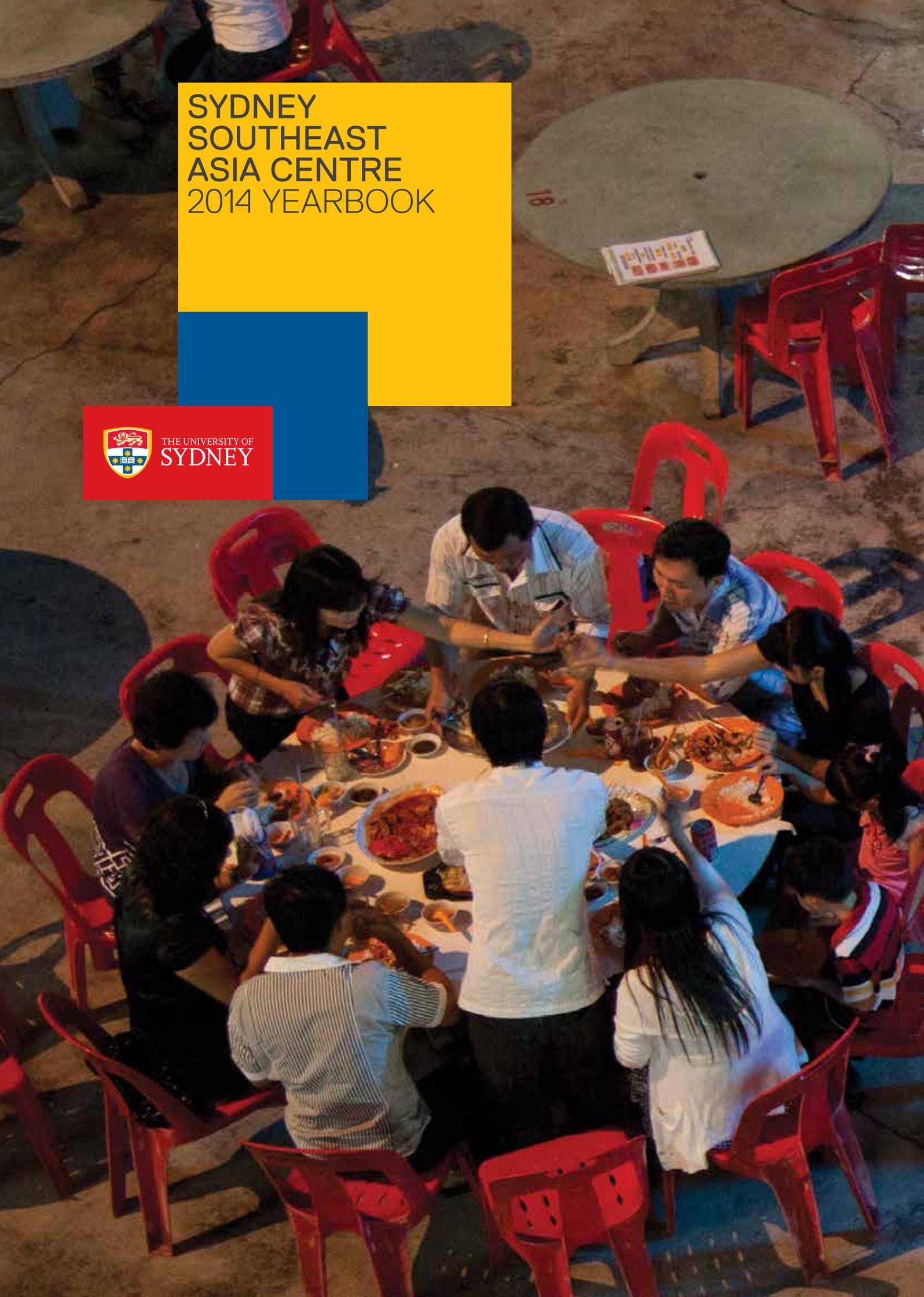


SYDNEY  
SOUTHEAST  
ASIA CENTRE  
2014 YEARBOOK



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
SYDNEY





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## A MESSAGE FROM THE VICE-CHANCELLOR



I am proud of the work of the Sydney Southeast Asia Centre, a key strategic initiative of the University of Sydney Strategic Plan 2011-2015. Established in 2012 with a mandate to prioritise our work with Southeast Asia, the centre has achieved remarkable success in a short timeframe, bringing together academics across the University with an interest in Southeast Asia and increasing engagement with each of the 11 countries that come within its auspices.

Southeast Asia really matters not just to the University but to Australia. Our future depends greatly on this dynamic region to our north. Indonesia is set to become one of the world's largest economies. Singapore is a global hub. Myanmar is emerging from decades of isolation. These nations, and others in the region, are fluid and complex. An understanding of them – and engagement with them – is vital for our wellbeing as a nation and our place in the world.

The centre's 250 academic members, located in 13 of our 16 faculties, constitute one of the highest concentrations of Southeast Asia expertise globally. Before the establishment of the centre, research teams and individual academics had established research profiles on Southeast Asia as well as strong links in the region. However, there was no overarching facilitation, co-ordination and narrative to demonstrate and develop those strengths for the University as a whole.

The Sydney Southeast Asia Centre provides a focus for this work, bringing academics together across disciplinary boundaries, showcasing and supporting existing and new academic and student engagement, and raising the profile of the University in the region. I congratulate everyone involved in the centre and thank its Director, Professor Michele Ford, and Deputy Director, Dr Thushara Dibley. Michele and Thushara have worked tirelessly to establish the centre and I know they will continue to work to ensure its continuing success. With the momentum that has been achieved to date, the future is indeed exciting for this key strategic initiative within the University of Sydney.

**DR MICHAEL SPENCE**

Vice-Chancellor, University of Sydney

## A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



Welcome to the Sydney Southeast Asia Centre's inaugural Yearbook. In the pages that follow, we hope to capture something of the enormous energy that characterises the University's engagement with our region – from the grandeur of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's appearance at the Sydney Opera House to the isolation of the mountains in Timor-Leste where students of agriculture, education and medicine work together to better understand the challenges of food security.

We are very proud of the contribution the University makes not only to our understanding of Southeast Asia, but to Australia's relationship with the region and to the well-being of its citizens. In the two years since we were established, SSEAC – as we like to call ourselves – has showcased and built upon the amazing depth of that engagement.

Academic events constitute a large part of the public face of our work. You will read about a number of them here, including the 12th International Conference on Thai Studies and the inaugural SSEAC Annual Forum, entitled 'Imagining the ASEAN Community'. We are also deeply engaged in public outreach in the City of Sydney, epitomised by our work with the Burmese community around the Daw Aung San Suu Kyi event, itself organised in collaboration with UTS and the Sydney Opera House. Other examples include public forums featuring our members, including the launch, hosted by Professor Geoff

Gallop, Director of the University's Graduate School of Government, of a book by former Foreign Minister and SSEAC Professorial Fellow, Mr Bob Carr, on his period in office.

Within Southeast Asia itself, Sydney academics are making a real difference. I am sure you will enjoy learning about some of the University's most significant research and outreach programs, including the Angkor Research Program, led by Professor Roland Fletcher, and Dr Richard Seymour's innovative work with grassroots entrepreneurs across the region. These are but a small sample of the vast number of faculty-based initiatives that give so much depth to the University's presence in the region.

Behind the scenes, SSEAC does its best to support existing initiatives and foster new ones. In the area of research, we provide start-up grants to researchers working in and across our five priority areas, which are Economic and Social Development, Environment and Resources, Health, Heritage and the Arts and State and Society. We also offer intensive training for staff and students in a range of Southeast Asian languages, as well as research training for Sydney postgraduates and Honours students from across Australia. In education, we work hard to increase undergraduate students' understanding and appreciation of Southeast Asia, primarily through our mobility programs. In the last twelve months, we have become heavily involved in the University's response to the New Colombo Plan, supporting faculty-based programs as well as mounting our flagship interdisciplinary field schools.

You can read about our grant recipients, our postgraduate research retreat, our Honours Bootcamp and our field schools, as well as many other SSEAC initiatives, in the pages that follow. Before I leave you to do just that, however, I would like to conclude this brief welcome by acknowledging the expertise, skills and enthusiasm of SSEAC members. Equally important is the support provided to them – and to us – by their faculties and the University's central portfolios and professional services units, without which none of this important work would be possible. It is deeply encouraging that so many share a vision for even greater engagement with the eleven complex and fascinating countries to our north.

### 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 on Southeast Asia. Established in July 2012 and officially launched by the Australian Foreign Minister four months later, SSEAC is testament to the University's commitment to high-impact, collaborative research and meaningful global engagement.

Southeast Asia is of strategic importance to Australia in trade, defence, development assistance and education. With 600 million people, it is home to almost 10 percent of the world's population. Located between the two economic powerhouses of the 21st century – China and India – it is one of the world's fastest-growing economic blocs.

With 250 academics in thirteen of its sixteen faculties working on and in the eleven countries of Southeast Asia, the University of Sydney has one of the highest concentrations of regional expertise in the world. From a central position within the University, SSEAC is working to forge an innovative and engaged approach that reflects the complexity of the region and recognises its salience to Australia's future.

SSEAC goes far beyond the conventional area studies model (based in the social sciences and humanities) to take a broad-based and holistic approach to research, education and engagement. The cornerstone of the centre is our research excellence. Scholars working on Southeast Asia specialise in an extraordinary range of disciplines, from archaeology to veterinary science.

This breadth of disciplinary focus is matched by the spectrum of topics researched. In addition to traditional area studies work in disciplines like anthropology, economics and politics, our academics deal with pressing real-world issues such as infectious and chronic diseases, energy and infrastructure, and food and other forms of human security. These topics cluster around five themes:

- economic and social development;
- environment and resources;
- health;
- heritage and the arts;
- state and society.

As well as supporting individual researchers and multidisciplinary teams working in these thematic areas, SSEAC connects disciplinary experts to country specialists who have the in-depth cultural and political knowledge necessary for sustained engagement. A key way of doing so is through our country-based groups, which bring together researchers working on Brunei and Malaysia, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-

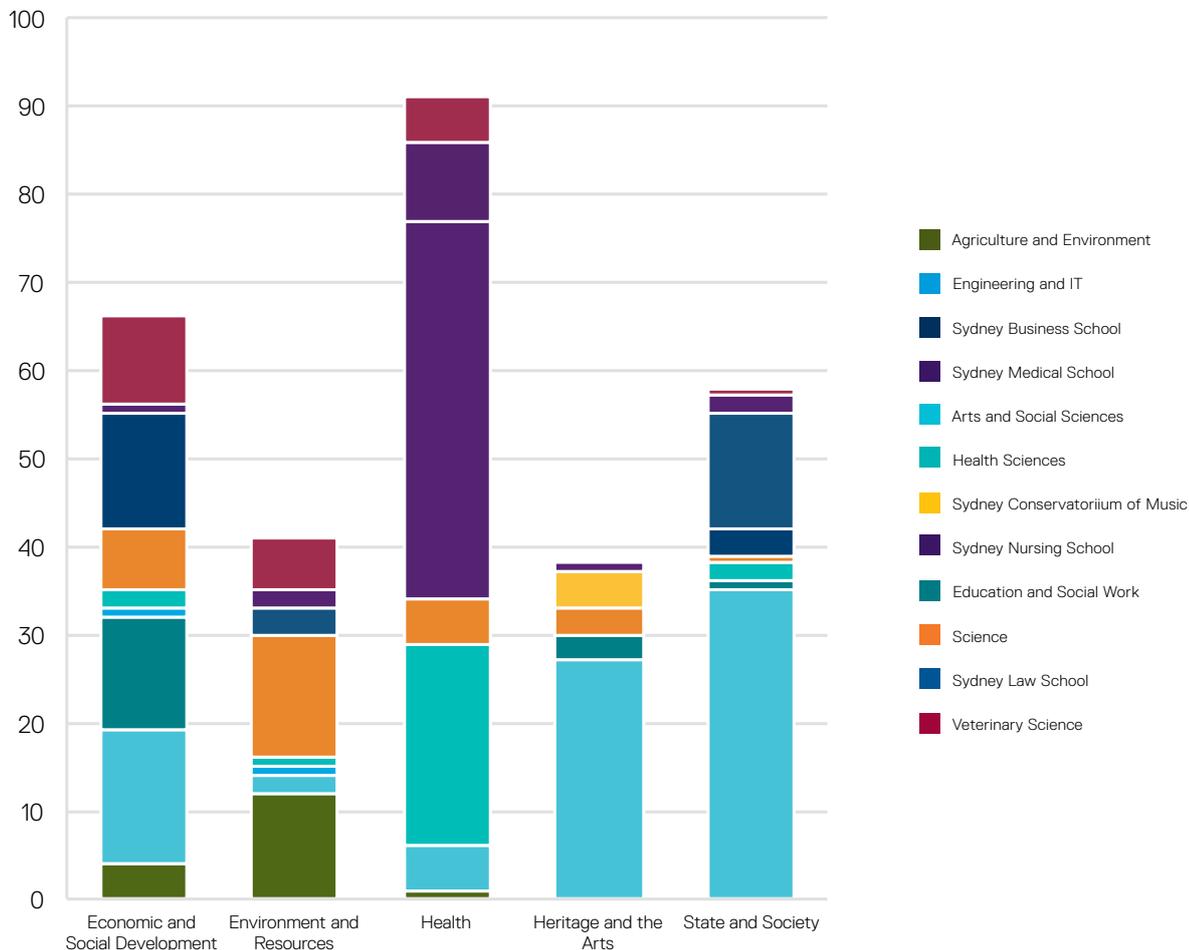
Leste, the Philippines and Vietnam. Another component of SSEAC's multi-pronged approach is to help identify potential research collaborators in Southeast Asian universities, but also in government, NGOs and the private sector.

Our members' academic work makes a real difference by informing decisions in government, industry and the wider community. Many of our members also take a direct hands-on approach through their outreach work. The Hoc Mai Foundation, a private foundation operated through the Sydney Medical School, provides scholarships to students from the region to study at Sydney. In other faculties like agriculture and veterinary science, SSEAC members are involved in training their counterparts from the region to use the latest techniques and tools in the field.

SSEAC engages extensively with Southeast Asian universities as peers, but also – where appropriate – as a form of outreach, to develop research capacity. This engagement is supported by schemes like SSEAC's Research Mentors in Retirement scheme, through which retired academics take on a mentorship role at universities in the region. Activities like this support Southeast Asian academics to better engage in global debates in their field and to contribute to the cutting edge research of their discipline and consolidate Sydney's relationships in the region.

In addition to supporting academics research and engagement, the centre works to enhance the learning experience of undergraduates and research students. By coordinating and facilitating interdisciplinary field schools that focus on real-world problems faced by people in our region, SSEAC helps undergraduate students develop a practical and well-rounded perspective on Southeast Asia in all its complexity. These students are the future of our engagement with the region. It is critical that they develop the skills, knowledge and networks that will help them operate there with ease. SSEAC also provides programs to enhance the knowledge and skills of research students. The networks developed between these students, many of whom hold influential posts in their home universities or governments, are helpful to them in the short term as they complete their research degrees, but also build the foundations for continued engagement upon their return home.

## SSEAC MEMBERS BY CLUSTER AND FACULTY



## RELATED INITIATIVES

The University of Sydney is fostering a deeper and wider understanding of Southeast Asia through a number of high-profile initiatives, each of which involves collaboration with regional and global partners:

- The Angkor Research Program (ARP), a cross disciplinary collaboration that incorporates the Greater Angkor Project (GAP) and five other projects including the Khmer Toponymic Atlas project, which are creating a new perspective on Angkor and its ancestry.
- The Centre for Asian and Pacific Law, which runs conferences and seminars and has particular expertise in Indonesian, Malaysian and Vietnamese legal systems and laws.
- The Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, which incorporates the West Papua Project and a concentration of researchers with an interest in Timor-Leste.
- The Department of Indonesian Studies, one of the most respected in Australia, with a strong reputation for its research and policy work in that country.
- The Hoc Mai 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 ways to reduce infectious diseases.
- The Mekong Research Group, Australia's premier centre for research on the Mekong region.
- The Office for Global Health which facilitates international health research and works with the University's health faculties to contribute to health and wellbeing in the Asia-Pacific.

## SSEAC GOVERNANCE

The Sydney Southeast Asia Centre is governed by a Board of Management, comprised of divisional representatives, and managed by a director, who is advised by an Executive Committee. The Director, Professor Michele Ford, is assisted in her work by Deputy Director, Dr Thushara Dibley and Executive Officer, Ms Jane Hardy. This small team works very closely with the University's professional services units, including the International Portfolio, the International Services team, Marketing and Communications, the Library, the Director for Government Relations and Sydney Ideas. SSEAC staff also collaborate with other Southeast Asia-related centres and initiatives at the University, the Office for Global Health and the Hoc Mai Foundation, the faculties, and with the other University-wide multidisciplinary research centres.

### COUNTRY COORDINATORS

COUNTRY	NAME	DISCIPLINE
Cambodia	Martin Polkinghorne	Archaeology
Indonesia	Jeff Nielson	Geography
Laos	Damien Field	Environmental Sciences
Malaysia & Brunei	Salim Farrar	Islamic Law
Myanmar	Grant Hill-Cawthorne	Public Health
The Philippines	Andrew Leaver	Physiotherapy
Singapore	Yeow-Tong Chia	History Curriculum
Thailand	Gavan Butler	Political Economy
Timor-Leste	Lyndal Trevena	General Practice
Vietnam	Merrilyn Walton	Medical Education

### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

NAME	FACULTY
Lesley Harbon	Education and Social Work
Adrian Vickers	Arts and Social Sciences
David Guest	Agriculture and Environment
Patrick Brennan	Health Sciences
Peter McMinn	Sydney Medical School
Jenny-Ann Toribio	Veterinary Sciences
Philip Hirsch	Science

### BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

NAME	DIVISION
Jeffrey Riegel	Provost's nominee
Paul Jones	Architecture and Creative Arts
Andrew Terry	Business
Joseph Davis	Engineering and Information Technologies
Kathryn Refshauge	Health Sciences
Luke Nottage	Humanities and Social Sciences
Jill White	Medicine, Dentistry, Nursing and Pharmacy
Peter Windsor	Natural Sciences
Jill Trehwella	DVC (Research)
Sandra Meiras	International Portfolio
Michele Ford	SSEAC Director



Thushara Dibley



Lesley Harbon



Yeow-Tong Chia

### THUSHARA DIBLEY

SSEAC Deputy Director, Dr Thushara Dibley, embodies the ambition, energy and engagement that is the hallmark of SSEAC. A long-time Southeast Asianist, Thushara is an active researcher, a committed teacher, and an experienced consultant.

Having spent much of her childhood in Indonesia, Thushara completed her undergraduate degree at Sydney, majoring in Indonesian Studies and neuroscience. She returned to Southeast Asia as an Australian Youth Ambassador in Timor-Leste before undertaking a PhD on peacebuilding NGOs in Aceh and Timor-Leste.

After graduating and spending a year as a Visiting Fellow at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Thushara once again returned to Sydney, this time as SSEAC's Executive Officer. Most recently, she was appointed Deputy Director, the stand-out candidate in a very competitive international field.

Thushara plays a vital role in the day-to-day running of the centre. She coordinates language training and undergraduate field schools, runs our annual Honours Bootcamp and postgraduate research retreat, and liaises with our academics working in Southeast Asia. She has also embarked on a new research project focused on disability activism and policy in Indonesia with a view in the medium term to broadening its focus to the region as a whole.

### LESLEY HARBON

Associate Professor Lesley Harbon is a member of the SSEAC Executive Committee. In her SSEAC role as Community Outreach Adviser, Lesley has worked with Dr Gavan Butler to establish a scheme to encourage retirees to help Southeast Asian universities to strengthen their research and their capacity to train research students.

Lesley grew up in the 1960s in Sydney's rural northern outskirts. Her earliest memory of Southeast Asia is of a postcard arriving from Vietnam, addressed to her — a four year old — thanking her for sending fruitcakes to Australian soldiers. Her fascination with Indonesian began in her first year at high school, and at the age of 14 she made her first visit to Indonesia. Lesley graduated as a secondary teacher of Indonesian in 1981 and hosted an exchange student from Central Java in 1992. Now she prepares Indonesian language teachers to teach in primary and secondary schools.

As Associate Dean International in the Faculty of Education and Social Work, Lesley has travelled extensively through Southeast Asia. She is a member of the Developing Educational Professionals in Southeast Asia (DEPISA) group, collaborating with colleagues in teacher education institutions from Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia and Laos since 2010.

### YEOW-TONG CHIA

SSEAC Country Coordinators play an important role in creating opportunities for better engagement with countries in the region. Dr Yeow-Tong Chia, Lecturer in History Curriculum Education, is the SSEAC Country Coordinator for Singapore. The centre and its members have benefited greatly from his enthusiasm about, and connections with, his home country.

Born and educated in Singapore, Yeow-Tong completed his undergraduate education at the National University of Singapore. He completed his PhD at the University of Toronto in the fields of history of education and comparative, international and development education. His thesis examined the role of education in the formation of the Singapore developmental state. His other research interests include history education and citizenship education in Singapore and Australia. He is currently writing his first book, which will be published in 2015.

As Country Coordinator, Yeow-Tong has created opportunities for SSEAC members and the wider community to learn more about Singapore. Yeow-Tong made a valuable contribution to the pre-departure training program for students involved in SSEAC's field school on Singapore housing policy, funded by Tranche 1 of the New Colombo Plan. He has also used his connections to involve SSEAC in public presentations by Singaporeans visiting Sydney and community events related to Singapore.



12th International Thai Studies Conference, April 2014

## INTERNATIONAL THAI STUDIES CONFERENCE

In April 2014, the University of Sydney hosted the 12th International Conference on Thai Studies, which is held every three years. The 2014 conference was attended by over 330 delegates from around the world. Approximately half of those present came from Thailand itself, but many travelled from the USA, Europe and from around Australia.

The conference adopted the theme Thailand in the World. It covered all areas of Thai studies, including the humanities; the social sciences; medicine, science and technology; the fine arts, design and architecture; education; and environment. The keynote speakers included Professor Thongchai Winichakul, Dr Paritta Chalermpong Koanantakool, Professor Jonathan Rigg and Professor Grant Evans, whose diverse perspectives on Thailand reflected the disciplinary variety of the over 200 papers presented over the three-day gathering.

In addition to engaging academics with diverse disciplinary interests, the conference included special sessions for postgraduates and early career researchers and a public forum. Students attending a pre-conference workshop received feedback on their conference papers and advice on publishing and writing. This workshop was co-convened by Dr Justin Hastings and Professor Craig Reynolds. The public forum focussed on different elements of Thailand in Australia and included presentations from community and business representatives, as well as the screening of an entertaining film about Thai migrants to Sydney. The new Thai Consul General, Mr Theeratep Promvongsanon, introduced the forum.

The conference attracted other high-profile figures. Australian Ambassador to Thailand, H.E. Mr James Wise addressed the delegates on the first night at the reception and went on to actively participate in all three days of the conference. SSEAC Professorial Fellow Mr Bob Carr delivered the conference dinner address, commenting on the value of lively political debate in democracies – a message that hit a note with the delegates as the conference occurred at a time of heightened political tensions in Thailand.

The political circumstances in Thailand were the subject of discussion in two special roundtables at the conference. The first, convened by Pavin Chachavalpongpun from Kyoto University, focussed on the royal succession and democracy. The second, about democratic reform, was convened by Professor Pasuk Phongpaichit from Monash University and Thailand analyst Chris Baker. The conference attracted considerable media attention from Thai media outlets.

The conference, the first large-scale research event hosted by SSEAC and one of the biggest Southeast Asia-related research events ever held in Australia, was a great success, placing the University of Sydney on the map for scholars with an interest in Thailand from around the world.



Floating village in Cambodia (photo credit: Isabelle Whitehead)



Philip Hirsch

### PHILIP HIRSCH

There are few scholars at Sydney who can claim as deep a commitment to mainland Southeast Asia as Philip Hirsch, Professor of Human Geography in the School of Geosciences and member of the SSEAC Executive Committee. Phil has lived in, researched, published on, and taught students about mainland Southeast Asia for over three decades.

Phil started working in Thailand in 1981 as a young lecturer at Silpakorn University in Nakorn Pathom. He is a self-taught Thai speaker. In the mid-1980s, Phil spent more than a year living in two villages on the agricultural-forest frontier of western Thailand while conducting fieldwork for his PhD. Since he started teaching at the University of Sydney in 1987, Phil has been engaged in research on development, environment and rural change in the Mekong countries. He has authored, co-authored and edited a dozen books on critical issues in development and environment in Southeast Asia.

Phil is fluent in written and spoken Thai and Lao, speaks and reads passable Vietnamese and some Khmer. He is most at home conducting research with farmers at the village level, and much of his work has involved collaborative, often applied, research projects with academic, NGO and local government partners in Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia. He has seen these countries experience phenomenal change during the time he has been working in and on Southeast Asia.

Field-based teaching is a hallmark of Phil's work with students. Since 1988 he has run 13 field schools to the region ranging from three to six weeks in duration, for 24 students at a time. The field schools are predicated on peer learning, involving collaboration between Sydney students and their local university peers to conduct village-based fieldwork. The field schools have been conducted in Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia and sometimes southwestern China. Phil also runs field methods workshops in the region for groups of PhD students.

Phil's recent work has included a co-authored book on land issues in Southeast Asia, entitled *Powers of Exclusion: Land dilemmas in Southeast Asia*. He is currently editing the *Routledge Handbook of Environment in Southeast Asia* and is co-authoring a book with law colleagues on socio-legal dimensions of water governance in the Mekong. Phil is also engaged in a collaborative field program in Laos that brings together geographers and public health researchers from the University of Sydney, three faculties at the National University of Laos and the Lao National Institute of Public Health to investigate dilemmas associated with large-scale natural resource projects and their implications for livelihood adaptation among the rural poor.

SSEAC has benefited greatly from Phil's knowledge about and passion for the region, which he has put to use as the convener of the 12th International Conference on Thai Studies and as the coordinator of the inaugural SSEAC postgraduate retreat in November 2013.



Helen Nesadurai, Monash University Malaysia speaking at the University of Sydney (photo credit: Richard North)

## SHOWCASING SOUTHEAST ASIA EXPERTISE

### IMAGINING THE ASEAN COMMUNITY

On 11 October 2013, SSEAC hosted 'Imagining the ASEAN Community', an interdisciplinary forum focussing on socio-cultural, political and economic issues in Southeast Asia. The forum brought together academics from seven different faculties at the University of Sydney, along with experts from across Australia and the Southeast Asia region. The participants of the forum included the Consuls General from the Philippines and Timor-Leste, representatives from the Indonesian Consulate, public servants, business people, as well as academics and students from the University of Sydney and other universities in Sydney.

Vice-Chancellor Dr Michael Spence opened the forum emphasising the importance of bringing people together to 'think through the challenges facing ASEAN'. Over the course of the day participants were able to do just that, in both lectures and small group sessions.

Associate Professor Helen Nesadurai, a lecturer at Monash University's Malaysian campus and former consultant for the ASEAN Secretariat, gave the keynote address. In it, she highlighted the need for ASEAN to focus on the concerns of people at the grass-roots level and the importance to ASEAN of engaging with civil society.

Following the address, participants divided into socio-cultural, political and economic streams to discuss issues ranging from security arrangements in ASEAN, to questions of food security in the Mekong, to the issue of infectious diseases.

### WORKING TOGETHER ON FOOD SECURITY

Food security is an increasingly important issue around the world. At the University of Sydney, it is a priority for researchers across a range of disciplines. The extent of this interest was reflected in March 2014 at a forum entitled Good Food, Good Health: Delivering the Benefits of Food Security in Australia and Beyond. The forum, co-hosted by the Charles Perkins Centre (CPC), the Marie Bashir Institute (MBI) and SSEAC, brought together the faculties of Arts and Social Sciences, Agriculture and Environment, Engineering and Information Technologies, Medicine, Science and Veterinary Science. It was the first of its kind.

The program included speakers from across the University of Sydney, as well as from organisations including the Crawford Fund, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance, and the Norwegian Institute

for Agriculture and Environmental Research. The forum attracted over 220 participants from across the University and beyond.

Southeast Asia featured prominently in a panel called 'Translating Australian expertise to the international context'. Speakers included Dr Jim Woodhill, Principal Sector Specialist, Food Security and Rural Development from DFAT, Associate Professor Robyn Alders and Professor Richard Whittington from the Faculty of Veterinary Science. This panel was attended by a group of eight senior journalists from Southeast Asian countries who were visiting the University of Sydney as part of an official International Media Visit program to Australia sponsored by DFAT.

The success of the forum generated enthusiasm for interdisciplinary work on food security. The following day, a group of academics from around the University gathered to discuss how to build on this momentum and interest. One key outcome of this meeting was the decision by scholars from the faculties of Agriculture, Medicine, Science and Veterinary Science with a specific interest in Southeast Asia to develop a project that focused on nutrition-sensitive food security in Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar and Timor-Leste. SSEAC has been supporting this group in their endeavours.



## DAW AUNG SAN SUU KYI



Daw Aung San Suu Kyi accepting her honorary degree from the University of Sydney

On 27 November 2013, Nobel Peace Prize winner Daw Aung San Suu Kyi addressed a capacity audience in the Concert Hall of the Sydney Opera House. In her first public address in Australia, she spoke about her experiences under house arrest and the challenges facing Myanmar's fledgling democracy. Many from the Australian Burmese community were in attendance, having had a separate audience with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi earlier in the day.

The event marked the award of honorary doctorates by the University of Sydney and UTS. The choir stalls behind the stage, where academics from the two universities were seated, were a sea of black and red. The vast majority of those seated in the stalls from Sydney were SSEAC country coordinators or members of its Myanmar country group, its Executive Committee and its Board of Management.

This remarkable occasion represented the culmination of many months' work. Assisted by members of the Australian Burmese community and the Australian Ambassador, SSEAC Director Michele Ford and International Portfolio Director Sandra Meiras delivered a joint invitation from the two universities and the Sydney Opera House while in Myanmar.

Liaison with government was handled by the University of Sydney's Senior Government Adviser Jane Oakeshott, who worked tirelessly with Opera House staff and representatives of UTS to bring the event to fruition once the invitation had been accepted. Vice-Chancellor Dr Michael Spence

devoted many hours to perfecting his opening address in Burmese – a gesture that was deeply appreciated by the Australian Burmese community.

As Dr Spence affirmed in his presentation, the University of Sydney is deeply committed to working towards a more prosperous Myanmar. SSEAC members' work to date has included projects on constitutional reform, human rights, entrepreneurship and the empowerment of women, child and maternal health, and the preservation of ancient religious texts.

Coming just twelve months after our official launch, helping make this once-in-a-lifetime experience a reality for so many Sydneysiders, and members of the Australian Burmese community from as far afield as Perth and Darwin, was an enormous privilege for SSEAC and for the University.

### SINGING FOR SUU KYI

One of the wonderful things about having over 250 members actively engaged in Southeast Asia is being able to draw on their skills, knowledge and networks to the benefit of the wider University community. Sydney PhD student Yuri Takahashi has been connected to Myanmar for over three decades, and since SSEAC was launched, has used the centre as a platform for sharing her knowledge of Burmese language and music.

Yuri is currently completing her PhD in modern Burmese history and literature. But her connection with the country began much earlier. In 1982, as a language teacher she taught Japanese to Burmese engineers working for an

automotive company. Curious about the culture of the people she was teaching, she made her first trip to Myanmar that year. Yuri subsequently took a Masters degree in the Burmese Department of the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, majoring in Burmese language and literature.

Upon completing her Masters, Yuri took up a post in the Japanese Embassy in Myanmar. During her time there, she developed a strong interest in Burmese traditional music. She took singing classes twice a week and cultivated relationships with Burmese musicians that have lasted until today. She maintained her interest after being posted to Sydney in 1994, quickly making connections with people in the local Burmese community. She eventually developed close relationships with Burmese artists and musicians. In 1996, Yuri was invited to sing traditional songs at a Burmese cultural event, something she has been doing ever since.

Yuri has deployed her musical skills in aid of SSEAC on many occasions. Most recently, she performed for Aung San Suu Kyi. Her singing was also greatly admired by delegations from Myanmar's upper and lower houses of parliament when they visited the University in 2013. In addition, Yuri taught the SSEAC Burmese language intensive in 2013. She also dedicated time to provide one-on-one training to the Vice-Chancellor, Dr Michael Spence, in preparation for his speech in Burmese leading up to Aung San Suu Kyi's visit.



## SPEAKING OUT FOR SSEAC



Bob Carr speaking at the University of Sydney (left) and meeting University of Sydney students from Southeast Asia (right) (photo credit: Sally Sitou)



Mr Bob Carr's association with SSEAC began in November 2012 when as Foreign Minister he officially launched the centre. In his launch address he explained why he believed Australian academics were uniquely positioned to interpret Southeast Asia to the world. He was a tremendous ambassador for SSEAC in his remaining time in office, telling audiences around the world of the strength of Sydney's Southeast Asia expertise.

Following his retirement from the Senate in October 2013, Mr Carr accepted a Professorial Fellowship with SSEAC, a post offered in recognition of his services to the centre and growing scholarly interest in the region. His very first public event after his retirement from the Senate was a public lecture co-hosted by SSEAC, the China Studies Centre and the School of Languages and Cultures in November 2013, where he spoke about the role Australia can play as China and the United States wrestle for influence in Southeast Asia. He has been an active contributor to SSEAC ever since, chairing seminars and public lectures and participating in other SSEAC events.

One of the highlights this year was the launch of *Diary of a Foreign Minister* in conversation with Professor Geoff Gallop. On 15 April 2014, the two former politicians entertained an audience of over 200 with their musings about Australia's place in Asia, how former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd was

perceived in China, and Australia's increasing closeness with the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. After fielding questions about issues ranging from the internal workings of the Australia Labor Party to his views on environmental degradation in Southeast Asia, Mr Carr was inundated with requests to sign his new book.

Another highlight was his dinner address at the 12th International Conference of Thai Studies later that month. Addressing an audience drawn from Australia, Southeast Asia, Europe and the USA, Mr Carr reflected not only on his experiences as Foreign Minister with Thailand, but also spoke candidly about his time in federal government, reflecting on the importance of respect for democratic process especially in the face of an election defeat. His observations were very much appreciated by an audience greatly concerned about growing political tensions in Thailand.

Mr Carr's commitment to the centre as it has developed has contributed to its public profile within and beyond Australia. His growing interest in Southeast Asia and engagement through the centre reflect a key goal of SSEAC, which is to involve individuals not necessarily already actively engaged in the region and to demonstrate its complexity and relevance to Australians from all walks of life. As one of SSEAC's first public ambassadors, Mr Carr has made an important contribution to raising the awareness of the pivotal importance of Southeast Asia to the future of Australia, and of Australia's role in the region.

## THE AUSTRALIA-INDONESIA CENTRE



Jeffrey Nielson in conversation with Harold Mitchell and Peter Kanowski (photo credit: Greg Barton)

In late 2013, Vice-Chancellor Dr Michael Spence agreed to support Sydney's involvement in the Australia Indonesia Centre (AIC), a new federal government-funded initiative. The AIC, housed at Monash University, involves five Australian institutions and seven leading Indonesian universities. In addition to Sydney and Monash, the Australian institutions involved are the Australian National University, the University of Melbourne and the CSIRO. The centre's Indonesian partners are the Bogor Agricultural Institute, the Bandung Institute of Technology, and the 10 November Institute of Technology, the University of Indonesia, Gadjah Mada University, Airlangga University, and Hasanuddin University. SSEAC is the conduit for Sydney's involvement in the new centre.

Like SSEAC, the AIC will work to develop research partnerships across a broad range of disciplines with a view to pooling our resources through large interdisciplinary research projects to address shared challenges. Focus areas include energy, food and agriculture, infrastructure, and health. In seeking to address these problems, the AIC aims to develop strong research partnerships in collaboration with government and business. It is also tasked with improving Australian's understanding of Indonesia and enhancing people-to-people relationships.

Sydney is extremely well-placed to contribute to this initiative. Not only

does the University have research strength in all of the nominated focus areas, but SSEAC's membership includes 90 academics and honoraries engaged in Indonesia-related research or outreach, 25 of whom are fluent speakers of Indonesian. These academics are located in 12 faculties across disciplines as diverse as agriculture, veterinary science, medicine, and the health sciences, as well as the social sciences and humanities, law, and education.

### JAKARTA RESEARCH SUMMIT

One of the centre's first initiatives was its inaugural Research Summit, hosted in Jakarta by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture in May 2014. The Summit was opened by the Chair of the AIC Board, Mr Harold Mitchell AC, well-known philanthropist and founder of Australia's largest media and communications group. Also in attendance were the Australian Ambassador to Indonesia and the Indonesian Ambassador to Australia. The University of Sydney was represented by SSEAC Director Professor Michele Ford, Dr Kaveh Rajab Khalilpour (Chemical Engineering), Associate Professor Ben Marais (Infectious Diseases), and Dr Jeffrey Neilson (Geosciences).

Following the delivery of background papers in each of the focus areas, Summit delegates participated in break-out sessions on each of the

focus areas, with a fifth on education. Professor Ford, Associate Professor Marais and Dr Neilson facilitated and reported on the infrastructure, health, and food and agriculture discussions. Dr Khalilpour represented the University in the energy group. All Sydney participants were inspired by the possibilities that emerged in these sessions, and by the role that our University could play in realising them. In the words of Dr Khalilpour, who had never before travelled to Indonesia:

"As an energy professional, it was a great opportunity for me to meet our Indonesian colleagues and develop a new platform for future collaborations. At the beginning I was thinking that I would learn about Indonesian universities and collaboration opportunities. But the multidisciplinary nature of the conference also provided an opportunity for Australian delegates to meet each other and learn about the research opportunities/challenges of other scientific fields! I am sure that this conference created numerous new interdisciplinary bonds between the Australian delegations. I can guess that similar links have been created amongst the delegations from Indonesian universities".

In the year ahead, the AIC research agenda will be firmed up and several major projects initiated. The contribution of participating institutions, including the University of Sydney, will be vital to its success.

## RESEARCH

A major element of SSEAC's mission is to support and showcase Southeast Asia-related research across the University. In the last year, SSEAC has hosted a wide range of research-related events, including film screenings and visiting speakers.

Highlights in 2013–14 included the 12th International Conference on Thai Studies; the SSEAC Annual Forum, this year titled 'Imagining the ASEAN Community', and a forum entitled 'Good Food, Good Health: Delivering the Benefits of Food Security in Australia and Beyond', which SSEAC co-hosted with the Charles Perkins Centre and the Marie Bashir Institute. In addition, we hosted a number of distinguished academic visitors, including anthropologist Professor Tania Li, and ran a regular seminar series showcasing the work of Sydney researchers in different Southeast Asian countries.

As part of its research program, SSEAC directly supports researchers in the faculties. Grants are available for projects in SSEAC's five areas of research strength and for interdisciplinary projects to seed research, support publication and encourage collaboration. In 2013, collaborative research grants were awarded to:

- Associate Professor Kim Foster from the Sydney Nursing School and Dr Nick Kowalenko from the Sydney Medical School, for a project on family-focused mental healthcare in Thailand
- Dr Jennifer Ferng and Dr Sean Anderson from the Faculty of Architecture and Design and Dr Ryan Griffiths from the Department of Government and International Relations, for a project on Australian-built detention centres in Indonesia.

Publication grants, designed to help academics transform applied/consultancy work into academic outputs, were awarded in 2013 to:

- Dr Eric Knight from the Sydney Business School, to support the development of an academic journal article from a report he co-authored for the World Bank on climate change infrastructure in Southeast Asia
- Associate Professor Nicola Piper and Ms Sohoon Lee from the Department of Sociology, to support the development of an academic journal article from a policy paper on labour migration in Southeast Asia.

Business research grants were offered in collaboration with the law firm, Baker and McKenzie, in 2013. These were awarded to:

- Professors Luke Nottage and Bing Ling from the Sydney Law School
- Dr Sandra Seno-Alday from the Sydney Business School.

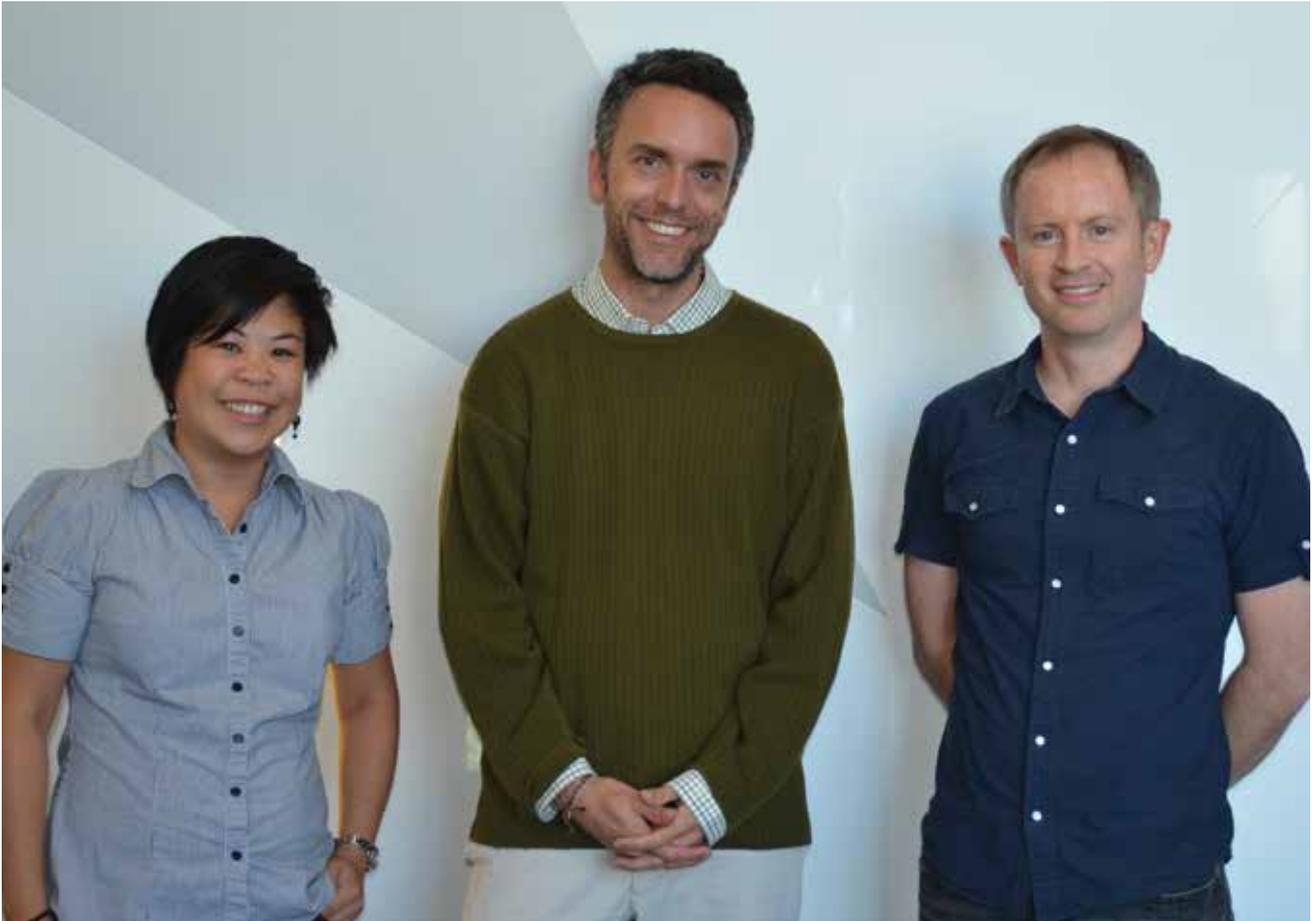
Growth in the SSEAC budget allowed the centre to significantly expand its grant programs in first half of 2014. The SSEAC cluster grants aim to provide a pathway for new academic projects in/about Southeast Asia or for scholars who are engaging in the region for the first time. Four of these were awarded to:

- Associate Professor Dale Dominey-Howes from the School of Geosciences to begin an assessment of the hazard and risk associated with an eruption of the Taal Volcano near Manila in the Philippines

- Dr Gyu-Jin Hwang from the Department of Sociology & Social Policy, for a project that investigates how key social policy institutions in Singapore are configured to promote the ideal of self-reliance
- Dr Niamh Moloney from the Faculty of Health Sciences for a project to develop an integrated health database infrastructure between Australia and Vietnam
- Dr Dwi Noverini Djenar in the Department of Indonesian Studies, for a project that investigates the ways in which the use of language in everyday interaction is dependent on social activity, physical environment and bodily movements.

Mobility grants were awarded to:

- Professor Catherine Waldby from the Department of Sociology & Social Policy, to facilitate collaboration on developing an ethico-regulatory framework for the innovative use of cell therapy products that would apply to researchers and practitioners operating within and between Australia and Singapore
- Associate Professor Kirsty Foster of the Office for Global Health, Sydney Medical School and Associate Professor Jennifer Fraser of the Sydney Nursing School to support a visit of a PhD student from Vietnam researching emerging viral infections in Southeast Asia
- Dr Henry Ko, a Research Fellow in the Sydney Medical School, to facilitate a visit to develop and test an evidence-based practice training program for allied health staff at SingHealth.
- Professor Marilyn Walton of the Sydney Medical School to evaluate the completeness of death report forms in Hanoi, Vietnam.



Recipients of a SSEAC Collaborative Grant: Jennifer Ferng, Sean Anderson and Ryan Griffiths

A publication grant was awarded to Associate Professor Jennifer Fraser to publish her work investigating how the abusive head trauma project has impacted medical and nursing staff knowledge and practice in paediatric health services in Vietnam.

SSEAC also publishes a quarterly newsletter, highlighting centre activities and Southeast Asia-related research from across the University, and a monthly bulletin with details of conferences and funding opportunities relating to each of the countries in Southeast Asia. Work continues on the SSEAC repository in the University's digital archive, an initiative driven by SSEAC Liaison Librarian Ms Michelle Harrison.

### THE POLITICS OF DETENTION

Dr Sean Anderson and Dr Jennifer Ferng from the Faculty of Architecture, Design and Planning and Dr Ryan Griffiths from the Department of Government and International Relations in the Faculty of Arts and Social Science were awarded a SSEAC Collaborative Research Grant in 2013 for a project on Australian-built detention centres on the island of Bintan in Indonesia.

The three researchers are analysing how the construction of the island's detention centres and camps engage matters of sovereign territoriality, infrastructure, land use and ethical design practices. The cross-disciplinary project will interrogate topics of 'shelter' and 'incarceration', and will examine the contraction of sovereignty and the resulting physical manifestations of Indonesia's detention policies.

While in Bintan, the team conducted interviews with architects, government officials, builders, contractors and local labourers responsible for the Bintan Island centre. Their cross-disciplinary approach, which could be described as an 'ethnography of detention architecture', will explore how detention centre and camp facilities on Bintan Island have altered the local political and built environments.



Work under way on the Angkor Research Project

## MANAGING CREATIVE CHAOS

Angkor, in north western Cambodia, is one of the world's most significant archaeological sites. It is also the subject of some of the University of Sydney's most cutting-edge interdisciplinary work in Southeast Asia. The Angkor Research Program has taken the study of Angkor from theory, through pure and applied research, to creating international business opportunities for Australian industry and developing teaching resources for the High School curriculum in Australia. For one and a half decades, the Angkor Research Program has been the cornerstone of the University's engagement with Cambodia, and our research centre in Siem Reap constituted the first physical presence for the University in Southeast Asia.

The Angkor Research Program applies a multidisciplinary approach to the study of urban society and related topics in the Angkor region which includes the archaeology, history, environment and heritage of Angkor and the contemporary relevance to Cambodia and the wider world. The program connects disciplines across the University in arts, science, agriculture, medicine and law. For more than a decade its primary focus has been the spatial organisation, operation, social life, development and demise of Angkor in its ecological and contemporary context.

Professor Roland Fletcher, Director of the Angkor Research Project, has conducted research on Angkor for 15 years in collaboration with partners from the USA, France and Cambodia. He is well aware of both the challenges of multidisciplinary work, which he describes as 'managed creative chaos', but also the benefits of applying 'different but complementary' approaches to a problem to help 'see familiar information in a different way'.

Home to the Khmer Empire between the 9th and 15th centuries, Angkor was originally thought to be a jungle-filled region scattered with temples. Initially, research on this place was based on studies of scriptures, epigraphy and architecture. Taking advantage of new technologies, archaeologists from the University of Sydney and their collaborators from around the world have shown that in fact Angkor was the site of a gigantic low density city surrounded by rice fields. Taking an environmental perspective, they have shown that this ancient city, built on land that was cleared to establish a complex agricultural system and dependent on infrastructure built by humans, was devastated by severe climate events. As such, this site serves to remind us how studies of the past can shed light on contemporary events, but also of the importance of working across disciplinary boundaries to develop these insights.



Members from the research team in Laos analyse their data

## WORKING ACROSS DISCIPLINES

Laos remains one of the least developed countries in Southeast Asia. It has experienced steady growth of the economy since the 1990s, but that growth has been heavily predicated on large-scale resource projects. Rapid development of hydropower, mining and plantations brings benefits to the national economy. It also carries risks. Particularly concerning are the impact of resource development on the access to food and nutritional wellbeing of vulnerable households.

*Facilitating livelihood adaptation under natural resource pressure in Lao PDR*, a three-year research project funded by the Australian Centre of International Agricultural Research (ACIAR), aims to understand the complex processes of livelihood change and adaptation in an area affected by a series of resource developments. The project focuses on the Nam Ngum River Basin where hydropower dams, mines and agricultural plantations have transformed the landscape and people's lives.

The ACIAR project approaches food security and livelihood adaptation to resource pressures through an interdisciplinary lens. The researchers involved come from agriculture, forestry, environmental sciences, geography and public

health. Institutionally, the project involves two faculties at the University of Sydney (Science and Medicine); three faculties of the National University of Laos (Agriculture, Environmental Sciences and Forestry); and the Lao National Institute of Public Health. Experts from the National Institute of Nutrition in Vietnam have also joined the research partnership to assist with analysis of health-related information.

The project draws on this wide range of expertise by applying multiple research methods to examine the cross-linkages between the different areas of resource development, livelihoods, food security and nutrition. These include spatial analysis of land use change, a cross-sectional household survey and participatory action research.

Approaching the issue of resource development and its implications for human wellbeing requires a shared understanding of the problem. It also requires the involvement of critical stakeholders. The project highlights the importance of building partnerships over time through an iterative research process and coordination across different agencies when addressing complex development issues.



Dr Sounthone Xayachak, Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs from Lao PDR

## ENGAGEMENT

SSEAC works closely with the International Portfolio to support academic engagement in Southeast Asia. Ms Sandra Meiras and Professor Michele Ford travelled to Myanmar in September 2013 for a series of high-level meetings with the Ministers for Planning and Economic Development and Science and Technology and Directors General in a number of other government departments, which built on earlier parliamentary delegations from Myanmar to the University. They also met with representatives of Yangon University, Yezin Agricultural University and key international organisations. Plans were made for a workshop co-sponsored by the ILO in late 2014 and SSEAC subsequently supported a visit by Professors Peter Sharp and Robert Park from the Faculty of Agriculture and Environment to Yezin Agricultural University to assess the feasibility of collaborating on the establishment of a plant breeding institute. These initiatives complement the work of several faculties, including Sydney Medical School, which is working with partners in Myanmar on a range of projects including child and maternal health, health economics, eye health, disability and reproductive health.

Other visits to the region by Professor Ford have included a visit to Siem Reap in Cambodia, with Professors Roland Fletcher and Jeffrey Riegel from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, to meet with the director of the *École Française d'Extrême-Orient*, a long-standing partner, about future collaborations. Professor

Ford also travelled to the Philippines with Dr Giselle Manalo from Sydney Medical School to attend a graduation ceremony for recipients of Australia Awards, including 50 students from eight faculties at the University of Sydney. While in Manila, Professor Ford met with the Faculty of Health Sciences' partners at the University of the Philippines Manila and gave a public lecture at the Third World Studies Center at the University of the Philippines Diliman on labour migration in the Asian region.

SSEAC has also continued to be active in the policy sphere. Following on the success of our Timor-Leste submission, SSEAC coordinated the University of Sydney's submission for DFAT's Indonesia Country Strategy and the Australian Aid Program's Indonesia Tertiary Sector Concept Note. Professor Ford also spoke at an Australian Aid Program briefing, a DFAT briefing for Indonesian participants in the Australia-Indonesia Youth Exchange Program and attended the official launch of the New Colombo Plan.

In April 2014, SSEAC hosted a meeting of ten directors of Asia-related centres from around Australia. The meeting participants discussed and challenges of being a regionally focussed centre in Australia at this time, and shared experiences with being engaged with regional and extra-regional networks.

Other visits that SSEAC hosted in 2013-14 included:

- Ms Jane Duke, Deputy High Commissioner, Australian High Commission, Kuala Lumpur

- Dato Eryawan Yusuf, ASEAN Permanent Secretary from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Brunei
- Mr George Morrison, Second Secretary (Foreign and Security Policy), British High Commission, Canberra
- Mr Simon Merrifield, Australian Ambassador to ASEAN
- Ms Kim Cleary, Counsellor (Education and Science) to Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia for Australian Education International (AEI)
- His Excellency Le Luong Minh, ASEAN Secretary General and Mr Simon Merrifield, Ambassador to ASEAN
- Mr Peter Doyle, Australian Ambassador to Timor-Leste
- Mr Hugh Borrowman, the Australian Ambassador to Vietnam
- Mr John Williams, the new Australian Ambassador to Laos
- The Consuls General from the Philippines and Timor-Leste and Thailand
- His Excellency Luong Thanh Nghi, Ambassador of Vietnam

SSEAC has also participated in campus visits by delegations from:

- Indonesian Ministry of Education
- Malaysian Parliament
- Universiti Putra Malaysia
- Universiti Malaysia Sabah
- Universiti Sains Malaysia
- Universiti Teknologi Petronas, Malaysia
- Ministry of Home Affairs Vietnam and Ministry of Science and Technology
- National University of Singapore
- Nanyang Technological University Singapore



Richard Seymour



Participants in the Entrepreneurship Development Network Asia program in Myanmar

### DR RICHARD SEYMOUR

Dr Richard Seymour is out to make a difference. Inspired by the principles of engaged practice and active learning, his Entrepreneurship & Innovation Enterprise program, located in the Sydney Business School, integrates teaching and research into a broad program of engagement. Its hands-on approach has been extremely successful, bringing benefits not only for the University of Sydney students and academics, but for partner universities and grassroots women in the region.

Across Southeast Asia, Richard and his team are working with governments, universities, corporations and NGOs to build the skills of women micro- and small entrepreneurs and to strengthen local enterprises. Through its early work in Cambodia, Indonesia and Vietnam, fully funded by the Australian government, the team developed and implemented programs in partnership with the University of Economics & Business Vietnam – Vietnam National University, the University of Battambang in Cambodia and the Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel in Indonesia.

In partnership with local universities, these programs strengthened the business skills of local entrepreneurs, and in doing so, generated opportunities for permanent employment, reduced inequality and facilitated inclusive growth. More recent initiatives in Vietnam have a focus on entrepreneurship and business credit and are funded by the World Bank.

The team's latest project in Myanmar dwarfs these early undertakings. The Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund (LIFT), which includes donors from eleven countries, including Australia, and the European Union, has provided USD 2 million to develop around 10,000 entrepreneurs over three years. Local program partners include the Myanmar Ministry of Commerce and Trade, the Entrepreneurship Development Network Asia, the Yangon Institute of Economics, and the Synergy Network. Over sixty people are working on this integrated learning and research program, with lessons from Myanmar informing the team's other projects in the region. As with the work in Vietnam and Cambodia, the key constituency for the new initiative is women entrepreneurs.



Paris Esposito, a student from the Faculty of Education and Social Work discussing food security with a student in Timor-Leste

## EDUCATION

As a cross-faculty centre, SSEAC develops creative opportunities for undergraduates, postgraduates and staff across multiple faculties to learn about Southeast Asia. These initiatives are designed to encourage and support interdisciplinary engagement between those at the University, while broadening and deepening the knowledge staff and students have of the region.

Over the last 12 months, the centre's key method for engaging undergraduates has been through its signature interdisciplinary field school model. The SSEAC field schools offer undergraduate students an interactive and intensive opportunity to work with their peers across the University on real-world problems faced by the region. The centre has run a field school

in Timor-Leste and has been developing programs for field schools in Singapore, Indonesia, Myanmar and Cambodia.

In the postgraduate space, SSEAC runs an interdisciplinary postgraduate retreat for research students whose research focus is Southeast Asia. By bringing together students from across faculties who share an interest in the region, SSEAC is cultivating an appreciation of the value for interdisciplinary engagement within this cohort of emerging scholars.

There are also education opportunities through SSEAC for staff. The primary opportunity for staff has been in language learning. Over the last twelve months, SSEAC has run five language intensives targeting researchers and students with an interest in Burmese, Indonesian, Lao, Tetum and Vietnamese.

Other units of the University have also been involved in innovative strategies for engaging students in Southeast Asia. The Sydney Medical School runs a classroom in the field program in the Philippines as part of its Master of International Public Health. In addition, Wesley College offers six of its resident students the opportunity for an in-country placement in the Indo-China region.

Staff and students of the University of Sydney have an unparalleled range and breadth of opportunities to learn about Southeast Asia. These opportunities, many of which are interdisciplinary in nature, are the gateway to stronger research relationships and more meaningful engagement with our partners in the region.



Masters of International Public Health student Hamira Welye of Nigeria engages with local people in Dao, Capiz, one of the areas struck by typhoon Haiyan in 2013

### LEARNING THROUGH OUTREACH

In 2013, the School of Public Health launched its Philippines 'Classroom in the Field' in partnership with the Philippines Department of Health, the University of the Philippines, Manila, the Zuellig Family Foundation and the United Nations Population Fund Philippines. This initiative supports field placements for students in the Masters of International Public Health. Before their departure, the students are mentored by Sydney-based Filipinos. In country they are supported by Filipino graduates of the University of Sydney.

Student experiences are varied, ranging from leadership training programs amongst health workers and local government officials, exposure to communities that were struck by the typhoon disaster in 2013 to contributing to community rehabilitation post disaster policies, shadowing municipal health officers through the Doctors to the Barrios program of the Department of Health and exploring specific public health issues on child nutrition, maternal health and national tuberculosis control programs. Over their eight-week placements, students engage with local NGOs such as Don Bosco Foundation, Health Justice and government agencies like the Metro Manila Development Authority to learn more about various educational and public health

programs that focus on street children, tobacco control advocacy, environmental sanitation and traffic road injuries.

The program aims not only to enable students to gain enriching experiences and a deeper understanding of public health issues in resource-poor settings, but to equip them with skills to help them become culturally proficient health professionals. The five students in the 2013 cohort had what they described as a 'life changing' experience. The in-country participating institutions were keenly impressed by the quality of the Sydney students and their understanding of the Philippines context, but also by their flexibility, cultural sensitivity, adaptability and willingness to work hard.

Program organiser, Dr Giselle Manalo – a Sydney academic of Filipino heritage – has a big vision for the future of the program. She sees it as a way of developing a broader and more interdisciplinary engagement. By capitalising on the program's success in engaging with local authorities, NGOs and alumni, she hopes not only to involve students and academics from other faculties in work in the Philippines, but to collectively help address complex challenges in the area of public health.



# LANGUAGES AND RESEARCH

## LEARNING SOUTHEAST ASIAN LANGUAGES

Since July 2014, SSEAC has organised language intensives in Vietnamese, Burmese and Indonesian for academics, students, general staff and members of the public. These particular languages were selected by academics who responded to a call put out by SSEAC for proposals for language training relevant to Sydney researchers.

In October 2013, SSEAC worked with the Hoc Mai Foundation to offer a two-day language intensive in Vietnamese. Academics from the Sydney Medical School and Sydney Nursing School who run projects in Vietnam and medical students who are undertaking placements in Vietnam participated. Diana Bond from the Sydney Medical School visited Vietnam within weeks of completing the course. She explained that her “first moment of enlightenment came when landing in Hanoi: a Vietnamese lady called down the aisle to a fellow passenger “What time is it?” in Vietnamese. I understood the phrase perfectly.” She also took great pride in being able to introduce herself at a workshop she was leading, and the fact that she could work out whether restaurants in Vietnam were serving chicken or beef soup.

The Burmese language intensive, held in November 2013, attracted academics and administrators from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, the Sydney Business School and Sydney Law School. The Lao language intensive brought together academics, project officers and students from the Faculty of Arts and Social Science, Veterinary Science and the School of Public Health. A first Indonesian language intensive customised for academics and students in the Faculty of Veterinary Science was held on the faculty’s Camden campus in April 2014. Undergraduates participating in the SSEAC Housing Policy Field School in Singapore attended a second in Camperdown in June.

In addition, in 2014 SSEAC has been working with the School of Languages and Cultures to put together a new intensive stream in its Diploma of Language Studies. The curriculum for the intensive stream has been designed specifically to meet the needs of undergraduate students within professional degree programs, but will also be attractive to postgraduate students and staff with research or outreach interests in a particular country. The federal government has provided 520 Commonwealth Supported Places for this program. The Southeast Asian language to be offered in the first phase is Indonesian (alongside Japanese, Korean and Spanish), but the program will be broadened over time to include other Southeast languages where there is demand.

## LEARNING TO RESEARCH

In addition to supporting established researchers, SSEAC ran two major programs for research students in 2013-14. The first was a multidisciplinary research training retreat at Barrington Tops, held in early November 2013. Twenty-one postgraduate research students working on Southeast Asia from six different faculties at the University of Sydney and two students from the University of New South Wales participated in a four day program of seminars and workshops based around the theme, ‘Contextualising the Thesis in Southeast Asia’. The retreat was convened by Professor Philip Hirsch from the School of Geosciences, who invited academics from his school, as well as academics from the Sydney Medical School and the Department of Indonesian Studies, to contribute to the program.

The retreat offered the students – many of whom were from Southeast Asia – the opportunity to experience life in rural New South Wales while reflecting on a broad range of issues related to the framing and writing of a thesis, and how a common interest in Southeast Asia facilitates intellectual exchange across disciplines. The retreat was a huge success. Subsequently, SSEAC appointed a postgraduate representative, Ms Elga Andriana from the Faculty of Education and Social Work, to organise events for postgraduate students. Elga is supported by a committee of three other postgraduate students.

The second research training program initiative in 2013-14 was the SSEAC Honours Bootcamp, a three-day event run in June that brought together 19 Honours students working on Southeast Asia-related topics from 13 universities across the country. The Bootcamp provided these students with practical skills related to doing and presenting research, but also with an opportunity to network with each other and with professionals in Southeast Asia-related positions in a wide range of occupations.

Feedback from participants was glowing. According to one student, “everyone was extremely impressed”. Another said it was “fantastic”. It has also made a substantive difference to the way the students approached their Honours year. As a third commented, “I have come away feeling much more confident in my topic, and am looking forward to the next 6 months of research and writing, and everything after submission as well”.





University of Sydney students teach English at a primary school in Timor-Leste (photo credit: Damien Field)

## A TASTE OF THE REAL WORLD

Student mobility into Southeast Asia has been a prominent issue for SSEAC over the last twelve months. Our first foray involved a new multidisciplinary field school model in Timor-Leste around the theme of food security. In July 2013, students and staff from the Faculty of Agriculture and Environment, the Faculty of Education and Social Work and the Sydney Medical School participated in this groundbreaking new SSEAC initiative, which combined discipline-specific placements with a week-long interdisciplinary project in the mountainous sub-district of Maubisse, approximately three and half hours from the capital, Dili.

During their interdisciplinary week, students worked in cross-faculty groups, rotating through placements supervised by the relevant academic in clinics, schools, farms and markets. In the evenings, they gathered to discuss what they had learned and how their different backgrounds had influenced the ways in which they had interpreted their experiences. While in Maubisse they also had the opportunity to practise basic Tetun, which they had acquired in a two-day intensive prior to departure. The students and academics who participated in the field school found it a highly stimulating and deeply rewarding learning experience.

This interdisciplinary model has become the basis for how SSEAC supports student mobility into Southeast Asia. This model allows students to tackle real-world problems by drawing on their own disciplinary expertise and that of their peers. The interdisciplinary nature of the field schools also challenges academics' own disciplinary perspectives and offers a pathway for developing new research interests in the region. In addition, the program, whereby students each enroll in a relevant Unit of Study within their own faculty but participate in a joint program in country, is a relatively simple way for faculties less familiar with student mobility into Southeast Asia to establish the processes and systems required to offer these pathways to their students.

From late 2013, the SSEAC field school model became a key component of the University of Sydney's engagement with the Australian Government's New Colombo Plan. SSEAC compiled the University's Tranche 1 application for the New Colombo Plan, and took responsibility for the Indonesia component of the University's Tranche 2 application, submitted in January and March 2014. Both applications were successful. In the first tranche SSEAC was awarded funds for an interdisciplinary field-school on housing policy in Singapore involving 20 students from architecture, business, geography and political economy.

Under Tranche 2, two more such field schools (one on transport policy and another on labour migration) were funded, along with several faculty initiatives. These programs will see over 60 students across campus engage in a range of short-term and semester-based trips to Indonesia. SSEAC's Indonesia submission was ranked first within the University and used as a model for applications for the other three pilot countries (Hong Kong, Japan and Singapore). The SSEAC Deputy Director also participated in the interview panel for the University of Sydney nominees for the New Colombo Plan Scholarships.

In addition to these programs, this year SSEAC funded a second interdisciplinary field school to Timor-Leste on food security, replicating the pilot program run in 2013. The program was broadened to include Indonesian language students in addition to students of medicine, agriculture and education. SSEAC has also been awarded funding for an interdisciplinary field school to Myanmar by the Australian Government's Short Term Mobility Program. Students from four faculties (Business, Architecture, Health Sciences and Agriculture) will participate in a two-week interdisciplinary professional experience in Myanmar in December, where they will engage with participants in Dr Richard Seymour's program on women's entrepreneurship.



Luke Flanagan in Cambodia

## A LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCE

Luke Flanagan, a third year student from the School of Information Technologies, had a life-changing experience this year. He was selected to participate in the twenty-second Wesley College Overseas Study Experience (OSE).

Every year, Wesley sponsors six students to study, travel and work in Indo-China over the summer vacation period. After a semester and a half of fundraising in Australia, Luke spent two weeks teaching English in Phnom Penh and four weeks doing charity work in Vietnam. In his second month, he put his IT skills to use working with an organisation called Open Development Cambodia (ODC). ODC runs an online hub providing up-to-date information on Cambodia's economic, social, political and environmental development, working to encourage transparency in private and public sectors and supporting the development of a young, energetic Khmer IT community.

Luke, who comes from rural Australia, was thrown in the deep end. Not only was the work culture different, but he was given responsibility for redeveloping the database system to sit behind the website. He had studied database systems at university, but ODC was asking for something far more challenging.

Initially, the task was daunting. Luke said, "My problem solving skills were pushed to the limit coding programs that were 10 times harder than any of my assignments at Uni. But I hadn't flown thousands of kilometres just to give up." But, despite his trepidation, he succeeded. By the end of the third week, the database had been transformed – as had Luke. "I felt incredibly accomplished and had a new sense of confidence. Working for ODC was one of the most challenging experiences of my life. I learnt new techniques in problem solving and technical knowledge that has benefited my grades immensely. Now I have the motivation to continue pushing ahead knowing that at the end of the track, there is something else to aim for."

That something is very tangible. So impressed was the NGO with Luke's work that they've offered him a job. After he graduates, Luke is looking forward to returning to Cambodia to make even a bigger contribution to its vibrant, young IT industry.



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**SYDNEY  
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