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Sydney Southeast Asia Centre

2018–19 Yearbook



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THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

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Welcome

A message from the Vice-Chancellor	2
A message from the Director	3

About us

About the Sydney Southeast Asia Centre	4
Governance	6
Meet some of our people	7

Highlights

ASAA conference	8
ASEAN Forum 2018	11
Politics in Action	12
Sustainable transboundary governance in Southeast Asia	13
Other events	14

Research

Fostering high-impact research	16
Supporting sustainable farming practices in the Greater Mekong region	17
An ethnographic study of biocapitalism and agribusiness in rural Indonesia	18
Site and Space in Southeast Asia	19
Supporting research excellence	20

Engagement

Expanding collaboration in the region	23
Building capacity in the region	24

Education

The next generation of researchers	27
Interdisciplinary field schools	28

A message from the Vice-Chancellor



The Sydney Southeast Asia Centre (SSEAC) exemplifies the University's commitment to creating and sustaining a culture of research excellence and a distinctive Sydney education built on the values of excellence and engagement, for the benefit of Australia and the wider world. Reflecting the University's broader strategic goals, SSEAC's mission is to:

- consolidate Sydney's reputation as a hub for Southeast Asia engagement
- champion research that transforms the lives of the region's people
- equip our undergraduate and research students to engage in meaningful and ethical ways in Southeast Asia and, in the process, help them prepare for the world of work.

In a relatively short time, SSEAC has become an important hub for Southeast Asia engagement, reaching out to academics and students across the University, the country, and the region.

As part of these endeavours, SSEAC co-hosted the largest ever conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA) in 2018. With 1142 registered participants (more than three times the number at the previous conference), ASAA 2018 represented a high watermark in Asian studies in Australia. It also showcased the University's commitment to multidisciplinary, including, for the first time, dedicated streams for scholars of agriculture, public health, international business and urban studies, to name just a few.

In the research domain, SSEAC supports Southeast Asia-related research that is not only excellent but improves people's lives. In 2018–19, it introduced a new incubator program to better support early career researchers. SSEAC is also working to build the next generation of Southeast Asia research expertise at the University and beyond, through its online offerings and face-to-face programs for research students.

In the education domain, SSEAC's flagship interdisciplinary field schools continue to inspire students to look not only beyond Australia but beyond their individual disciplines. In the process, they develop their critical thinking, cultural competence and interdisciplinary effectiveness in ways that complement the learning that takes place in our lecture halls and classrooms.

SSEAC also continues to take a leadership role through its training programs for women activists and activists with disabilities from Indonesia. These programs put the University's values into practice and demonstrate the real-world benefit of our knowledge of, and networks in, the region.

Once again, I would like to congratulate the SSEAC team on its hard work and commitment to excellence, as it continues to lead the University's engagement with Southeast Asia.

Dr Michael Spence
Vice-Chancellor and Principal

A message from the Director



Thank you for joining us to celebrate another year of achievements by SSEAC and its members. Highlights this year include the 2018 biennial conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA 2018), our new program for early career researchers and our first-ever Vietnam field school, organised in collaboration with the Sydney Vietnam Initiative.

Organising ASAA 2018 was a mammoth task, and one that occupied much of the SSEAC team's time in 2017 and the first half of 2018. It was a delight to see our hard work pay off in what was widely acknowledged as an outstanding event. It was also wonderful to have the opportunity to work with colleagues in the China Studies Centre and the School of Languages and Cultures on this initiative. I am proud to see, in the months since, that many of the innovations we introduced have been embraced by the convenors of ASAA 2020 at the University of Melbourne.

It has also been a personal delight to launch our new program for early career researchers working on Southeast Asia. This program has two key components.

The first is the provision of targeted support for emerging researchers wishing to apply for an Australian Research Council (ARC) grant. This year, we ran a pilot program for a number of Discovery Early Career Researcher Award (DECRA) applicants from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, in which participants received detailed feedback from me, as well as the opportunity to workshop their applications with their peers. We plan to expand the scope of this program to other disciplinary domains.

The second component involves offering postdoctoral fellowships for people in the early stages of their post-PhD careers. These one- to two-year positions are designed to provide a stepping stone to a DECRA or other longer-term postdoctoral position. Advertised internationally, the positions have generated a great deal of interest; in the 2019 round, 107 applications were made for a single fellowship.

While our Vietnam field school was only one of a number to run in the last 12 months, it represents a milestone as our first collaboration with the Sydney Vietnam Initiative. Run in Hanoi, the field school focused on urbanisation. It differed from the majority of our field schools in that it involved postgraduate students who interacted with a wide range of locally based organisations and made site visits to several locations. It shared, however, our emphasis on interdisciplinarity, bringing together students from medicine, development studies, urban planning and public health, to work together on independent research projects.

I trust that you will enjoy reading about these and other SSEAC activities in the pages that follow.

Professor Michele Ford

Director, Sydney Southeast Asia Centre

About the Sydney Southeast Asia Centre

The Sydney Southeast Asia Centre (SSEAC) is Australia's premier centre of interdisciplinary academic excellence relevant to Southeast Asia.

With more than 500 academics across all faculties and schools at the University, SSEAC:

- supports research excellence
- encourages a new generation of Southeast Asia experts
- brings students from different disciplines together to learn from the region and its people
- partners with government, business and civil society to address real-world issues.

Our researchers work in and on all 11 countries in Southeast Asia across five thematic areas:

- Economic and social development
- Environment and resources
- Health
- Heritage and the arts
- State and society.

SSEAC supports its members by providing funding opportunities and creating an academic community around engagement in our countries of focus.

In providing a focal point for Southeast Asia-related research, we are connecting researchers across the institution and forging new links and multidisciplinary approaches to the region.

SSEAC has worked closely with the Australian Government since 2014 to provide leadership training to activists from Women's Empowerment and Disabled People's Organisations across Indonesia.

Through these courses, SSEAC fosters links between Indonesian and Australian activists and contributes to a deeper understanding of the universality of the struggles they face.

Our flagship interdisciplinary field schools have given more than 300 students the opportunity to engage in real-world learning in Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Vietnam.

In 2017, SSEAC received the Vice-Chancellor's Award for Excellence in the category of Outstanding Education Engagement and Innovation for this initiative.

These field schools have drawn together students from disciplines including architecture, communications, economics, engineering, heritage conservation, international public health, occupational therapy and political economy. Students work in multidisciplinary teams to study topics like agrarian change, food security, housing policy, urbanism and health, and women's and disability rights.

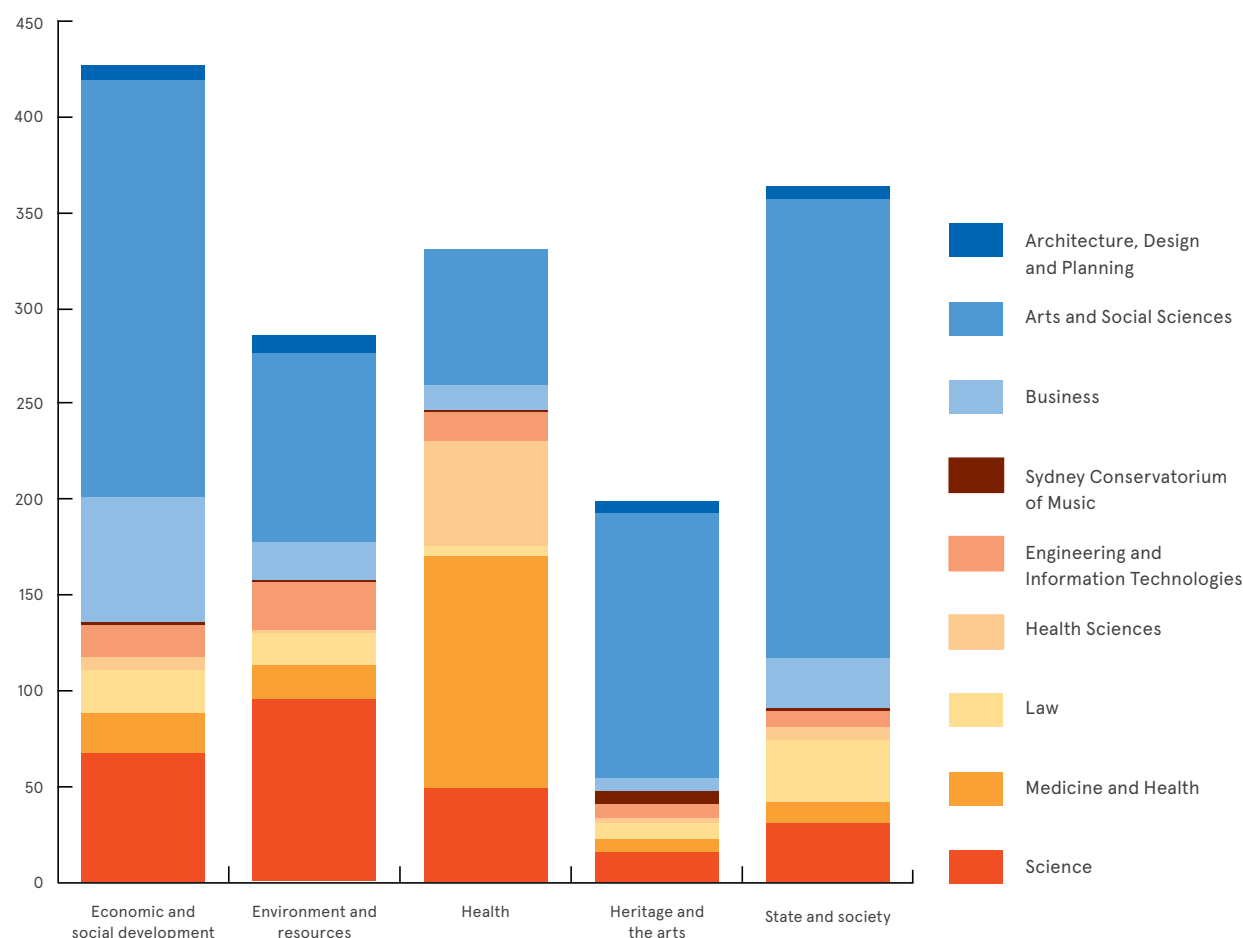
Each year, SSEAC hosts a number of events designed to stimulate public engagement.

Our Politics in Action Forum draws on expertise from Australia and around the world to inform a broad audience about recent political developments in the region.

The ASEAN Forum – which targets policymakers, NGOs and academics – focuses on a different theme each year, from the role of China in ASEAN to gender relations in Southeast Asia.

We also champion closer ties with Southeast Asia by receiving visiting government and university delegations from Southeast Asia, as well as cultivating strong relationships with Australia-based embassies and consulates from the region.

Disciplinary spread of SSEAC members at the University of Sydney



Related initiatives

The University of Sydney is fostering a deeper and broader understanding of Southeast Asia through the following high-profile initiatives that work closely with regional and global partners.

- **The Angkor Research Program**, a cross-disciplinary collaboration incorporating the Greater Angkor Project, which is creating new perspectives on urban society in the Angkor region.
- **The Centre for Asian and Pacific Law**, which has particular expertise in Indonesian, Malaysian and Vietnamese legal systems and laws.
- **The Department of Indonesian Studies**, one of the most respected in Australia, with a strong reputation for its research and policy work in Indonesia.
- **The Department of Peace and Conflict Studies**, which incorporates the West Papua Project and a concentration of researchers with an interest in Timor-Leste.
- **The Hoc Mãi Foundation**, which provides development assistance, public health programs and medical training in Vietnam.
- **The Marie Bashir Institute for Infectious Diseases and Biosecurity**, which brings together researchers, educators and professionals from across the biological and social sciences to increase understanding about and develop new methods to reduce infectious diseases.
- **The Mekong Research Group**, Australia's premier group of researchers focused on the Mekong region.
- **The Office for Global Health**, which facilitates international health research and works with our Faculty of Medicine and Health to contribute to health and wellbeing in the Asia-Pacific region.

Governance

SSEAC Director Professor Michele Ford is supported by:

- Dr Thushara Dibley, Deputy Director
- Dr Elisabeth Kramer, Deputy Director
- Dr Natali Pearson, Curriculum Coordinator
- Ariane Defreine, Communications and Events Officer
- Minh Le, Administration Officer

The team is governed by a Board of Management and supported by our Country Coordinators and Executive Committee as well as by our Postgraduate Coordinator Wayan Jarrah Sastrawan.

Staff work closely with many of the University of Sydney's professional service units, including the Office of Global Engagement, International Services, Marketing and Communications, the Library and Sydney Ideas.

The team also collaborates with other multidisciplinary research centres and Southeast Asia-related initiatives, as well as with the faculties.

Board of Management

Name	Division
Professor Stephen Garton (Chair)	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Provost)
Professor Duncan Ivison	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research)
Professor Philippa Pattison	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education)
Professor Katherine Belov	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Global Engagement)
Professor Michele Ford	Sydney Southeast Asia Centre

Executive Committee

Name	Department/School	Position
Dr Sandra Seno-Alday	Business School	Community Outreach Advisor
Associate Professor Russell Bush	Veterinary Science	Curriculum Advisor
Professor David Guest	Agriculture and Environment	Policy and Regional Outreach Advisor
Associate Professor Kirsty Foster	Sydney Medical School	Policy and Regional Outreach Advisor
Professor Simon Butt	Sydney Law School	Research Advisor
Associate Professor Damien Field	Agriculture and Environment	Research Training Advisor
Dr Petr Matous	School of Civil Engineering	Research Training Advisor

Country Coordinators

Name	Department/School	Country
Associate Professor Daniel Tan	Life and Environmental Sciences	Cambodia
Dr Jeff Neilson	Life and Environmental Sciences	Indonesia
Professor Nick Enfield	Linguistics	Laos
Associate Professor Marina Kennerson	Medicine and Health	Malaysia & Brunei
Dr Louis Taborda	Civil Engineering	Myanmar
Dr Aaron Opdyke	Humanitarian Engineering	The Philippines
Dr Yeow-Tong Chia	Education and Social Work	Singapore
Dr Aim Sinpeng	Government and International Relations	Thailand
Dr Thushara Dibley	Asian Studies	Timor-Leste
Dr Linh Nguyen	Business	Vietnam

Meet some of our people



Wayan Jarrah Sastrawan

Jarrah joined SSEAC in 2015 as a master's student and is now a PhD candidate in Asian history. His research investigates the development of historical writing in equatorial Southeast Asia up to the 17th century.

Since 2019, Jarrah has been coordinating the centre's postgraduate community of more than 200 members.

Jarrah's interest in the region began during primary school in Bali, and later deepened out of both a general fascination with the mechanisms of time and a specific desire to understand the complexities of the politics and culture of Indonesia and the region.

Jarrah lectures and tutors students in the units of study: The History of Islam in the Indian Ocean, and History of Modern Indonesia. He is also the Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA) Postgraduate Students' Representative on the 2019-20 Council. He is an editor of the *Perspectives on the Past* blog on the website *New Mandala*.



Tamerlaine Beasley

Tamerlaine's interest in Southeast Asia began at age 16, when she completed a one-year exchange program in Bangkok. She returned to Australia speaking fluent Thai, and with an enduring passion for Southeast Asia.

Tamerlaine is the Managing Director and Founder of Beasley Intercultural, where she leads a team of consultants working with corporate clients, international NGOs, and government. She is a board member of the Australia ASEAN Council, and leads the University's Vice-Chancellor's Sponsorship Program for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Women.

Tamerlaine began volunteering at the Australian Mekong Resource Centre in 1988, and went on to join its Advisory Board.

She has since been involved in many SSEAC initiatives, including facilitating our ASEAN Women in Business Forum, and speaking at the 2017 postgraduate retreat and SSEAC's Australia Indonesia Leaders Programs in 2015, 2016 and 2019.



Simon Butt

Professor Simon Butt has played a crucial role in SSEAC since the beginning, as a member of the Steering Committee that campaigned for the centre's establishment.

In his current capacity as Research Advisor on the Executive Committee, he helps identify and facilitate collaborative research opportunities between University of Sydney researchers as well as with external and international collaborators.

Simon is the Director of the Centre for Asian and Pacific Law at the University of Sydney Law School and an ARC Future Fellow. His research focuses on Indonesian law and comparative law, principally transplanting legal norms between jurisdictions. He has published widely on constitutional, criminal, civic, human rights, Islamic and customary law (*adat*) in Indonesia.

Simon is also a fluent Indonesian speaker and has taught more than 70 law courses in Indonesia on a diverse range of topics.

The largest ever ASAA conference

In July 2018, SSEAC Director Professor Michele Ford convened the largest ever biennial conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA).

Hosted by SSEAC in collaboration with the University's China Studies Centre and the School of Languages and Cultures, the conference was attended by more than 1100 Asian Studies academics and practitioners from the region and around the world.

Reflecting the University of Sydney's commitment to moving beyond disciplinary silos, we decided on 'Area Studies and Beyond' as our conference theme. And beyond area studies we went, involving scholars from public health, architecture and international business, to name just a few disciplines generally not represented at the conference.

This spread of disciplines was made possible by the amazing work of our disciplinary and thematic champions, the majority of whom were SSEAC members. Sub-regional associations, like the Association of Mainland Southeast Asia Scholars, also played a vital role. The 2018 conference was the first to put the spotlight on the sub-regional associations in this way.

Innovations within the conference format didn't stop there. Instead of inviting a senior scholar to address the plenary session, we assembled a panel of early career researchers to explain why it's a great time to be an Asia scholar.

The plenary session was preceded by a montage of reflections on the importance of Asia to Australia and the world. This montage featured, among others, the Hon. Julie Bishop MP (then Minister for Foreign Affairs); Kevin McCann (Co-Vice Chair of the New Colombo Plan Reference Group and fellow of the University of Sydney Senate), and Sydney graduate Professor Barbara Watson Andaya (University of Hawai'i).

Other highlights of the conference included a series of roundtables built around SSEAC's five signature themes: economic and social development; environment and resources; health; heritage and the arts; and state and society.

Participants also had a wide range of activities to choose from during the extended breaks. Having enjoyed a different Asian menu each day, there was a wealth of film screenings and book launches to attend.

The conference was very well received, with many attendees describing it as the best they had ever attended. Others praised its "intellectually vibrant panels", "superb organisation", "welcoming environment" and "dynamic atmosphere" – due in no small part, as one participant said, to the efforts of the "outstanding team at SSEAC".



Volunteers and participants at the ASAA conference



Plenary session

The 2018 conference opened with an animated plenary session featuring three emerging scholars of Asia: Dr Jacqui Baker (Murdoch University), Dr Thomas Baudinette (Macquarie University) and Dr Tanya Jakimow (UNSW Sydney).

Facilitated by SSEAC's Dr Thushara Dibley, the discussion focused on what it means to be an Asianist in Australia today.

One of the key points of debate related to the merits of embedding Asia knowledge across the curriculum, or whether a more traditional 'area studies' approach is a better way of developing the next generation of Asia-literate students.

One thing that garnered widespread agreement was the need for Australian universities to embrace multidisciplinary by delivering Asia-related content and skills across faculties.

The plenary session signalled a shift away from a more traditional keynote approach, auguring well for the health of Asian studies not only as a standalone discipline but as a departure point for sustained scholarly engagement with the region.

Roundtables

On the second day of the conference, five standalone roundtables were held, featuring four to six experts and focusing on some of the region's most 'wicked problems', namely the impact of urbanisation, Asia's heritage challenges, climate change and its impact on knowledge and power, democratic decline in Asia, and the relationship between health outcomes and the rise of big tobacco.

With over 121 million smokers in Southeast Asia alone, the health roundtable was a timely – and alarming – intervention into the debate about the effectiveness of efforts to combat the region's tobacco epidemic, where significant economic and social barriers remain in place despite the introduction of tobacco control policies.

Cause for hope exists, however, with speakers contextualising these challenges with reference to countermeasures such as the sustainable development goals and the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

Sub-regional associations

The sub-regional associations and councils were given particular attention, with an afternoon and evening dedicated entirely to regionally focused discussions and meetings. Sub-regional keynote sessions were held with the:

- Association of Mainland Southeast Asia Scholars
- Chinese Studies Association of Australia
- Indonesia Council
- Japanese Studies Association of Australia
- Korean Studies Association of Australia
- Malaysia and Singapore Society of Australia
- South Asian Studies Association of Australia
- Timor-Leste Studies Association.

Each session featured a dedicated keynote speaker discussing topics ranging from the protection of Indonesia's migrant workers to social memory activism in Timor-Leste and Aceh.

Participants later convened for sub-regional dinners, enabling scholars with shared sub-regional interests to come together in both an official and a casual setting.

SSEAC-sponsored pre-conference workshops

Postgraduate workshop

Postgraduate students attending the ASAA conference were offered the opportunity to participate in a half-day workshop organised by the then-ASAA postgraduate representative, Dr Natali Pearson.

The first part of the workshop focused on networking, with a panel of early, mid-career and senior academics, chaired by Professor Michele Ford, sharing their networking strategies and experiences. The second part focused on helping participants navigate the job market. Students prepared applications, then worked in small groups to generate a shortlist.

The top three candidates proceeded to a mock interview in front of workshop participants. Each interview was followed by constructive feedback from the interview panel, providing a rare insight into what hiring committees are looking for. The top-ranked candidate was the University of Sydney's Cheng Nien Yuan.

Labour relations workshop

SSEAC Director Professor Michele Ford convened a workshop on labour movements in Southeast Asia in conjunction with a series of panels on the same topic during the conference.

The workshop was attended by a dozen scholars and labour activists from Australia, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Taiwan and Hong Kong. In a lively half-day discussion, participants debated emerging regional trends in labour relations, shared insights into how trade unions are faring in different countries, and considered the role of the international labour movement in the region.

The workshop was a conference highlight for many of the participants. For example, a postgraduate participant from Perth wrote that it "offered a fantastic opportunity to meet scholars working in my area. It pushed me out of my comfort zone and broadened my perspective, which was fantastic."

A disability lens on Asia

The ASAA 2018 conference brought together a group of scholars from around Australia and the region with a shared interest in disability in Asia.

This conference was the first time the ASAA hosted a stream of papers focused specifically on the issue of disability. The panels featured speakers from a wide range of disciplines, focusing on poverty and disability, disability-inclusive disaster-risk reduction, inclusive education, and disability advocacy. People with disabilities participated in the sessions, and the ASAA provided sign interpreters.

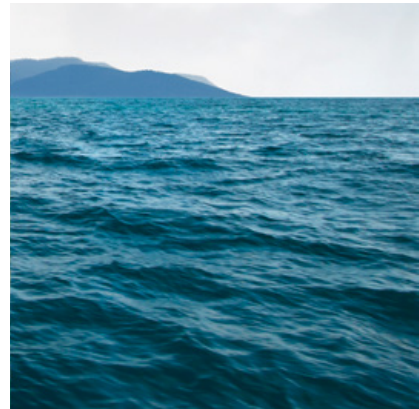
The pre-conference workshop on Monday 2 July was one of the best attended of the 10 workshops that day. It focused on framing research questions about disability in an Asian context, working with practitioners through research and funding for disability research in Asia.



Workers in a silk factory in Vietnam

ASEAN Forum 2018

In 2018, SSEAC's sixth annual Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Forum focused on the theme of environmental sustainability in ASEAN. The forum was co-hosted by the Sydney Environment Institute and featured seven speakers from Australia and Southeast Asia.



The keynote address was delivered by Professor Emerita Lorraine Elliott (Department of International Relations at the Australian National University). She demonstrated how examples of sustainability regulation and practice in Southeast Asia have responded to challenges of scale and local adaptation, and offered critical reflections on the science-policy interface and the co-production of sustainability knowledge.

Individual presentations addressed the question of how to protect common environmental goods and maintain sustainable development in ASEAN. Chaired by Professor David Schlosberg (Co-Director, Sydney Environment Institute), the speakers focused on Southeast Asia's forests, oceans and air.

Dr Rini Astuti (Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore) argued that forest-peatland commons in Indonesia can be used to address transboundary haze

in Southeast Asia. Dr Manuel Solis (Adelaide Law School, University of Adelaide) discussed climate and ocean change in the South China Sea, and proposed that ASEAN had an important role to play in reframing the narrative from contestation to consensus-focused. Associate Professor Geoff Morgan (Sydney School of Public Health, University of Sydney) provided a sobering overview of the health burden due to air pollution in Southeast Asia.

The forum concluded with a panel discussion chaired by Dr Natali Pearson (SSEAC), focusing on the challenges of balancing economic growth and environmental sustainability in ASEAN.

In their discussion on whether sustainable development is achievable in ASEAN, Dr Catherine Dorey (Fish & Fisheries Science and Policy Campaigner), Dr Arunima Malik (School of Physics and Sydney Business School, University of Sydney),

and Dr Pichamon Yeophantong (Department of International Relations and Development, UNSW Canberra) identified not only the environmental and economic impact, but also the human rights and public health consequences, of failing to attend to these issues.

The night before the ASEAN Forum, SSEAC and the Sydney Environment Institute co-hosted a Sydney Ideas event, 'Planet versus profit: striking a balance', which took a closer look at Australia's role in negotiating the tension between economic growth and environmental sustainability.

The multidisciplinary panel of experts featured two of the ASEAN Forum speakers, Dr Dorey and Dr Yeophantong, as well as Professor Christopher Wright (Work and Organisational Studies, University of Sydney). The panel was chaired by Professor Bill Pritchard (Human Geography, University of Sydney).

Politics in Action

This annual public forum hosted by SSEAC is an opportunity to hear about the most recent and relevant political developments throughout Southeast Asia. The latest Politics in Action forum was held in May 2019.



Crowds waving Malaysian flags at Independence Day celebrations

At this year's forum, six academics provided an analysis of the political situation in selected countries in Southeast Asia and discussed the broader implications, for our region, of events in these countries.

This year our presentations focused on:

- **Malaysia** – Ms Tricia Yeoh, University of Nottingham Malaysia
- **Timor-Leste** – Professor Clinton Fernandes, UNSW Canberra
- **Singapore** – Mr Hoe-Yeong Loke, independent researcher
- **Thailand** – Dr Aim Sinpeng, University of Sydney
- **Indonesia** – Professor Edward Aspinall, Australian National University

The highly engaging country updates were followed by a superb wrap-up by Dr Eve Warburton from the National University of Singapore, who highlighted in her concluding remarks that we need to reconsider the 'grand myths' of democracy and think about how the changing political contexts of Southeast Asian states reflect the problematic nature of democracy more broadly.

Capitalising on the expertise gathered for the public event, SSEAC hosted targeted events for postgraduates and early career researchers (ECRs) before and after the forum.

A postgraduate workshop on 'Understanding Impact' helped students to better comprehend how impact works in academia and how it can factor into publishing decisions for research students. Sessions focused on what 'impact' means, different forms of impact and why impact matters.

At the ECR day, junior academics explored similar topics, with a focus on creating their own impact narratives.

The Politics in Action events are an opportunity to connect postgraduates and academics from institutions across Australia with a shared interest in Southeast Asia. Building meaningful links between the University of Sydney and Australian and international institutions is an integral aspect of SSEAC's work and we look forward to hosting this event again in 2020.

Sustainable transboundary governance in Southeast Asia

SSEAC regularly collaborates with international Southeast Asia-focused institutions to support research excellence and address real-world issues in the region.

In November 2018, SSEAC collaborated with the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, on a workshop on sustainable transboundary governance of the environmental commons in Southeast Asia.

Supported by a Social Science Research Council grant, the multidisciplinary workshop explored key issues in sustainable development with particular reference to the ecological commons in Southeast Asia from a transboundary governance perspective.

The workshop combined the richness of empirical research with theoretical insights into how to conceptualise and govern the transboundary environmental commons.

SSEAC executive member Professor Simon Butt represented SSEAC at the workshop. Professor Butt gave a welcome address at the opening of the workshop, and chaired a panel on grassroots transboundary movements, which included presentations related to the Lower Mekong and Indonesia.

A highlight of the workshop was the keynote address given by Philip Hirsch, Emeritus Professor of Human Geography in the School of Geosciences at the

University of Sydney, titled ‘Scaling the Environmental Commons: Broadening our Frame of Reference for Transboundary Governance in Southeast Asia’.

The presentation built upon earlier critiques of why institutions fail to address the governance challenges in their regions, by considering the relationship between the local commons impacted by transboundary projects, on the one hand, and the framing of the commons at an intergovernmental level on the other.

Over the course of the two-day workshop there were sessions on hydropower transformations (with presentations focusing on the Mekong, Myanmar, Thailand and Cambodia); peatland governance

(with a focus on Indonesia); the role of ASEAN; transboundary commoning narratives; and governance frameworks, among other topics relating to the theme.

The workshop was organised by Professor David Taylor (Department of Geography), Professor Jonathan Rigg (Asia Research Institute and Department of Geography) and Dr Michelle Miller (Asia Research Institute) – all from the National University of Singapore.

Collaborations such as this between the Sydney Southeast Asia Centre and the Asia Research Institute serve to foster regional research connections and enable meaningful social change.



Aerial shot of land separating mangrove from the sea in Indonesia
Image by Tom Fisk via Pexels

Other events

SSEAC hosts a wide variety of events each year, reflecting the diverse interests of our clusters and our membership.

We partner with institutions across the University and beyond to create a calendar of high-impact events that showcase the depth and breadth of our expertise on Southeast Asia. We also serve as a focal point for visiting scholars and experts on the region to share their research and engagement with the University.

In June 2018, the centre held the inaugural **SSEAC Postgraduate Conference**, showcasing Southeast Asia expertise from 24 higher degree by research (HDR) students from the University and beyond. The conference was preparation for HDR students who had been accepted to present research papers at the biennial conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia 2018.

Also in June, Her Excellency Ms Jane Duke, the Australian Ambassador to ASEAN, joined SSEAC students for a **conversation exploring the topics of diplomatic careers, working in Southeast Asia, and being a woman in leadership**.

In September, we hosted several events in conjunction with other institutions and departments across the University. Together with the Sydney Vietnam Initiative, we held the inaugural **Sydney Vietnam Symposium**. Led by Associate Professor Greg Fox, researchers, educators and students from across all faculties and schools with an academic interest in Vietnam showcased ongoing collaborative

research being undertaken in Vietnam and explored opportunities for new cross-disciplinary collaboration in research and education.

In addition, we teamed up with the Department of Indonesian Studies and the Department of Sociology and Social Policy to host Emeritus Professor Saskia Wieringa from the University of Amsterdam for a **seminar on homophobia in Indonesia**. Professor Wieringa spoke on the recent wave of virulent homophobia in Indonesia, putting it into political and religious contexts to understand the current situation.

Finally, at the end of September, we partnered with the School of History and Philosophy of Science, the Department of Indonesian Studies, and the research and reading group Perspectives on the Past (PoP) of Southeast Asia, to co-host the launch of **Nurturing Indonesia: Medicine and Decolonisation in the Dutch East Indies**, by Associate Professor Hans Pols.

Held in the historic Nicholson Museum, the event was launched by Professor Stephen Garton (Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor, University of Sydney), Emeritus Professor Saskia Wieringa (University of Amsterdam), Honorary Associate Professor Jean Gelman Taylor (UNSW) and Dr Natali Pearson (PoP of Southeast Asia). The event concluded with a Betawi dance performance led by Dr Dyah Pitaloka (Department of Indonesian Studies).



Betawi dance performance led by Dr Dyah Pitaloka, Department of Indonesian Studies, at the *Nurturing Indonesia* book launch



Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs Senator the Hon. Marise Payne with Australia Award recipients at the launch of the *Australia Now* ASEAN public diplomacy program

In October, the centre welcomed Dr James Gomez from the Asia Centre, and Dr Sophie Lemi re, NUS-Stanford Lee Kong Chian Fellow on Contemporary Southeast Asia to the University for a joint **seminar on political contestations in Malaysia and Singapore**. Dr Gomez spoke about the ongoing restrictions and persecutions faced by members of opposition parties and civil society in Singapore, while Dr Lemi re gave an engaging account of Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Bin Mohamad's reinvention from authoritarian tyrant to democratic icon and the power of charisma in giving authority to the political narrative.

Two weeks later, Endeavour Executive Visiting Fellow at Sydney Southeast Asia Centre, Dr Abubakar Eby Hara gave a **seminar on Indonesia's foreign policy under President Joko Widodo**.

For the final event in the year, SSEAC partnered with the Australia-Indonesia Youth Association NSW to host a **pop-up screening of the Australia-Indonesia short-film festival ReelOzInd! 2018**. This annual short film competition, created by the Australia-Indonesia Centre, aims to raise awareness and improve understanding between Australian and Indonesian youth.

At the beginning of 2019, the centre welcomed ethnomusicologist Dr Philip Yampolsky to the University. Dr Yampolsky gave a seminar on his 15-year project to research the **representation of Indonesian regional music and theatre on VCDs** (video compact discs). He also held a master class for higher degree by research students interested in oral traditions, ethnography and musicology.

In early March, Associate Professor Janet Steele joined us from George Washington University to talk about the many different faces of Islamic journalism in Indonesia and Malaysia in her **seminar on 'The Journalisms of Islam: Contending views of Muslim Southeast Asia'**.

Later in March, we partnered with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to host the official **launch of the Australia Now ASEAN 2019 public diplomacy program**. Featuring keynote speeches by Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator the Hon. Marise Payne, SSEAC Director Professor Michele Ford, and winner of 2010 Australian Masterchef and celebrity chef Mr Adam Liaw, the event showcased the vitality, diversity and innovative capability of our youth and connected future leaders across the region. The event saw attendance from the University of Sydney's senior management and academics, SSEAC alumni and New Colombo Plan scholars, as well as delegations from six schools that are part of the Asia Education Foundation Australia – ASEAN Bridge Schools Partnerships.

April was election season in Southeast Asia and at SSEAC. In collaboration with the Department of Indonesian Studies and the Australia-Indonesia Youth Association, we hosted a **pre-election expert panel on the Indonesian election** that explored the key issues at stake for Indonesia in the lead-up to the 2019 election. Chaired by Professor Simon Butt, the panel featured distinguished speakers from across each of SSEAC's five research clusters, including Dr Russell Toth, Dr Jeff Neilson and Professor Michele Ford from the University of Sydney, as well as Mr Antoni Tsaputra from UNSW Sydney and Dr Intan Paramaditha from Macquarie University.

SSEAC subsequently held an **international panel discussion on the state of Thai politics in the aftermath of the elections**, featuring Dr Aim Sinpeng from the University of Sydney, Dr Chris Baker, Associate Professor Pasuk Phongpaichit from Chulalongkorn University, Mr Sunai Phasuk from Human Rights Watch, and Dr Roger Lee Huang from Macquarie University.

Fostering high-impact research

The Sydney Southeast Asia Centre unites academics across all disciplines to produce high-impact research and engagement with one of the world's fastest growing regions.



Protesters at a minority rights rally in the Philippines in 2017

Over the years, Southeast Asia-focused researchers at the University of Sydney have performed very well in the national competitive grant schemes run by the Australian Research Council (ARC) and the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC).

In the last 12 months, the following SSEAC members have been awarded new ARC and NHMRC grants on Southeast Asia-related topics:

- Dr Gregory Fox – harnessing new health technologies to strengthen the management of multidrug-resistant tuberculosis in Vietnam
- Associate Professor Tihomir Ancev – evaluating and improving policies for attracting investment in the agricultural sector in Vietnam.

A number of members have also been recognised in high profile internal grant schemes, including:

- Dr Michelle Villeneuve, who was awarded a Brown Fellowship for her research on disaster risk reduction for people with disability in Australia and Indonesia
- Associate Professor Jacqueline Bloomfield, who received a Small Educational Innovation Grant for her work on recognising culture and developing academic potential in Singapore nursing students
- Professor Bill Pritchard, who was awarded a Bridging Support Grant for his project on food and nutrition security in Myanmar.

SSEAC has also welcomed two new postdoctoral research associates, Dr Kristy Ward and Dr Benjamin Thompson.

Dr Ward's research focuses on labour activism in Cambodia, examining why, how and to what effect Cambodian workers mobilise collectively under comparative regulatory regimes.

Dr Thompson's research explores current financing strategies for environmental management in Southeast Asia.

They join Dr Jessica Melvin who is investigating the military's instrumentalisation of political Islam in Indonesia, as well as Dr Emma Calgaro and Dr Rosemary Grey, whose university postdoctoral positions were sponsored by the SSEAC.

Supporting sustainable farming practices in the Greater Mekong region

Two projects funded by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) have improved smallholder farmer livelihoods in Cambodia and Lao People's Democratic Republic through pest identification and disease management training.

Cambodia smartphone app

In response to the need for crop diversity, Cambodian farmers have begun incorporating mung bean into rice cropping systems. However, mung bean is facing significant yield loss due to direct impacts of insects and pests. Improper pest management has worsened the problem, causing economic losses to farmers and environmental disruption through ill-informed chemical use. The use of broad-spectrum pesticides as a solution to all observed pests is commonplace in mung bean fields of lowland Cambodia and can be linked to unsuitable sources of agricultural information.

Associate Professor Daniel Tan from the Sydney Institute of Agriculture, along with his team and in partnership with indigenous Australian start-up company Ngakkan Nyaagu (NGNY) Co., have developed an image-rich mobile phone application, *Pest ID*, to assist Cambodian mung bean farmers with insect pest identification and crop management.

At the farmers' request, a Khmer voiceover was added by University of Sydney Postdoctoral Fellow, Dr Van Touch, to ensure the app was accessible to illiterate farmers in Cambodia's more remote rural areas.

Pest ID adds to a series of mobile apps built by the Sydney Institute of Agriculture to assist Cambodian farmers to improve their farming practices.

Improving village-based biosecurity in Laos

Emeritus Professor Peter Windsor, from the Sydney School of Veterinary Science, is leading field-based research projects in Lao People's Democratic Republic, aimed at increasing knowledge of transboundary livestock disease and its impact on human health.

Through training on biosecurity practices and animal vaccination programs, rural households were able to prevent disease transmission and increase their productivity. Sustainable farming practices have contributed to improving the local families' livelihoods. With higher income levels, there was no need to do external work for additional revenue, which allowed parents to spend more time raising their children and even to afford university education.



Our researchers are working on a pest-identification app for mung bean fields in Cambodia.

An ethnographic study of biocapitalism and agribusiness in rural Indonesia

Dr Sophie Chao from the School of Philosophical and Historical Inquiry and the Charles Perkins Centre is investigating the health and cultural impacts of large-scale agribusiness projects on indigenous communities in Indonesia.

Dr Chao joined the University of Sydney as a Postdoctoral Research Associate in History in 2019. As an ecological anthropologist, she is interested in how human societies conceptualise and interact with their environments across space and time, and has worked on indigenous peoples' rights issues in several Southeast Asian countries. For her PhD, she lived with the Marind-Anim community in a remote village in West Papua, Indonesia, and reflected on the social and ecological impacts of large-scale deforestation and monocrop oil palm development.

Building on her long-term ethnographic fieldwork, her postdoctoral research project will weave together social science methods (including history), science and technology studies, and biomedicine to investigate the health and cultural impacts of agribusiness on humans and their environments in Indonesia.

In her previous research, Dr Chao found that agribusiness expansion was undermining the local food and water security of Marind communities in West Papua, who have traditionally relied on the forest for their subsistence. While these developments were promoted by the Indonesian government as part of efforts to achieve national self-sufficiency in basic commodities, on the ground this has led to the disappearance of morally-valued forest foods and the introduction of imported processed foods.

Deforestation and the arrival of monocrops also disrupted the Marind's cosmological understanding of the world, fragmenting multispecies relations and adversely affecting notions of kinship between human and other-than-human lifeforms through shared descent from ancestral spirits.

Dr Chao describes the community's perceived loss of fertility and cultural genocide in vivid terms. Village women, for instance, recounted dreams of giving birth to palm fruit, their spines destroying the women's entrails. Others described being possessed by the oil palm and losing all sense of time and place on the plantations.

The project has significant implications for our understanding of human-plant relations, biosecurity, and the ethics of industrial-scale agriculture and its impact on lands and livelihoods in the Asia-Pacific and Melanesia.



Dr Sophie Chao during her fieldwork living with the Marind-Anim community of West Papua, Indonesia

Site and Space in Southeast Asia

Professors Adrian Vickers and Mark Ledbury and Dr Stephen Whiteman received a Getty Foundation grant to conduct research on the visual culture of Southeast Asia.



Incense in Hue, Vietnam. Image by Josh Ellwood via Unsplash

Following the success of the Ambitious Alignments project, in 2019, University of Sydney-based researchers launched the first stage of a new approach to understanding the visual culture of Southeast Asia: an initiative titled 'Site and Space'. This new stage is funded by the Getty Foundation's Connecting Art Histories initiative, with support from the Power Institute, as part of both organisations' shared vision to develop more global, interconnected fields of art history and museums.

Both projects advance Southeast Asian art history by providing opportunities for research students and early career researchers in the field to conduct new and innovative research and create collaborative networks within and beyond the region.

Beginning with a planning workshop in Singapore, Site and Space has attempted to create a new methodology for understanding visual culture and the built environment in Southeast Asia through attention to cultures and histories of space and place. A previous planning workshop, organised out of the University of Sydney's centre in Siem Reap, identified Penang, Yangon and Hue as unique cultural matrices.

These sites have their own self-contained cultural worlds but are not necessarily central to regional accounts of art history. After a rigorous selection process to identify teams for each site, the July 2018 Singapore workshop was the first opportunity for participants to meet each other.

The National Gallery of Singapore, as host of the workshop, is a key regional partner in the project. The team leaders come from a variety of different disciplines and backgrounds, and include University of Sydney PhD graduate Simon Soon, now at the University of Malaya, who is the Penang team leader.

Between August and October, each of the teams established field schools in their respective sites, with strong inter-group fertilisation. These field schools included the involvement of Dr Stephen Whiteman as lead investigator. Although Dr Whiteman has since joined the Courtauld Institute in London, he continues to be actively involved in the project.

Another key cross-site role has been played by Hedren Sum of the Digital Humanities Lab at Nanyang Technology University in Singapore, who has created a website/research tool (www.siteandspace.org), and is working with the teams to integrate digital research into their work.

The full cohort reconvened in Phnom Penh in July 2019 for discussions led by the project's chief investigators, including University of Sydney Professors Adrian Vickers (Asian Studies) and Mark Ledbury (Art History), about the teams' research in progress, plans for Year 2 and beyond, and the methodologies underpinning the project's work.

Supporting research excellence

A hallmark of the Sydney Southeast Asia Centre is its support for academic mobility and excellence in research.

We support researchers from across the University of Sydney seeking to engage with Southeast Asia through a grant scheme offering funding in the fields of research, academic mobility and language training for research.

Grants are provided to seed projects in the centre's five areas of research strength, to support the development of academic publications from applied research work, and to encourage academic collaboration with researchers in the region and further afield.

In the 2018–19 year, 36 grants were awarded to Sydney academics and their collaborators.

Our flagship grant program is our Cluster Research Grant, which aims to provide a pathway for new academic projects on Southeast Asia or for scholars who are engaging in the region for the first time.

These grants provide a basis for larger research projects and applications to external funding.

Our Workshop Grant program supports international meetings that lead to a special journal edition, edited book on a topic related to Southeast Asia, or a substantial policy intervention.



Indonesian flags floating in the sky

Cluster Research Grants awarded in 2018–19

Recipient	Faculty/MDI*	Topic
Dr Reuben Segara	Business	Does stock liquidity affect dividend policy decision? Evidence from the Vietnamese stock market
Dr Shawna Ser Wei Tang	Arts and Social Sciences	Islamic LGBT research in Malaysia
Dr Jacqueline Thomas	Engineering and Information Technologies	Evaluating sanitation technologies to reduce untreated wastewater in the environment in Timor-Leste
Dr Kristy Ward	SSEAC	Improving worker rights in Cambodia's construction and garment sectors
Dr Beth Yahp	Arts and Social Sciences	Re-imagining archives: narrative and the visual artefact

Partnership Grants awarded in 2018–19

Recipient	Faculty/MDI*	Title	Country
Dr Hamid Arandiyan	Science	Selective environmental CO2 absorption in a metal-organic framework	Vietnam
Dr Mark de Bruyn	Science	Is macroevolutionary change predictable? Testing the taxon cycle hypothesis	Indonesia, Malaysia
Dr Nicola Hancock	Health Sciences	Mental health in Indonesia: understanding recovery and enhancing recovery-oriented practice	Indonesia
Associate Professor Marina Kennerson	Medicine	Investigating the genetics of Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) in Malaysia	Malaysia
Dr Andrew Leaver	Health Sciences	Better lifetime care for children with developmental disabilities	The Philippines
Dr Aaron Opdyke	Engineering and Information Technologies	Informal sheltering practices in the Philippines: adaptive urban resilience processes	The Philippines

Workshop Grants awarded in 2018–19

Recipient	Faculty/MDI*	Workshop
Dr Dwi Noverini Djenar	Arts and Social Sciences	Language and social hierarchy: workshop on address and self-reference practices in Southeast Asia
Dr Salim Farrar	Law	Law and justice in Malaysia: 2020 and beyond
Dr Jess Melvin	SSEAC	International workshop on the Aceh Truth and Reconciliation Commission
Dr Josh Stenberg	Arts and Social Sciences	Towards a new Nanyang studies: examinations of Tionghoa and Tsinoy beyond the 'Sinophone'

Other grants awarded in 2018–19

Category	No. awarded	Countries
Collaborative research	2	Indonesia, the Philippines
Conference (academic) for papers on Southeast Asia	4	Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand
Conference (PhD) for papers on Southeast Asia	2	Indonesia, Thailand
Mobility	3	Indonesia, the Philippines
Research capacity building	1	Vietnam
Sabbatical visitor	1	Thailand
Visiting PhD scholar	1	Malaysia, the Philippines

* Multidisciplinary institute



Expanding collaboration in the region

A key function of SSEAC is to showcase the University of Sydney's wide-ranging expertise on Southeast Asia.

SSEAC also works closely with the University's Office of Global Engagement and Office for Global Health, as well as many individual academics, to foster closer ties with Southeast Asia. In 2018–19, SSEAC has had a particular focus on developing relationships with other academic institutions.

SSEAC met with Southeast Asia specialists from the National University of Singapore, the National Taiwan University, and the National Intelligence University, United States to discuss potential partnerships.

Centre Director Professor Michele Ford met with the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies based in Singapore, and Dr Natali Pearson, in her capacity as interim Deputy Director, met with the Brookings Institution from Washington, to explore avenues for further cooperation.

SSEAC received several high-ranking officials, often in conjunction with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade or the Office for the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

In October, we hosted students from the Partnership in Islamic Education Scheme. The program included roundtables with SSEAC postdoctorate and PhD students, engaging with University of Sydney Indonesian Studies students, and knowledge exchange with academics from the Department of Arabic Language and Cultures.

In November, SSEAC welcomed a party of ASEAN parliamentarians and showcased the centre's engagement with the region in the fields of health, life and environmental sciences.

SSEAC also received delegations from Southeast Asian universities, including representatives from Ateneo de Zamboanga University, Philippines and Lambung Mangkurat University, Indonesia.

SSEAC 2018–19 distinguished visitors

His Excellency Mr Allaster Cox	Australian Deputy Head of Mission to Indonesia
Her Excellency Ms Jane Duke	Australian Ambassador to ASEAN
His Excellency Mr Gary Quinlan	Australian Ambassador to Indonesia
His Excellency Mr Paul Stephens	Australian Deputy Head of Mission to Thailand
His Excellency Mr Mohd Khalil Zaiyany Sumiran	Ambassador of Malaysia to Australia
Ms Kartini Tajul Urus	Vice Consul of Malaysia to Australia
Her Excellency Ma. Hellen B. De La Vega	Ambassador of the Philippines to Australia
Ms Melanie Rita B. Diano	Consul General, Consulate of Philippines, Sydney
Her Excellency Dang Thi Ngoc Thinh	Vice President of Vietnam
His Excellency Ngo Huong Nam	Ambassador of Socialist Republic of Vietnam in Australia
His Excellency Ha Kim Ngoc	Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vietnam
Mr Chu Van Yem	Vice Chairman of the Office of the President of Vietnam
Mrs Nguyen Thi Nghia	Vice Minister of Education and Training, Vietnam
Mrs Vu Thi Mai	Vice Minister of Finance, Vietnam
Mrs Do Thi Hoang	Vice President of Quang Ninh Province, Vietnam
Mrs Bui Thi Thanh	Vice President of the Vietnamese Fatherland Front
His Excellency Dr Trinh Duc Hai	Consul General of Vietnam in Sydney
Mrs Vu Thi Linh Chi	Deputy Chief of State Protocol, Vietnam

Building capacity in the region

This year, the SSEAC team took on two new capacity-building activities in addition to our yearly Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) funded Australia Awards program for activists from Indonesia, which in 2018 focused on women.

The first of these additional projects commissioned by the Indonesia Australia Infrastructure Partnership, targeted 20 women entrepreneurs, women activists, disability activists and government officials on the Indonesian island of Lombok, where the partnership has invested heavily in better roads.

The two-week intensive program focused on leadership, organisational capacity and research for advocacy, with participants designing disability and gender audit tools which they then used to assess public facilities in the city of Mataram, including the provincial mosque, the market, and a major hospital. Participants also honed their presentation skills, which they put into practice on the final day when they presented the findings of their research and their recommendations to government officials.

Four alumni from our Australia Awards programs – two from a course for women activists and two from a course for disability activists – were involved as facilitators to encourage peer learning and help local activists to network with activists from other parts of Indonesia.

Participants found the course very useful but also enjoyable. According to one: “The course was incredibly useful. I now have a better awareness of my own core values, as well as knowing how to run my organisation more effectively. The knowledge we gained will help me to achieve excellent results.”

Another reflected on the different soft skills she’d learned in the course: “I gained new knowledge about leadership, made a lot of new friends and learned to value time but also other people.”



Aerial shot of the National Islamic Center in Mataram, Lombok, Indonesia



Workers collecting and categorising fish for sale in Vietnam

The second new activity involved running a qualitative research methodology course for members of Vietnam's Southern Labour Research Network. Over the course of two days, 70 researchers and activists, some of whom had never engaged in qualitative research, participated in a 'back to basics' refresher on the underlying philosophy and ethics of qualitative research as well as effective use of a range of qualitative methods.

Run by SSEAC Director Professor Michele Ford, the course introduced participants to interactive teaching methods, as well as to the substantive material. Professor Ford drew examples from her research in Cambodia, Indonesia and Myanmar, which had the additional benefit of providing a comparative perspective.

The course, which was funded by Germany's Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, was also very well received.

“The feedback from participants is very encouraging and inspiring. They really appreciated your hard work, experience and the very interactive way of teaching and encouraging all participants to become involved. Many who are deans, vice deans of international departments or professional departments told me that they wished to invite you to conduct similar training courses for their colleagues and senior students.”

Coordinator of Vietnam's Southern Labour Research Network



sydney.edu.au/sseac

Sydney Southeast
Local Centre

The University of Sydney

The next generation of researchers

SSEAC is committed to supporting emerging scholars of Southeast Asia. The centre's professional development programs are creative and practical, and offer opportunities for higher degree by research students to develop their skills and broaden their networks.

Honours Bootcamp

SSEAC runs an annual bootcamp for honours students from around Australia working on a topic related to Southeast Asia.

In 2018, the bootcamp attracted students researching topics ranging from digital media use to migrant workers in Singapore, to the development of mobile phone apps for identification of pests for Cambodian farmers.

Honours students from Monash University, UNSW Canberra and Sydney, University of Melbourne and University of Queensland, as well as University of Sydney students, worked together over three days to sharpen their presentation skills, learn about publishing from their thesis and discussed career pathways after honours.

“This was a great and challenging learning experience that helped open my eyes to what is ahead of me in my honours year.”

Isabel Hinchcliffe

Postgraduate Retreat

The annual SSEAC Postgraduate Retreat focused on contextualising the thesis in Southeast Asia.

Over three days of roundtables, workshops and group exercises, 20 postgraduate students learned how to conceptualise and contextualise their research questions both within the region, and also within a disciplinary (and multidisciplinary) framework.

The students also met with academics and early career researchers from across the University of Sydney, who discussed the importance of local context when conducting research in Southeast Asia.

“The retreat was a valuable and fruitful opportunity to gain skills and knowledge of immediate practical benefit to my higher degree research.”

Student participant

Postgraduate Conference

In 2018 SSEAC held the inaugural SSEAC Postgraduate Conference, designed to showcase Southeast Asia expertise from higher degree research students from the University of Sydney and beyond. 24 postgraduate students presented papers across eight panels on a variety of topics.

The conference built on a public speaking workshop that SSEAC held earlier in 2018, which focused on techniques for delivering an engaging and informative conference paper. Participants who were accepted to present research papers at the ASAA 2018 conference in July were encouraged to workshop their papers and present their three-minute introduction, which was then filmed, allowing students to review and perfect their presentation ‘hook’.

“The workshop and conference was invaluable to me in putting together my application for this postdoctoral research associate position at the University of Sydney.”

Dr Sophie Chao

Interdisciplinary field schools

SSEAC field schools have given 52 undergraduate and postgraduate students real-world experience of conducting interdisciplinary research in Southeast Asia in the last 12 months.

In 2018, 36 students received funding from the Australian Government's New Colombo Plan to take field schools in Indonesia. In July, 20 students travelled to Jakarta and Makassar to research women's empowerment. In December, 16 students spent two weeks in Jakarta and Yogyakarta engaging with disability and social inclusion in Indonesia.

In January 2019, SSEAC partnered with the Woolcock Institute of Medical Research in Hanoi to deliver a pilot field school on Urbanisation in Vietnam. The field school brought together 16 postgraduate students from a range of professional and disciplinary backgrounds including medicine, development studies, urban planning and international public health. Over 19 days, the students explored the relationships between urbanisation and social change, health, migration and infrastructure.

The field school began with two days of intensive language and cultural training, providing students with the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the local context. As one student commented, the Vietnamese language became, if not 'known', at least 'knowable'. Students then ventured beyond the classroom to test their newfound language skills in Hanoi's popular cafés and tea houses, with varying degrees of success!

Having mastered the basics, students began a week-long program of lectures and seminars with academics, not-for-profit organisations and expert practitioners. Dr Michael DiGregorio, Vietnam country representative at the Asia Foundation, delivered a fascinating presentation on urban resilience in which he countered accepted narratives about the economic benefits of rapid urban growth.

At the University of Social Sciences and Humanities – Vietnam National University, the students learned about the transformative effect urbanisation has had on kinship and family structures. At Green Innovation and Development, an award-winning civil society organisation, an enthusiastic team explained the work they are doing to promote sustainable development and green energy in Vietnam.

Site visits helped contextualise these presentations. Highlights included the National Lung Hospital, where students observed the efforts being made to treat respiratory diseases, and a behind-the-scenes tour of the Green One UN House, considered to be the most eco-friendly and energy efficient office building in the region. At Trung Hoà, located in southwestern Hanoi, students surveyed the city from one of Hanoi's earliest residential high-rise buildings. Students also visited a community of female migrant workers under the auspices of CARE International to learn about the NEW ME! Project. This project provides new skills and knowledge to Hanoi's informal female workers, such as waste collectors or second-hand clothes vendors, to improve their income security.

In the final week of the field school, students worked on their independent research projects in small interdisciplinary groups. This included a short period of self-designed and self-guided fieldwork, with students conducting interviews at the Ministry of Education and Training, the Bach Mai hospital, and with a national newspaper. Students also experimented with more experiential research techniques such as conducting a healthcare access audit and participating in kerbside badminton to better understand how urban spaces are adapted for exercise.

The field school concluded with presentations about geriatric healthcare infrastructure, the prevalence of depression, determinants of tertiary student migration to Hanoi, and a pilot study on the availability and adaptation of spaces for physical activity in Hanoi. The presentations were a salient reminder of the importance of working across disciplines as a way of understanding complex issues, such as urbanisation, in Southeast Asia.

“This field school is honestly one of my best academic and personal experiences so far.”

Patricia Anne Sim, student participant in the Urbanisation in Vietnam field school



With more than 500 academics across all 11 Southeast Asian countries, the University of Sydney has one of the highest concentrations of regional expertise in the world.

From its central position within the University, the Sydney Southeast Asia Centre offers an innovative and engaged approach that reflects the region's complexity and recognises its importance to Australia's future.

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