

Sydney Southeast Asia Centre

2019–2020 Yearbook

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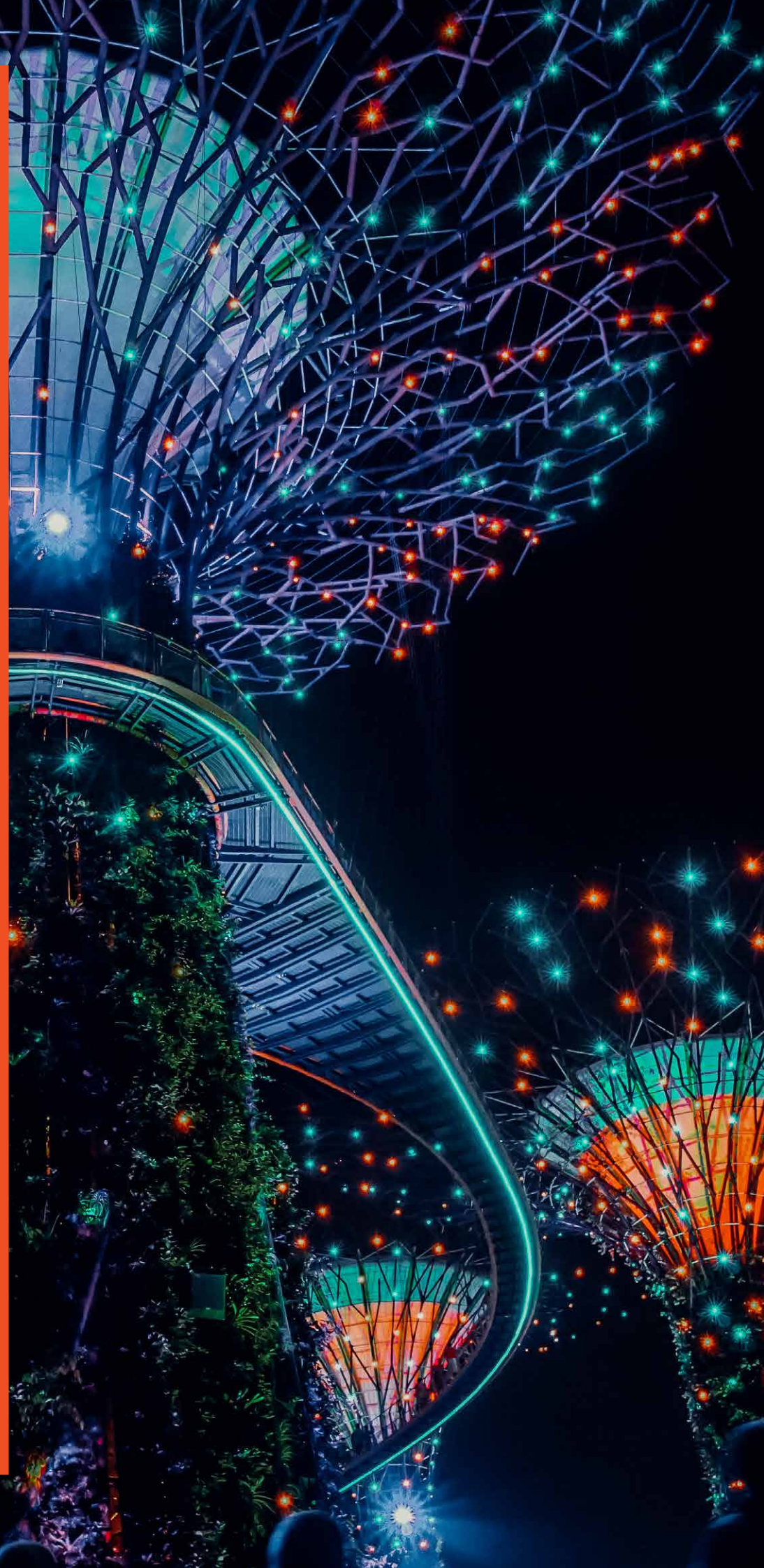
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THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY



Cover image: Singapore Gardens by the Bay. Photo credit: Siti Rahmah Mat Daud.

We acknowledge the tradition of custodianship and law of the Country on which the University of Sydney campuses stand. We pay our respects to those who have cared and continue to care for Country.

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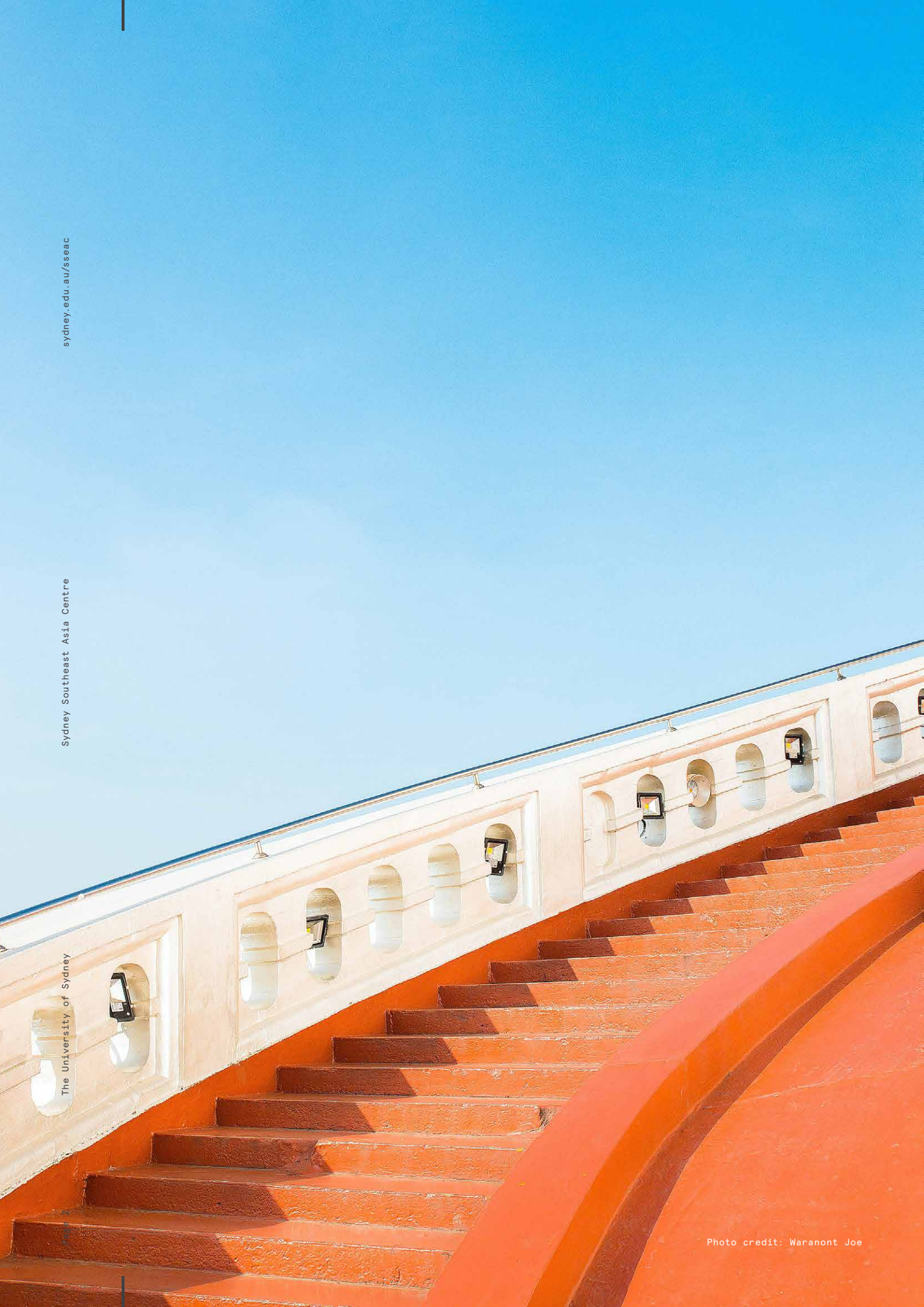
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A message from the Director

Thank you for joining us to celebrate another year of achievements by SSEAC and its members, and to ponder the impact that COVID-19 is having on Australia and our region. SSEAC's year, which runs July to June, has included eight months of frenetic activity and four months of innovation in program delivery, but also quiet reflection, as we take stock of Southeast Asia-related research and teaching at a time when closed borders make Southeast Asia inaccessible.

First, it is interesting to observe how Southeast Asia itself has managed the initial stages of the pandemic. Having begun by responding strongly, global hub Singapore quickly fell victim to a failure to consider the prospect of transmission among the hundreds of thousands of migrant workers who live in cramped conditions in the island's purpose-built dormitories.

Elsewhere, testing rates have been low in the region. It is not surprising, then, that reported cases are relatively low. It is nevertheless noteworthy that Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam had recorded fewer than ten cases per million of population and – with the exception of Myanmar – no deaths at all as of early July 2020. Thailand is not far behind, with just 46 cases per million and a total of 58 deaths, which equates to less than one death per million population. As I write, the key concern is Indonesia, where reported figures are also relatively low but highly contested.

At the moment, it is hard to imagine a time when academic traffic will resume between Australia and Southeast Asia, but in the meantime, there is a wealth of new opportunities to engage with researchers in the region and around the world.

One of the key things the SSEAC team has been doing to reach out to our members at Sydney and elsewhere is to expand our podcast program. For several years, we have recorded podcasts with speakers at our major events, but for some months now we have released one podcast every week featuring a Centre member. You can find the details in the pages that follow, and I can guarantee that they're well worth a listen.



Another of the highlights this year is the number of people who have leveraged SSEAC grants to secure external funding. This, of course, is our gold standard of success. I'm sure you'll join me in congratulating Professor Patrick Brennan, Dr Emma Calgaro, Dr Rosalyn Gloag, Dr Jess Melvin, Professor Benjamin Oldroyd, Dr Kriscia Tapia, Dr Phuong Dung (Yun) Trieu, and Associate Professor Michelle Villeneuve, and wishing them all the best with their research.

It has also been a personal delight to again work on our program for early career researchers working on Southeast Asia. This year, the program has expanded to cover not only Discovery Early Career Researcher Award (DECRA) applicants from Geography, Law and Asian Studies, but also Future Fellowship applicants from Sociology and Anthropology, and Linkage Project applicants from Civil Engineering, Development Studies, and Museum and Heritage Studies. Assessor feedback on the fellowship applicants was very strong, and I am very much hoping that we will have some good news to report this time next year.

Go well, stay safe as we all continue to deal with the pandemic, and all the best for the year to come.

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 3,500 members, our work continues to expand around the region and embrace new stakeholders across disciplines. Our community includes:

- student members
- academic members
- affiliate members
- friends of SSEAC

You can find out more on our website:

- sydney.edu.au/sseac

Engaging more than 400 academics across all faculties and schools at the University, SSEAC:

- supports research excellence
- builds 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

We support our members by providing funding opportunities and creating an academic community around engagement in our countries of focus. Through our focus on multidisciplinary, we actively seek to challenge divisions to foster new approaches to the pressing issues affecting the region. This approach has proven to be particularly effective, as you can read in our research stories.

In providing a focal point for Southeast Asia-related research, we are connecting researchers across the institution, strengthening existing relationships and forging new ones, to better foster multidisciplinary research, support new learning experiences, actively engage industry, and raise the level of public debate.

SSEAC has been working 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 over 300 students, including 28 in the last 12 months, the opportunity to engage in real-world learning in Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Vietnam. SSEAC has 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 including agrarian change, food security, housing policy, urbanism and health, and women's and disability rights.

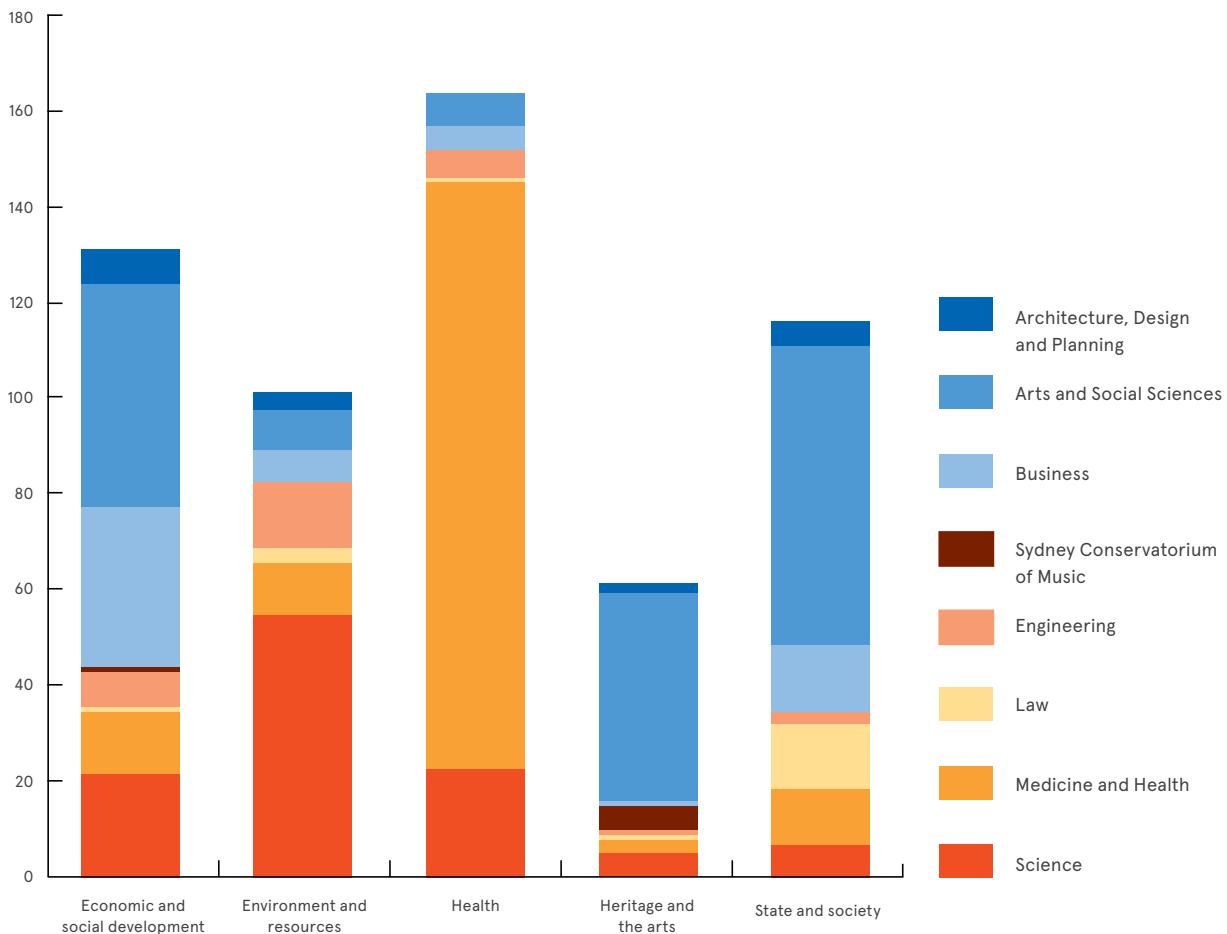
Each year, SSEAC hosts a number of events designed to stimulate public engagement with Southeast Asia.

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 the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic 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 that incorporates 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.
- **The Sydney Vietnam Initiative**, which is a leading multidisciplinary regional network of researchers and educators, working together to improve the lives of people and communities in Vietnam.

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 assisted 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.

Executive Committee

Position	Name	Department/School
Community Outreach Adviser	Prof Hans Pols	School of History and Philosophy of Science
Community Outreach Adviser	Dr Sandra Seno-Alday	Business School
Curriculum Adviser	A/Prof Russell Bush	Sydney School of Veterinary Science
Curriculum Adviser	Dr Susan Banki	Sociology and Social Policy
Regional & Policy Engagement Adviser	Prof David Guest	Sydney Institute of Agriculture
Research Adviser	Prof Simon Butt	Sydney Law School
Research Adviser	Dr Paul Hick	Sydney School of Veterinary Science
Research Training Adviser	A/Prof Damien Field	Sydney Institute of Agriculture
Research Training Adviser	Dr Petr Matous	School of Civil Engineering

Country Coordinators

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

Meet some of our people



Susan Banki

Susan first became engaged in Southeast Asia over two decades ago, and has conducted extensive fieldwork across the Asia-Pacific region. She has worked in development and microfinance in West Papua, volunteered in refugee camps along the Thai-Myanmar border, and conducted research for Griffith University, UNSW, and the Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship.

Susan's research explores the ways in which local, regional and international mechanisms can serve as levers for change in human rights implementation. She has published widely on issues around forced displacement and international migration, refugee resettlement, transnational political activism, and social justice.

Susan has received multiple awards for excellence in teaching and her outstanding contributions to student learning. As Curriculum Adviser on SSEAC's Executive Committee, Susan helps design and facilitate experiential learning programs for academics and students, with a focus on human rights skills development in higher education and research.



Gregory Fox

Greg's interest in Southeast Asia was ignited after travelling around Laos, Thailand and Vietnam in the late 1990s. Since then, he has been working on numerous research projects aiming to improve healthcare in the region. From 2009 to 2013, Greg lived in Vietnam, overseeing clinical trials to increase tuberculosis detection. He is now the clinical Academic Lead (Research) for the Faculty of Medicine and Health at the Cumberland campus.

Greg's research focuses on the epidemiology of infectious diseases. In 2018, he was part of a team that received a SSEAC grant to develop *Aspergillus* (a deadly lung infection) research capacity in Vietnam.

In 2017, with support from SSEAC, Greg steered the creation of the Sydney Vietnam Initiative, a multidisciplinary platform for academics and students across the University to engage in Vietnam. SSEAC and the Sydney Vietnam Initiative have been working in close collaboration to support high quality research and educational engagement with Vietnam, including by offering research grants and organising annual research symposiums.



Ariane Defreine

Ariane joined the Centre as its Communications and Events Officer in March 2019.

Ariane has several years' experience promoting international student mobility at the Embassy of France in Canberra and the University of Sydney. She also lived in Indonesia for two years, managing an international student mobility program led by the European Union and ASEAN.

Prior to this, Ariane conducted research on land and natural resource conflicts, corporate accountability, and redress mechanisms across the Asia-Pacific region, for the academia-NGO collaborative Corporate Accountability Research. Over the years, Ariane has also done volunteer work for the Australian Red Cross, the Democratic Progress Institute, and Left Right Think-Tank.

Ariane holds a Bachelor of Arts (Politics and International Relations) from Sciences Po Paris and a MSc Comparative Politics (Conflict Studies and Southeast Asian Studies) from the London School of Economics. Ariane is a native French speaker and is fluent in Bahasa Indonesia.

ASEAN Forum 2019

The seventh annual ASEAN Forum focused on the Digital Revolution, and featured 13 speakers from Australia and Southeast Asia.



The keynote address was delivered by the Asia Foundation's Dr Michael DiGregorio, who discussed the relationship between digital technology and climate change within the context of Vietnam. Dr DiGregorio demonstrated how disruptive technologies affect the development trajectories of advanced middle-income countries and offered critical reflections on the use of digital financial services and new technologies in Southeast Asia. He also highlighted the Asia Foundation's work in developing blockchain-based technologies to empower vulnerable people and improve climate resilience.

The ASEAN Forum continued with two breakout sessions, including one on technical innovation and development, chaired by Professor Heather Horst (University of Sydney). Professor Budiman Minasny (Sydney School of Life and Environmental Sciences), focused on digital agriculture, describing how artificial intelligence and satellite imagery support rice field production in Indonesia and Malaysia. Associate Professor Jonathan Liebenau (London School of Economics and Political Science) argued that in Indonesia, digital economy business models have offered opportunities to extend financial inclusion. Finally, Mr Yan Naung Oak (Phandee Myanmar Innovation Lab) discussed the rise of a new tech entrepreneurship system in Myanmar.

The parallel session, chaired by Mr Kean Wong (independent journalist), focused on the social impact of the digital revolution. Ms Kirsten Han (*New Naratif*) highlighted the implications of Singapore's 'fake news' legislation on freedom of speech, arguing that restrictions on civil liberties may in fact cause further harm to public trust. Dr Aim Sinpeng (University of Sydney) drew upon data from political campaigns in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand to propose that social media can catalyse citizen political engagement. Mr Bart Hogeveen (Australian Strategic Policy Institute) provided a sobering overview of the increasingly malicious use of technology within Southeast Asia.

The forum concluded with a panel on inclusion and technology, including human rights and public safety considerations. Chaired by Dr Damien Spry (University of South Australia), it featured Dr Crystal Abidin (Curtin University), Professor Fleur Johns (UNSW Sydney) and Dr Petr Matous (University of Sydney).

Mr Wong wrapped-up the 2019 ASEAN Forum by underlining the desire for subversive frivolity in an era of widespread state surveillance.

Who controls the internet?

The night before the ASEAN Forum, SSEAC partnered with Sydney Ideas to co-present a panel on “Who controls the internet?”. The event featured speakers from around Australia to discuss the spread of hate speech, political falsehoods and deep fakes.

Chaired by SSEAC Director Professor Michele Ford, the multidisciplinary panel of scholars and practitioners featured three of the ASEAN Forum speakers: Mr Bart Hogeveen from the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Dr Aim Sinpeng from the University of Sydney, and Dr Damien Spry from the University of South Australia. The discussion centred around the relationship between social media and the state, the weaponisation of the cyber frontier, and how citizens can engage with the digital world in a way that both promotes privacy and minimises data breaches.

Dr Sinpeng drew from her research on online political engagement in Southeast Asia to highlight the tension between social media and freedom of speech, emphasising the need to consistently re-centre discussions on rights. Using her work with Facebook, Dr Sinpeng also drew attention to the lack of consistent anti-hate speech standards around the world.

Dr Spry’s outlook was pragmatic, focusing on states’ and people’s dependence on social media and how

this creates an imbalance of power in favour of big social media corporations. As Dr Spry explained, this results in a lack of incentives for governments to put pressure on these corporations to design and enforce international regulation of the online world. He also revealed some of the tricks used by social media experts to protect their data from being captured and sold by social media outlets.

Finally, Mr Hogeveen shared his insights into the strategic uses of information and computer technologies in an age where cyberconflict is increasingly widespread and has potentially become as dangerous as traditional forms of open conflict. The discussion was followed by a passionate Q&A that testified to the audience’s strong concerns with protecting their data privacy.

The event attracted over 700 registrations and the Facebook livestream was watched by more than 500 people. The talk was also recorded and broadcast by Sky News Extra, further increasing its impact around Australia and beyond.



Virtual Politics in Action

In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, the Sydney Southeast Asia Centre decided to hold its first ever virtual Politics in Action Forum.



In 2020, SSEAC's annual Politics in Action event took place online for the first time amidst ongoing travel and meeting restrictions due to COVID-19. While we were unable to bring scholars together in the traditional Politics in Actions format, the SSEAC team acknowledged the importance of continuing to keep the SSEAC community informed of political events in the region. The event was moved to the virtual world, with six country updates and a wrap-up conclusion submitted by video and available to view via SSEAC's social media portals.

Each presenter was asked to submit a short video covering key political events over the past year, highlighting particular themes and topics of political significance. While the governments across the region vary in composition and ideology, government responses to COVID-19 across Southeast Asia was a recurring issue across the presentations, highlighting the ongoing challenges that the pandemic poses for the region and globally.

Although the audience were not able to ask questions in person, viewers had the opportunity to submit follow-up questions to the presenters, some of which were addressed in follow-up question and answer video. This allowed the presenters to elaborate on some of the topics they discussed.

This year's Politics in Action offered contemporary updates for Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Vietnam.

Our expert presenters for this year were:

- **Indonesia** Dr Risa Toha,
Yale-NUS College
- **Laos** Dr Kearnin Sims,
James Cook University
- **Malaysia** Dr Sebastian Dettman,
Singapore Management University
- **Myanmar** Dr Susan Banki,
University of Sydney
- **Philippines** Dr Jean Encinas-Franco,
University of the Philippines, Diliman
- **Vietnam** Dr Huong Le Thu,
Australian Strategic Policy Institute
- **Wrap-up** Mr Thomas Power,
University of Sydney

The event attracted unprecedented interest, with over 8,000 views to date on Facebook and YouTube. The original presentations and question and answer sessions are available on the SSEAC social media channels for those wishing to view them.

Human rights teaching and research

Capitalising on the significant Human Rights expertise at the University, SSEAC brought together scholars of Southeast Asia interested in incorporating a rights-based approach into their research and teaching practice.

This one-day Masterclass attracted over 20 scholars from the University of Sydney, Macquarie University, the University of Queensland, the Australian National University and Western Sydney University.

The Masterclass opened with a keynote address by Tim Soutphommasane, Professor of Practice (Sociology and Political Theory) in which he examined teaching and advocacy within a human rights framework. Professor Soutphommasane emphasised the multi-faceted nature of the University – as academy, as think tank and as actor – and called for greater acknowledgement of their responsibilities, as well as their capabilities.

Participants then turned to the question of how to integrate Human Rights in – and beyond – their classrooms. Dr Susan Banki (Sociology) chaired a lively panel featuring Professor Megan MacKenzie (Government and International Relations), Dr Aaron Opdyke (Engineering) and Dr Andres Rodriguez (History), who each spoke about their efforts to mainstream Human Rights within their teaching.

Discussions centred around decolonising the curriculum, the value of inclusivity within student engagement, and the need to develop a pedagogy of care.

Despite the considerable challenges, there was consensus around the benefits of integrating human rights into teaching practices, regardless of discipline, within a Southeast Asian context.

This was followed by a session on how to approach research on Southeast Asia from a rights perspective. Chaired by Dr Benjamin Thompson (SSEAC Postdoctoral Research Associate), the panel included Dr Petr Matous (Engineering), Dr Natali Pearson (Museum and Heritage Studies) and Dr Aim Sinpeng (Government and International Relations). Panellists identified transparency and different forms of knowledge as essential considerations.

Participants then worked to identify issues within their own research – including livelihoods, the environment and intergenerational justice – that were underpinned by a human rights perspective.

The Masterclass incorporated the public launch by Professor Soutphommasane of Andreas Harsono's new book, *Race, Islam and Power: Ethnic and Religious Violence in Post-Suharto Indonesia*, and a talk on the state of human rights in Cambodia with Australia Director for Human Rights Watch, Ms Elaine Pearson, who reminded the audience that Cambodia's recent history has not been without its challenges.



Photo credit: Fabio Campo

World literatures and the Global South

SSEAC, together with the China Studies Centre, sponsored the third international congress of the World Literature Association, hosted by the School of Languages and Cultures.

Co-convened in August 2019 with the Peking University Australian Studies Centre and the World Literature Association, this international conference on 'World Literatures and the Global South' engaged with literary work on and from the Global South in various languages as well as in translation. In doing so, the conference demonstrated and showcased the diversity of languages and their interaction for both literary creation and academic scholarship.

The concepts of world literature(s) and the Global South are two widely discussed notions that are continuously being debated and redefined. Australia – shaped by its colonial history and multi-ethnic, multilingual and transnational population – bears an ambiguous relationship to the Global South, making it an ideal location to explore and interrogate these two unsettled terms.

Through its focus on the 'Global South', and on the transnational and postcolonial perspectives implied by the term, this conference brought together writers and academics, giving equal billing to presentations in English, Indonesian/Malay, Chinese, Arabic, French and Spanish.

The conference was opened by Vice-Chancellor and Principal Dr Michael Spence AC, and featured two keynote speakers: award-winning Australian novelist Alexis Wright, and Gauri Viswanathan, Professor in the Humanities and Director of the South Asia Institute at Columbia University.

For three intensive days, over 95 speakers examined questions relating to imagining and writing the Global South, transnational literatures, world literature and market forces, and beyond the Global South.

The University of Sydney's Southeast Asia expertise was on show. Associate Professor Dwi Noverini Djenar, Chair of the Indonesian Studies Department, expertly led a panel on Southeast Asian literature, discussing topics ranging from history and identity in post-colonial novels, to feminism in Indonesian literature. In a panel on food in literature, Dr Dyah Pitaloka (Indonesian Studies) spoke about edible activism and the way in which plants are a source of agency, resilience and identity.

A panel on world literature and popular genres featured SSEAC alumna Dr Yuri Takahashi (now at the Australian National University), who spoke about Burmese novelist Min Thein Kha. PhD candidate Mr Faris Yothasamuth also joined this panel, where he spoke about Thai imperialism and racism in the translations of twentieth century English popular novels.

Other postgraduate students, Ms Naomi Cammayo, explored the poetry of Filipina lesbians, and Ms Eliza Victoria discussed the emergence of the Filipino horror genre, while Panita Silapavithayadilok spoke about travel writer and journalist Tiziano Terzani, whose work covered the war in Vietnam.



Human rights theory meets practice

SSEAC partnered with the University of Jember, Indonesia to co-host Human Rights in Southeast Asia: Theory Meets Practice.



Photo credit: Henri Ismail

Over three days, the University of Jember played host to over 100 academics, human rights activists, and practitioners to explore current human rights issues in Southeast Asia.

The conference was an excellent opportunity to explore the injustices that impact the day-to-day lives of people in the region and the structures that facilitate them.

With 16 parallel panel sessions on themes ranging from disability rights to crime and terrorism, women's and children's rights to religious intolerance, mobility and displacement to the politics of institutionalism, the conference had an impressive array of presentations by over 60 speakers from around the world.

The conference also featured plenary presentations by noted human rights experts, including:

- Khariroh Ali, Indonesian National Commission on Violence Against Women
- Dr Zainal Abidin Bagir, Gadjah Mada University
- Dr Susan Banki, University of Sydney
- Franklin De Vrieze and Agus Wijayanto, Westminster Foundation for Democracy

In the first plenary session, Dr Zainal Abidin Bagir presented a paper co-written with colleagues from Gadjah Mada University about the limitations to freedom of religion or belief in Indonesia, both in terms of government institutions and social prejudice.

This was followed by Dr Banki's superb presentation, which dealt with Myanmar's human rights trajectory. After reviewing some of the recent thorny human rights issues plaguing the people of Myanmar, Dr Banki proposed the architecture of non-protection as a complex explanation for, if not a solution to, the country's entrenched human rights problems.

The final plenary session, delivered jointly by Khariroh Ali, Franklin De Vrieze, and Agus Wijayanto, examined the role of Indonesian governing bodies in mainstreaming human rights at the local level. Advocating for better cooperation between government and human rights organisations, the session left the audience with a keen sense of the work that remains to be done.

Following this successful event, SSEAC and the University of Jember are now exploring avenues for further cooperation in the future.

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 draw together 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, SSEAC supported the Office for Global Health in organising a panel discussion around tuberculosis (TB) and the right to health in Australia and the Asia-Pacific, which featured high-profile health experts, such as Dr Lucica Ditiu (Stop TB Partnership), Dr Suman Majumdar (Burnet Institute), Associate Professor Gregory Fox and Professor David Kinley (University of Sydney), and TB survivor Ms Meirinda Sebayang.

The Centre also supported the Association of Mainland Southeast Asian Scholars (AMSEAS)'s annual workshop, which this year focused on China's presence in the region. The full-day workshop discussed themes around security and geopolitics, economic development and social change, particularly in relation to China's Belt and Road Initiative, and China's soft power in mainland Southeast Asia.

In August, we teamed up with the Department of Indonesian Studies and the Australia-Indonesia Youth Association (AIYA) NSW to co-host the launch of *Contentious Belonging: The Places of Minorities in Indonesia* (ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute). Associate Professor Greg Fealy (Australian National University) and Dr Thushara Dibley (University of Sydney) spoke of the political dissonance of minorities in Indonesia.

We also organised a seminar where Dr Sophie Chao reflected on the use of rain-making ceremonies by indigenous Marind communities and Indonesian palm oil corporations in West Papua.

Together with the Sydney Vietnam Initiative, we held the second Sydney Vietnam Symposium, which showcased ongoing collaborative research being undertaken in Vietnam and explored opportunities for new cross-disciplinary collaboration in research and education.

In September, SSEAC teamed up with Causeway Films to host an exclusive screening of *Buoyancy* at the Palace Central Cinema, a gripping film that reveals the confronting reality of slavery within Southeast Asia's fishing industry.

Two weeks later, SSEAC hosted a screening of the remarkable fly-on-the-wall documentary *High Noon in Jakarta*, which was followed by a discussion with award-winning filmmaker Curtis Levy.

Associate Professor Eric Vanden Bussche visited the Centre from the University of Tokyo and held a public talk analysing the Sino-Burmese border demarcation process and China's territorial and maritime disputes in Southeast Asia.

Finally, at the end of September, we partnered with the Malaysia and Singapore Society of Australia (MASSA) to co-host Sangeetha Thanapal, activist and PhD candidate at RMIT University, for a compelling discussion of race relations and racism in Singapore.

In October, the Centre welcomed a series of visiting scholars from around the world. Dr Tom Hoogervorst joined us from the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV) to talk about the Sino-Malay literary tradition in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Subsequently, Associate Professor Pavin Chachavalpongpun visited from Kyoto University and ran a seminar on the political relationship between Thailand and the United States.

Associate Professor Taomo Zhou (Nanyang Technological University) launched her book *Migration in the Time of Revolution: China, Indonesia and the Cold War* (Cornell University Press) in conjunction with Dr Josh Stenberg (University of Sydney)'s *Minority Stages: Sino-Indonesian Performance and Public Display* (University of Hawai'i Press). The two speakers discussed how their books investigate the spaces where high diplomacy, cultural production, and everyday life experiences of the Chinese diaspora have intersected since the mid-20th century.

On World Mental Health Day, in collaboration with the School of Philosophical and Historical Inquiry, we hosted an expert panel on mental health services in Indonesia. Chaired by Professor Hans Pols, the panel featured prominent mental health care experts from around Australia and New Zealand.

Partnering with Project Management students, SSEAC co-organised an event celebrating Myanmar's world-renowned cultural heritage, with a keynote address by Professor Richard Mackay, AM, about the inscription of Bagan on the UNESCO World Heritage list. A series of 'lightning talks' followed, showcasing the University's expertise across different areas of research in Myanmar, and a traditional Myanmar Weaving Dance performed by the Myanmar Cultural Society enchanted the audience with colourful clothing and delicate dance moves set to ethereal music. The evening concluded with an opportunity for social networking whilst enjoying a delicious spread of traditional dishes from Myanmar.

In celebration of World Climate Day, SSEAC Postdoctoral Researcher Dr Benjamin Thompson gave a seminar discussing environmental conservation in the Asia-Pacific.

Together with the China Studies Centre, we then co-hosted a seminar on China and Burma's ethnic policies in multicultural border areas in 1945-48 with University of Sydney scholars Dr Andres Rodriguez and Dr Susan Banki.

In November, SSEAC hosted a pop-up screening of the Australia-Indonesia short-film festival *ReelOzInd! 2019*, focused on the theme: 'Berubah/Change'.

In the same month, we supported the Sydney Law School in delivering a full-day roundtable on the Khmer Rouge Tribunal in Cambodia, which included a seminar with psychotherapist Yim Sotheary on the role of art as a tool for justice in sexual and gender-based crimes committed in the Khmer Rouge era.

Later in November, Dr Jesse Grayman joined us from the University of Auckland to talk about the Indonesian novel, *The Bearded Turtle*, winner of the 2018 Kusala Sastra Khatulistiwa prize in the prose category.

For the last event of the year, the Centre welcomed internationally renowned Indonesian writer Laksmi Pamuntjak, for the launch of her latest novel, *Fall Baby*, about the intricacies of art, religion, politics and history in a troubled Indonesia. Laksmi also held a masterclass for Higher Degree Research (HDR) students in creative writing, publishing and literary translation.

At the beginning of 2020, SSEAC hosted a delegation of 18 disability activism leaders in Indonesia, on a policy reform and advocacy course funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. On this occasion, SSEAC organised an exclusive networking event to introduce the activists to stakeholders in the disability rights movement in Australia. Held in the Nicholson Museum, the event was launched by Mr Jeff Smith, CEO of People With Disability Australia, and Mr Heru Hartanto Subolo, Consul General of the Republic of Indonesia. The event concluded with a Balinese dance performance.

In March 2020, SSEAC trialled its first virtual event with a live panel discussion about the short-lived Pakatan Harapan government and the possible return of kleptocracy in Malaysia. Co-hosted with the Malaysia and Singapore Society of Australia (MASSA) and chaired by independent journalist Mr Kean Wong, the panel featured Emeritus Professor Clive Kessler (UNSW Sydney), Dr Ross Tapsell (Australian National University), Senator Liew Chin Tong (Malaysian Federal Parliament), and Ms Tricia Yeoh (Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs).

In April, Associate Professor Janjira Sombatpoonsiri, from Chulalongkorn University and the German Institute for Global and Area Studies, gave a virtual talk about how religious nationalism shapes civil society activism in Thailand.



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.



Photo credit: Woottigon

One of our key aims is to seed research that can build into bigger projects. We are very proud that in the last twelve months several of our researchers have secured prestigious external funding in areas where they had previously been supported by a SSEAC grant.

SSEAC members in this category include:

- **Dr Jess Melvin**, who has been awarded a DECRA for her project on links between Islamist militias and the Indonesian military
- **Professor Benjamin Oldroyd and Dr Rosalyn Gloag**, who were awarded a Discovery Project grant for work on Honeybees in Indonesia
- **Associate Professor Michelle Villeneuve and Dr Emma Calgato**, who drew on links they had strengthened through SSEAC-funded projects to secure an ARC Linkage Grant on disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction in Australia.
- **Professor Patrick Brennan**, whose team has been awarded a competitive Aus4Innovation Grant to develop new approaches to breast cancer diagnosis in Vietnam, building on SSEAC-funded work.

These projects span four of our five research clusters, namely Economic and Social Development, Environment and Resources, Health, and State and Society.

Another exciting project is one funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. SSEAC members from the Sydney School of Veterinary Science are leading a team of 40 world-class epidemiologists involved in a multi-agency program designed to limit the spread of animal disease that could affect human health and livelihoods. The project will operate in eleven countries including Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, the Philippines, Timor-Leste and Vietnam.

Details of these projects appear in the pages that follow. We hope you join us in congratulating these researchers, and the many other outstanding scholars in SSEAC, on their grant success in 2019–20.

Exposing the influence of the military on Indonesian politics throughout history

SSEAC Postdoctoral Research Associate Dr Jess Melvin has secured a prestigious Discovery Early Career Researcher Award (DECRA) for the militarisation of political Islam in Indonesia.

Dr Jess Melvin has been awarded \$418,988 by the Australian Research Council (ARC) for a project she developed while at SSEAC on the links between Islamist militias and the Indonesian military. Adopting a multi-scalar approach, the project assesses this relationship nationally and in Aceh, a province with a long history of military–militia relations and Islamisation of political life.

In the first attempt to systematically locate current developments in their historical context, this study will draw on interviews and archival research to document and analyse the extent to which the military is using long-established tactics of civilian mobilisation to reassert its political power. The analysis it generates will provide new insight into the role of the military in Indonesia’s current authoritarian turn.

Dr Melvin had previously investigated the role of the Indonesian military in the 1965–66 Indonesian genocide for over a decade, which led to her publishing an acclaimed book on the topic, entitled *The Army and the Indonesian Genocide: Mechanics of Mass Murder* (Routledge, 2018). The book was lauded as “a dramatic breakthrough... [that] demonstrate[s] powerfully that the Indonesian military was deeply engaged in planning and carrying out the murder of Indonesian communists” (Professor Robert Cribb, Australian National University).

During her time at SSEAC, Dr Melvin’s research subsequently shifted to the present day, investigating the military’s instrumentalisation of political Islam in today’s Indonesia. Specifically, it looked at the role that the military plays in mobilising hard-line Islamist groups and inciting religious violence – a mobilisation that Dr Melvin had predicted would intensify in the lead-up to the 2019 presidential elections in Indonesia.

In 2018–19, Dr Melvin participated in the SSEAC Fellowship Hothouse, where she developed her successful DECRA proposal. Upon taking up the award in March 2020, Dr Melvin joined the University of Sydney’s School of Philosophical and Historical Inquiry.

Dr Melvin was previously a Postdoctoral Fellow in Genocide Studies and Henry Hart Rice Faculty Fellow in Southeast Asian Studies at Yale University (2016–17); and a Gilbert Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Melbourne (2015). She completed her PhD, *Mechanics of Mass Murder: How the Indonesian Military Initiated and Implemented the Indonesian Genocide: The Case of Aceh*, at the University of Melbourne in 2014.



Indonesia’s coat of arms, called the Garuda Pancasila

Leading cutting-edge research on honeybees

A project funded by the Australian Research Council aims to improve our understanding of invasive honeybee species around the region.



Close-up of honeybees in the hive

Funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC), the \$321,000 project aims to determine how introduced Asian honeybee populations in Australia and the Pacific managed to overcome severe genetic bottlenecks to become invasive pests.

Led by behavioural geneticists Professor Benjamin Oldroyd and Dr Rosalyn Gloag from the School of Life and Environmental Sciences, and working in close partnership with Bogor Agricultural University (IPB) and the Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB) in Indonesia, the project will use advanced molecular techniques to understand rapid evolution at a focal gene that determines fitness in these populations, and to see evolution in action across the genome using a twelve-year timeline of samples.

The outcome will be an enhanced capacity to manage new outbreaks of invasive social insects of all kinds via a better understanding of how invasions establish and spread. The project will provide significant benefits in the form of protecting Australian agriculture and pollination services from social insect pests.

Professor Oldroyd and Dr Gloag were awarded a SSEAC Collaborative Research Grant in 2017 to support their research into the Asian honeybee (*Apis cerana*) in Indonesia. In collaboration with IPB and ITB, the project assessed the density of Asian honeybee populations in two locations in Indonesia – Java and Sulawesi – thereby addressing high-profile evolutionary and biogeographical questions. The team used new population genetic technologies developed in Australia, deploying helium balloons baited with queen honeybee sex pheromones to trap large numbers of male honeybees.

“The award of our ARC Discovery Projects Grant was a direct outcome of the SSEAC grant.”

Dr Rosalyn Gloag

Despite multiple challenges, including an earthquake which delayed sample collections, the project was highly successful, fostering a close relationship with the Indonesian partner institution, and seeding further collaborative biological research in Indonesia with Australian government funding.

Leaving no one behind

With funding from the Australian Research Council, a team of researchers is working to promote disaster risk reduction policies that are inclusive of people with disabilities.



With funding from the Australian Research Council (ARC), a team of researchers is working to promote disaster risk reduction policies that are inclusive of people with disabilities.

The Asia-Pacific is one of the most disaster-prone regions in the world. Southeast Asia and Australia are regularly struck by major disasters that make international news, with often devastating casualties. While some policies are in place to develop disaster risk reduction, preparedness and recovery, some communities remain left out of the process. People with disabilities are often some of the hardest hit when disasters occur, as they are not provided with adequate access and resources to have their needs met.

Two SSEAC researchers, Associate Professor Michelle Villeneuve and Dr Emma Calgaro, are reversing this trend by promoting and supporting disaster risk reduction practices that are inclusive of people with disabilities in the Asia-Pacific and beyond. Through a SSEAC-supported Sydney Postdoctoral Fellowship, Dr Calgaro was able to expand her action research on disability inclusive disaster risk reduction (DiDRR) in Southeast Asia to create a disability-inclusive climate change adaptation program involving 10 countries across the Asia-Pacific, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Program. Dr Calgaro's hard work was celebrated by the University with a Vice-Chancellor's Award for Outstanding Contribution to Disability Inclusion, an award she shares with colleague Professor Dale Dominey-Howes.

Associate Professor Villeneuve and her team from the Centre for Disability Research and Policy are also advancing DiDRR in the region by applying 'whole-community' and people-centred approaches that put people with disabilities at the centre of Disaster Risk Reduction. Thanks to SSEAC funding awarded in 2018, Associate Professor Villeneuve organised a series of workshops that aimed to build capacity for Disabled Peoples' Organisations leadership in inclusive, community-led research in Indonesia.

In 2019, Associate Professor Villeneuve and Dr Calgaro joined forces to secure an ARC Linkage Grant to build upon their existing work and expand their research on disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction across Australia. The multi-agency project aims to answer critical questions about how to assist people with disabilities in disasters, what their support needs are and how they might help themselves to better prepare for disasters.

Working in collaboration with 12 partner organisations, including the NSW Department of Justice, the Local Community Services Association, and the Australian Red Cross, the research team will co-design effective mechanisms that can be used to scale-up DiDRR across Australia, thereby saving lives and preventing injury for over four million Australians with disabilities who are at higher risk of injury and death than the general population when disasters strikes.

Transforming breast cancer diagnosis in Vietnam

Professor Patrick Brennan and his team from the Faculty of Medicine and Health have been awarded a competitive Aus4Innovation Grant to establish new approaches to breast cancer diagnosis in Vietnam.

Globally, breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in women, with over 1 million cases detected annually. The disease is particularly worrisome in Vietnam, where breast cancer incidence has more than doubled over the last two decades, making it the leading cancer among Vietnamese women, ahead of cervical and uterine cancers. It has also demonstrated a high level of aggressiveness, with over 80% of breast cancer patients presenting with local or distant metastases, while only 28% of breast cancers in Australia were diagnosed in late stages. Thus mortality rates are twofold higher in Vietnam compared with developed countries.

Professor Patrick Brennan and his team have been working on improving breast cancer detection in Vietnamese women for a decade. In 2018, Professor Brennan, Dr Phuong Dung (Yun) Trieu, and Dr Kriscia Tapia were awarded two SSEAC grants to fund workshops in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City with more than 100 breast clinicians and radiologists from 12 large hospitals in northern and southern regions of Vietnam. The data collected pointed to poor mammographic diagnostic efficacy of Vietnamese radiologists in cancer detection. As early treatment and better patient outcomes are reliant on accurate interpretation of breast images by radiologists, the research team committed to investigating innovative methods to improve breast cancer diagnosis in Vietnamese women.

“There is no way we could have achieved this without SSEAC’s support.”

Professor Patrick Brennan

In 2019, the team was awarded the Aus4Innovation Partnership Grant and the Innovation-Xchange (IXC) Grant by the Australian Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade to help strengthen Vietnam’s innovation agenda in science and technology.

Working in partnership with the National Health Strategy and Policy Institute (NHSPI), Vietnam Ministry of Health, the team will be increasing the capacity of Vietnamese radiologists to use local imaging readers in detecting breast cancer through the Breastscreen REader Assessment STRategy platform.

The **Breastscreen REader Assessment STRategy** (BREAST) is an innovative approach used by BreastScreen services in Australia and New Zealand. The tool has increased the detection of breast cancer on mammograms by 30%. The project will introduce, implement, and validate VIETRAD, a BREAST-type platform tailored for Vietnamese clinicians.

Vietnam will have access to an intelligent system that will have a major impact on improving radiologic diagnosis of early stages of breast cancer. A Southeast Asian Hub of breast cancer imaging research and innovation will also be established in Vietnam.

Additionally, the VIETRAD platform can be developed for a range of pathology, oncology and radiology domains in the longer term.



Photo credit: Minh Pham

Training animal disease detectives to prevent future pandemics

With funding from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, SSEAC academics are leading animal health surveillance projects at the forefront of veterinary biosecurity and epidemiology research.



As the coronavirus crisis continues to unfold, an international consortium of veterinary scientists has been established to train a new generation of ‘animal disease detectives’ across Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the \$4.3 million program aims to prevent and contain the spread of zoonotic (i.e. transmissible between animals and humans) and animal diseases in the Indo-Pacific, which have the potential to cause tremendous social and economic harm on a national, regional or even global scale.

“The coronavirus outbreak has underlined how urgent this work is,” explained program leader Associate Professor Navneet Dhand. “The majority of emerging infectious diseases, such as coronaviruses, are zoonotic: they spread from animals to humans. To protect humans from these diseases we must look for pathogens and disease ‘upstream’ in domestic animals and wildlife before they spread to the human population.”

Associate Professor Dhand from the Sydney School of Veterinary Science and the Marie Bashir Institute for Infectious Diseases and Biosecurity leads the multi-agency program, along with Associate Professors Annette Burgess and Jenny-Ann Toribio. The consortium involves over 40 world-class epidemiologists from all of the veterinary schools in Australia and New Zealand and one in the United States.

They will also work with international institutions including the World Health Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the World Organisation for Animal Health.

The consortium engages with government animal health authorities and educators in the region to develop capacity for early intervention in the investigation and management of animal disease outbreaks in the Asia-Pacific region, helping to prevent and halt the spread of animal disease outbreaks that could affect human health, animal health and farmer livelihoods. Alongside on-site training, veterinarians and para-veterinarians will be offered project work with their in-country animal health ministries. Selected candidates will be provided with fellowships for further training in Australia’s world-class veterinarian schools.

The program will operate in Cambodia, Fiji, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, the Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Vanuatu and Vietnam over the next three years.

In addition to his work on biosecurity, Associate Professor Dhand, along with Emeritus Professor Peter Windsor, was awarded US\$200,000 by the Food and Agriculture Organization to look at the impact of planted forest on smallholder livestock farmers and their livelihoods in the Greater Mekong Subregion.



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.

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.

Our Mobility Grants aim to facilitate and expand research collaboration between SSEAC scholars and academics in Southeast Asia.

In the second half of 2019, 11 grants were awarded to Sydney academics and their collaborators. The first round in 2020 was cancelled due to COVID-19.

Cluster research grants awarded in the second half of 2019

Recipient	Faculty	Topic	Cluster
Dr Aliko Christou	Medicine and Health	Raising the Profile of Stillbirth in Myanmar: Improved Data to Inform Prevention Efforts	Health

Workshop grants awarded in the second half of 2019

Recipient	Faculty	Workshop
Prof Simon Butt	Law	Anti-corruption Reform and Governance in Indonesia
Dr Cheng Nien Yuan	Arts and Social Sciences	Critical Approaches to Indonesian Contemporary Art

Other grants awarded in the second half of 2019

Category	No. awarded	Countries
Conference grants	3	Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore
Language	1	Cambodia
Mobility	2	Indonesia, Singapore
Visiting PhD scholar	2	Malaysia, Vietnam

Hothousing future research leaders

Last year, SSEAC established an exciting new initiative to support the University's future leaders in their bids to secure a DECRA, a prestigious fellowship offered to early career researchers by the Australian Research Council. This year, we extended the program to applicants of its mid-career equivalent, the Future Fellowships.

The SSEAC Fellowship Hothouse is open to academics in all disciplines, provided they are conducting research related to Southeast Asia and have a track record that positions them to apply for these prestigious schemes. They are led by SSEAC Director, Professor Michele Ford, who has herself held a Future Fellowship, and who served on the Australian Research Council (ARC)'s College of Experts from 2015 to 2017.

The Hothouse involves intensive workshopping of proposals in a small group, a process that is both challenging and rewarding, as reflected in participant feedback:

"In the SSEAC Hothouse, the extent of individualised advice and mentoring surpassed anything I have experienced as an early career academic. Leading by example, Professor Ford set an expectation that all participants would provide feedback which is constructive, detailed, and frank. The feedback I received in Hothouse was invaluable. My DECRA application is far more persuasive, coherent, and methodologically precise as a result ... The reciprocal nature of Hothouse was another strength. By providing feedback on other people's grants, I honed my own skills in critical reading and grant-writing. On top of that, through regular meetings and exchanging ideas, the SSEAC Hothouse created a supportive academic community within Sydney University that will continue after our grants have been submitted."

Building on this success, SSEAC plans to extend the Hothouse program in 2020–21 to a number of other ARC schemes.

Supporting future research leaders through language learning

"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 in Khmer. I was able to put my new Khmer skills to practice during an internship over the summer of 2019–20, where I worked with Cambodian university students to survey 240 smallholder rice farmers in Northwest Cambodia. The field trip was a huge success.

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



Daniel Howell is a PhD candidate who recently completed a Khmer language course thanks to a SSEAC Language Training Initiative grant. His PhD research is aligned with an Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research funded project: "Sustainable intensification and diversification in the lowland system in Northwest Cambodia."



Photo credit: Tom Fisk

Podcasts galore!

In the continued context of the global pandemic, the Centre has expanded its *SSEAC Stories* podcast program. In weekly episodes, this podcast tells the stories of our members, exploring and sharing their research in and across the region.

In the first half of the year 2020, we released a total of 19 new *SSEAC Stories* podcasts across our five thematic clusters. Here are some of the highlights from each cluster. You can find plenty more online – *SSEAC Stories* is available on all the main podcasting apps, including [Apple Podcasts](#), [Spotify](#), [SoundCloud](#), [Google Podcasts](#), and more!



Digital Technology, Climate Change and the 4th Industrial Revolution

While previous industrial revolutions unleashed the power of fossil fuels and created consumer societies, the 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR) has come with a range of new technologies that fuse the biological, physical and digital worlds. Dr Michael DiGregorio explores the transformative impact of 4IR and how new technologies can be used to empower vulnerable communities and improve climate resilience in Southeast Asia.



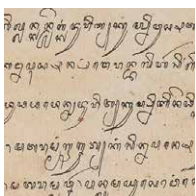
Tigers, Sloths, and Sawfish: Using Flagship Species to Conserve the World's Mangroves

As the effects of climate change and deforestation become ever-more concerning, what innovative strategies can we develop to increase funding and awareness for environmental conservation projects? Dr Benjamin Thompson explains how charismatic megafauna can be used as flagship species for mangrove forest conservation.



COVID-19 and HIV/AIDS in Indonesia

The rapid spread of COVID-19 across Indonesia has put the country's nascent healthcare system under tremendous pressure. Associate Professor Sharyn Davies and Dr Najmah highlight how, in a context of rising populism and social pressure over sexual practices, the pandemic has exacerbated the challenges encountered by the LGBTIQ community and people with HIV/AIDS across the archipelago.



The Materiality of History-Writing in Premodern Java

The study of history is often constrained by the availability and reliability of sources. Through his research on the materiality of writing in Indonesia, Jarrah Sastrawan argues that the physical conditions of historical documents, such as their durability, the circumstances of their storage, and their capacity for reproduction, have powerfully influenced the development of Javanese historiography as a whole.



Sex, Cyanide and CCTV: A Review of the Jessica Wongso Case

In 2016, a young Indonesian woman collapsed in an upmarket Jakarta cafe after drinking iced coffee, and died before she reached hospital. Following a sensational four-month trial broadcast live on national TV, Jessica Wongso was found guilty of premeditated murder and sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment. Professor Simon Butt discusses whether Jessica Wongso got a fair trial and debates the influence of the media on criminal trials.

Expanding collaboration in the region

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



Photo credit: Waranont Joe

SSEAC 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 2019–20, SSEAC continued to develop relationships with other academic institutions.

Centre Director Professor Michele Ford met with representatives from the National Institute of International Strategy (NISS) in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), as well as the Heads of the Southeast Asia centres at Cornell University and the University of British Columbia, to discuss potential partnerships.

SSEAC Curriculum Coordinator Dr Natali Pearson met with the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies at Mahidol University to organise a joint field school on human rights in Thailand.

In June, SSEAC welcomed representatives from think tanks and media outlets from across the region for a roundtable on media trends in Southeast Asia co-hosted with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

In September, SSEAC welcomed a party of high officials from the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs to explore avenues for further cooperation.

SSEAC also received delegations from universities with expertise in Southeast Asia, including representatives from the Centre for Southeast Asian Studies at Kyoto University, Japan, LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore, and Chiang Mai University, Thailand.

The Centre received fewer high-ranking officials in 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

SSEAC 2019–2020 distinguished visitors

Her Excellency Ms Robyn Mudie	Australian Ambassador to Vietnam
His Excellency Mr Ezzedin H. Tago	Consul General of the Philippines, Sydney
Her Excellency Ms Melanie Rita B. Diano	Consul of the Philippines, Sydney
His Excellency Mr Emmanuel Donato K. Guzman	Consul of the Philippines, Sydney
His Excellency Mr Chakkririd Krachaiwong	Consul General of Thailand, Sydney
Her Excellency Ms Sareeya Panyadee	Consul of Thailand, Sydney

Leading the way on social inclusion

Through its Australia Awards-funded leadership training for Disabled People’s Organisations across Indonesia, SSEAC is creating links between Indonesian and Australian activists, and contributing to a deeper understanding of social inclusion.

The Centre ran its third leadership training course for emerging leaders from Disabled Peoples’ Organisations in Indonesia from 18 January to 2 February 2020. Funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and managed by Australia Awards in Indonesia, the course focused on the role of disabled people’s organisations in policy advocacy. The 18 participants learnt about the Australian National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and other Australian disability-related initiatives, developed a campaign to implement on their return to Indonesia, and honed their policy advocacy skills by pitching their policy change ideas to a panel of judges.

During their time in Australia, the participants met a range of Australian disability activists, policy makers, disability service providers and end users. Their interactions with these diverse stakeholders helped increase their understanding of disability policy in Australia and inspired them to seek new ways to tackle the disability-related policy challenges they face back at home. The participants also met with officials from the National Disability Insurance Agency and heard from four different users of the NDIS. These encounters provided a comprehensive overview of the NDIS and how it works. The course has provided the participants with strategies to audit their organisation’s strengths and weaknesses, define an advocacy campaign around a particular issue, and engage with authorities in their hometowns and provinces to work for meaningful change.

“Here we have learnt that success is the result of everyone’s work, each person makes a contribution, working together, being empathetic, sharing resources and energy.”

Ms Fanti Frida Yanti, Office of Women’s Empowerment and Child Protection

“Though there is still so much to learn, this course has opened my eyes to what I can achieve and gave me new skills to reach my goals.”

Mr Budi Pramono, Yayasan Sidikara



Indonesian participant in the DPO leadership course, Mr Budi Pramono, in front of the University of Sydney’s Quadrangle



The next generation of research excellence

The Sydney Southeast Asia Centre 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 Honours Bootcamp for Honours students from around Australia working on a topic related to Southeast Asia.

In 2019, SSEAC hosted 16 students researching topics ranging from public housing in Jakarta and representations of queer subjects in Vietnamese cinema to international responses to sexual and gender-based violence in Myanmar.

Honours students from the University of Melbourne, UNSW Sydney, the University of Queensland, University of Technology Sydney and the University of Western Australia, as well as University of Sydney students, worked together over three days to sharpen their presentation skills, learn about publishing from their thesis and discuss career pathways after their Honours degree.

“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

Postgraduate Retreat

For the first time, SSEAC's annual Postgraduate Retreat was dedicated to writing, with a specially curated program providing our students with the physical and mental space to write as part of a community of productive student researchers.

Over three days, students participated in structured writing sessions, facilitated workshops, and informal discussions and debriefing sessions regarding the writing process. Optional yoga classes were held each morning.

This was our most highly attended postgraduate retreat ever, with 44 participants from across Australia, including the University of Sydney, University of Technology Sydney, Western Sydney University, the Australian National University, Flinders University and Monash University.

“Thank you again for organising such a fantastic event and offering beautiful memories to cherish for life.”

Jiva Nath Lamsal

Postgraduate Conference

SSEAC's annual Postgraduate Research Conference is designed to showcase Southeast Asia expertise amongst higher degree research students from the University of Sydney and beyond. Nineteen postgraduate students presented papers across six panels on topics including rural development models in Vietnam, media freedom in the Philippines, and disease investigation in Indonesian aquaculture.

The conference built on a public speaking workshop that SSEAC held earlier in 2019, which focused on techniques for delivering an engaging and informative conference paper. Participants 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'.

“An excellent opportunity to build your confidence, improve your talk and its delivery, and learn tips for a great presentation.”

Student participant

Interdisciplinary field schools

SSEAC field schools gave 28 undergraduate students real-world experience of conducting interdisciplinary research in the second half of 2019.

An interdisciplinary view of disability and social inclusion in Indonesia

In winter 2019, 17 University of Sydney students travelled to Indonesia for an interdisciplinary field school on disability and social inclusion. Funded by the New Colombo Plan, this field school was designed to support transformational experiences for young Australian undergraduate students. Building on SSEAC's flagship interdisciplinary model, the field school attracted students from the history and philosophy of science, political economy, psychology, geography, social work and Indonesian studies.

Students toured Jakarta with not-for-profit organisation Jakarta Barrier Free Tourism to experience first-hand the impact of inadequate infrastructure on physical mobility. A highlight of the field school was the opportunity to partner with local students in Yogyakarta. These partnerships allowed new friendships to flourish through knowledge exchange, shared interests and occasional hilarity. Together, the students visited community advocacy groups, Universitas Gadjah Mada and an inclusive school. Through these and other experiences, students gained a profound appreciation of the challenges faced by people with disabilities in an Indonesian context.

This field school is one component of SSEAC's broader work on disability and social inclusion in Indonesia. Since 2016, this work has included an organisational leadership and management practice training program for disabled people's organisations, funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

“This project has taught me that active learning and listening is one of the most important tools you can develop in this world. When you openly learn about someone else's experience, you learn about your own in the process. You learn about what has shaped you, informed you, and what makes your story different from others.”

Student participant in the Disability and Social Inclusion in Indonesia field school

Researching social issues: Water in Singapore

In December 2019, 11 students participated in a pilot Sydney Research Seminar Unit on Water in Singapore. The Unit attracted undergraduate students majoring in a diverse range of disciplines, including music, accounting, environmental studies, sociology, philosophy, international relations and political economy.

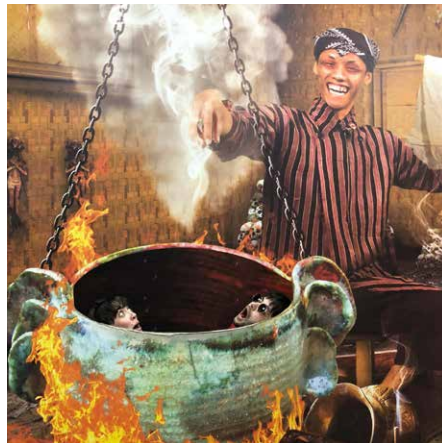
The unit began with 4 intensive weeks of pre-departure seminars, in which students were encouraged to deepen their knowledge of Singapore and to think broadly about the political, cultural and socio-economic significance of water. These sessions were also designed to provide students with an understanding of research ethics and integrity, researcher positionality and methodological approaches.

Students then ventured beyond the classroom to test their newfound skills. Over two weeks in Singapore, the group visited the National University of Singapore, the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, the Future Cities Laboratory and the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute. This was complemented with a curator-led tour of the Tang Shipwreck Collection at the Asian Civilisations Museum and a visit to the Marina Bay Barrage. Students also had the opportunity to visit the NEWater facility to witness reclaimed wastewater recycling in action.

Site visits provided context, demonstrating the value of research-led teaching in a field school context. One highlight was a visit to Pulau Ubin (Ubin Island) to observe local water management practices, meet with local fishers and explore the coastal wetlands and mangrove systems at low tide. Local artists and activists accompanied the students, adding another layer of insight and interpretation to the island experience.

“All my team members were so open, smart, funny and hardworking. We had a great time developing our own research project together. The research project gave us so much freedom to explore what we are interested in. It is really cool to have this kind of experience before making career choices. Now I am sure I want to do more research in the future!”

Student participant in the Water in Singapore field school



With more than 400 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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