT inquiry on Australia's Indonesia Strategy, to a parliamentary inquiry into Australia's relationship with Timor-Leste, and to an AusAID program proposal on supporting Indonesia's tertiary education sector.

“SSEAC delivers high-quality, innovative programs in relation to Southeast Asia. As a board member of the Australia-ASEAN Council, I follow the activities and publications of the Centre to keep abreast of topical issues and research. The team leading the Centre clearly have deep field experience, subject matter expertise and extensive networks across Southeast Asia. The contribution they make to dialogue and people to people linkages is valued.”

Ms Tamerlaine Beasley
Managing Director Beasley Intercultural





Building Southeast Asia literacy

We bring students from different disciplines together to learn from the region and its people. We seek to enhance the learning experience and increase the number of students who graduate with a passion for Southeast Asia.

Postgraduate support



Emerging Scholars Conference

SSEAC's annual Emerging Scholars Conference enables postgraduate students to showcase their Southeast Asia research to an audience of academics, practitioners, peers and the general public. Held since 2018, the conference has attracted exceptional students from at least 12 universities across Australia, as well as Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, the United Kingdom, and Vietnam.

The conference helps participants to develop their academic networks, hone their public speaking and presentation skills, and learn about research beyond their field. The event has drawn an eclectic range of papers, ranging across countries, disciplines and subjects – from rural development in Vietnam, to disease investigation in Indonesian aquaculture, social change movements in Thailand, and the impact of COVID-19 on the arts in Singapore.

In a snapshot

4 conferences held

540+ attendees

98 papers presented

20 universities represented

Postgraduate workshops

We also support postgraduate students to build their skills and successfully navigate the realities of a PhD. From 2016–21, we ran annual workshops for postgrads leading in to our Politics in Action event. Delivered by SSEAC academic members at Sydney and beyond, these all-day workshops focused on key aspects of academia, including strategic publishing during a PhD; understanding research impact; building academic networks; engaging with policy and non-academic audiences; and preparing for academic jobs.

These sessions helped dozens of students to prepare for a fulfilling post-PhD career and achieve their goals. In addition, we have also run standalone workshops in response to postgraduate needs, including sessions on public speaking, managing feedback, and using library resources.

“A note of appreciation for a very successful event! Everything went smoothly, it was very well moderated, the quality of presentations was top notch, and the questions asked by participants were critical and intriguing. Very well done indeed.”

Conference participant, 2021

Postgraduate retreats

SSEAC holds regular postgraduate retreats for students from around Australia. From 2013–18, we held thematic retreats covering different aspects of research, from interdisciplinary collaboration to fieldwork, ethics, leadership in academia, methods, and writing for a general audience. Delivered by core SSEAC staff and academic members, these intensive retreats helped enhance participants' skills and ensure their thesis work was the best it could be.

From 2019, the retreats have focused on supporting participants to progress an academic output on Southeast Asia, with structured writing time, workshops, feedback and debriefing sessions. Some 195 students have taken part in these writing-focused retreats, drawn from diverse disciplinary backgrounds and based at universities across Australia.

The retreats have helped students hone their writing craft, reflect on their goals and productivity, and offer constructive feedback to peers. Many have credited the retreat as integral to polishing off a thesis chapter or submitting a high-quality journal article. In 2023, our first writing retreat of the year attracted some 45 postgraduate participants.



“Feeling reenergised and inspired after being back at an in-person event again, surrounded and supported by so many researchers doing amazing work on Southeast Asia. Thank you SSEAC for everything you do to support postgrads.”

Retreat participant, 2022

In a snapshot

- 5 writing retreats
- 6 thematic retreats
- 308 participants since 2013
- 18 Australian universities

Undergraduate support

Honours Bootcamp

This annual three-day professional development program helps high-achieving Honours students to take their research to the next level and connect with likeminded peers. Over 110 students from universities around Australia have taken part since 2014.

SSEAC's academic members teach students practical skills, such as thesis writing, publishing and public speaking, as well as subject-specific knowledge, through interdisciplinary workshops, seminars and group activities.

We also draw on key external partners to enrich the student experience. In 2021, we partnered with the ANU Indonesia Project to offer the program online during pandemic restrictions, drawing talented students researching topics including the poetics of Filipino national dress, female merchants in early modern Vietnam, social cohesion in Malaysia, and post-disaster housing in Indonesia.

Students have consistently remarked that the Bootcamp helped them expand their networks beyond their disciplines, and exposed them to new perspectives that shaped their future studies.

In a snapshot

8 Honours Bootcamps held

110+ student participants

20 Australian universities

“It was so refreshing and enriching to hear from so many like-minded scholars working on such diverse topics – and that despite the diversity, we were united by a passion and interest in better understanding Southeast Asia.”

Student participant, 2021



“My utmost thanks to the SSEAC team who made the Honours Bootcamp possible. I learnt a lot and was able to develop skills that I can take beyond my Honours project and apply throughout my career and professional development.”

Student participant, 2019

Beyond the classroom

SSEAC's flagship field schools to the region offer students a unique education experience. Since 2013, our field schools have taken students to Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Vietnam, primarily funded by the New Colombo Plan (NCP).

Students are brought together from across disciplines to explore key themes, from women's empowerment to disability and social inclusion, urbanisation, water, and land rights. The program includes pre-departure language and cultural training; site visits; engagement with local students, NGOs, professionals and communities; and a practical research component.

In many cases, our field schools have positively influenced students' career trajectories. Alumni have gone on to work at local and international NGOs in their fields of interest, enter academia, and collaborate on research with their peers. Many return to the region for work, study or travel.

We also secured NCP funding to run five field schools in the region in 2023, enabling students to study anti-microbial resistance in Cambodia; social justice in Indonesia; disaster risk and resilience in the Philippines; the COVID-19 vaccine rollout in Singapore; and disability and work in Timor-Leste.



In a snapshot

20 field schools in the region and funding for 5 more

1 virtual field school to Thailand

8 Southeast Asian countries

300+ student participants

\$845k NCP funding

Transformational student experiences



Matilde Breth Petersen (Bachelor of Health Sciences, Psychology) took part in our disability and social inclusion field school to Jakarta and Yogyakarta in 2017, working closely with other Sydney students from Arts and Engineering, as well as Indonesian students from Gadjah Mada University. During the visit, Matilde was inspired by a meeting with Benny Prawira, who established the suicide prevention organisation Into the Light Indonesia. Four years later, Matilde and Benny co-authored a paper together on mental health stigma in the Asia-Pacific, as part of a broader team of academics and practitioners in the field of mental health.

“I am forever grateful for the wonderful experiences I had during the interdisciplinary field trip to Indonesia, and for all the opportunities that arose out of it. It has fundamentally shaped my approach to health research, allowing me to adopt a more holistic view of mental health issues.”

Matilde Breth Petersen

Disability and social inclusion in Indonesia, 2017



Zoe Neill (Bachelor of International and Global Studies) took part in SSEAC’s field school to Indonesia in July 2018 to study issues of women’s empowerment. Over two weeks, students learned about the work of grassroots women’s rights organisations and initiatives, with visits to local NGOs in Jakarta and Makassar. Inspired by the field school, Zoe returned to Indonesia less than a year later to work with a women’s rights organisation in Padang, West Sumatra. She credited the field school experience as invaluable in shaping her knowledge, interests and career path, and has since taken up the role of Project Coordinator with the Salvation Army International Development team in Australia.

“It was really powerful. These women’s groups had achieved so much. I felt quite privileged to have heard their experiences. Going on a field school can really ignite a new passion, or you may realise one that you’d already had. Even just to experience our nearest neighbours I think is really important. Definitely – everyone should go.”

Zoe Neill

Women’s empowerment in Indonesia, 2018

Embedding Southeast Asia in the curriculum

SSEAC has joined with partners from across the University to launch new initiatives that encourage students to meaningfully engage with Southeast Asia.



Participants and judges involved in the 'Make a Real Difference' initiative in 2022 (photograph by Maja Baska).

'Make a Real Difference'

In collaboration with the Business School, we helped establish 'Make a Real Difference' in 2022. This initiative supports students to harness their analytical and problem-solving skills to propose innovative solutions to real-world problems in Southeast Asia.

The program is offered to Masters students enrolled in the Creative and Analytic Mindset unit – one of the university's largest units of study, with 1,760 enrolments in the first semester of 2022.

Engage Asia Challenge

SSEAC supported the inaugural Engage Asia Challenge in 2022, a co-curricular initiative led by the Business School and open to undergraduate students.

Students work in small teams to develop solutions to key sustainability challenges in the Asia-Pacific region, with the top solutions showcased at the Business School's Engage Asia Symposium.

Encouraged by SSEAC, the leading ideas in 2022 had a significant Southeast Asia focus.

Object-based Learning

In 2021, we launched our object-based learning program, in partnership with the University's Chau Chak Wing Museum.

The program enables students to engage with Southeast Asia's complexity and diversity through material culture, and explore possibilities for research and learning using the museum's collection.

With high interest, the program has since expanded to include researchers and professional staff.



“The ‘Make a Real Difference’ event was a resounding success. Business leaders were in awe of the creative ideas and solutions presented. Many students have gone on to develop their ideas further through the Sydney Business School’s Genesis program. This unique collaboration with SSEAC allowed us to explore how to make a real difference in the region and embed Southeast Asia firmly in our curriculum at the University of Sydney.”

Dr Abdul Razeed
University of Sydney Business School



Photograph by Maja Baska.



“Thank you again for a really enjoyable and informative program! I appreciate the work, time and coordination that went into it and hope the museum can use this as a great model for other regions/periods of time. I particularly enjoyed handling the objects and learning from the curators – a peak behind the curtain so to speak.”

Student participant
Object-based Learning, 2021

“The experiences and skills I have gained from my involvement with SSEAC continue to play an important role in the development of my research practice and career. SSEAC postgraduate and early career workshops were key to me successfully securing my first teaching role, and have given me skills I continue to use when applying for teaching and research positions. SSEAC is a vital element of the University of Sydney, enriching the student experience, the professional development of staff, and the intellectual life of the University of Sydney community.”

Michael Leadbetter

Lecturer in Archaeology, University of Oxford

“Through SSEAC’s retreats, I [was able] to engage with other postgraduate students from a variety of backgrounds, learning from their different perspectives, and developing skills from working in interdisciplinary teams.”

Dr Johanna Wong

PhD graduate, Sydney

“In addition to providing seed funding for new collaborative research initiatives and supporting language learning, I really appreciate the way SSEAC has created a learning community for postgraduate research students. This is a fantastic asset for students working on, or coming from, Southeast Asia.”

Associate Professor Jeffrey Neilson

School of Geosciences

“SSEAC provides a unique support system for research students, emerging researchers, and established scholars alike. The Centre is an extremely energetic one that proactively brings people together and provides meaningful opportunities for professional development. The communities fostered by SSEAC have been the richest and most productive of my academic life by far. I know of no initiative or institution at the University of Sydney that makes such a major contribution, relative to its size, to the intellectual and academic life of its University and of the various publics that it serves.”

Dr Wayan Jarrah Sastrawan

École française d’Extrême-Orient

“I’ve been on two SSEAC field schools to Singapore and Indonesia. These programs honestly changed my view of the University. It allowed me to explore and study instead of simply repeating a metric of assignments.”

Angus McDonald

Sydney graduate

“Indonesian Studies students who have participated in the field schools have benefitted from the opportunity to apply their language skills and enhance their country knowledge by taking on the role of interpreter and translator for their peers in a fieldwork situation. Students have expressed that this has extended their linguistic and research skills.”

Associate Professor Novi Djenar

School of Languages and Cultures

“SSEAC’s Honours Bootcamp held each year has been a success. Two of my students from the University of Queensland have attended these events and spoken highly of how well the program was organised and how much they benefitted from it. The networking opportunities were also valuable. Both students finished their degrees back at the University of Queensland with First Class Honours.”

Dr Patrick Jory

University of Queensland

“My utmost thanks to you and the SSEAC team who made the Honours Bootcamp possible. I was able to learn and develop skills that I can take beyond my Honours project and apply them throughout my career and professional development.”

April McElligott

Sydney graduate

“Through participating in SSEAC events I have benefitted from the development of supportive relationships... and extra-curricular opportunities which have enhanced my learning experience and provided me with additional skills to take to the workforce at the conclusion of my studies.”

John Dooley

Sydney graduate



Contact us

sydney.edu.au/sseac
+61 2 9114 0953
sseac@sydney.edu.au

Follow us

 Facebook (@sydneyseasteasiacentre)
 Twitter (@seacsydney)
 Instagram (@seacsydney)
Follow **#sseac**



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY