

# News from Australia and the Pacific

For *News from Australia and the Pacific*, we ask contributors to reflect on their own research interests and the broader academic field in Australia and the Pacific of which it is a part. We focus on current, recent or upcoming projects, books, articles, conferences and teaching, while identifying related interests and activities of fellow academics in the field. Our contributions aim to give a broad overview of Asia-related studies in Australia and beyond, and to highlight exciting intellectual debates on and with Asia in the region. Our preferred style is subjective and conversational. Rather than offering fully-fledged research reports, our contributions give insight into the motivations behind and directions of various types of conversations between Asia and the region.

In the current issue, we highlight the field of Language and Linguistics. *News from Australia and the Pacific* is edited by Ana Dragojlovic and Edwin Jurriëns, with assistance from Andy Fuller, from the Asia Institute in Melbourne.

Ana Dragojlovic (ana.dragojlovic@unimelb.edu.au), Edwin Jurriëns (edwin.jurriens@unimelb.edu.au) and Andy Fuller (fuller.a@unimelb.edu.au)



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The Asia Institute is The University of Melbourne's key centre for studies in Asian languages, cultures and societies. Asia Institute academic staff have an array of research interests and specialisations, and strive to provide leadership in the study of the intellectual, legal, politico-economic, cultural and religious traditions and transformations of Asia and the Islamic world. The Institute is committed to community engagement and offers a dynamic program of academic and community-focused events and cultural exchanges that aim to promote dialogue and debate.

## ACICIS and studying language in Indonesia

David Reeve

IN THE LATE 1980S there began a strong government advocacy of Asian language learning in Australia, with goals and policy recommendations made in the major Ingleson report of 1989, *Asia in Australian Higher Education*. This report proposed a much wider provision of Asian languages in Australian universities, with the aim to have 5% of the higher education population to be studying an Asian language by 1995. There was a particular focus on 'the three major Asian languages', Chinese, Japanese and Indonesian. More local measures were advocated for Korean, Hindi and Thai, plus recommendations for the maintenance of teaching capacity in Lao, Tibetan, Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit and Sinhala at ANU. In-country training was strongly recommended. Japanese language study experienced a boom from the later 1980s, and in the early 1990s more university programs in Chinese and Indonesian were opened.

During the early 1990s various universities made pioneering efforts to set up semester-long programs with Indonesian universities, aided in part by funding through the University Mobility in the Asia Pacific (UMAP) program, which provided seed funding for programs that promised to become enduring student exchange programs between universities in Indonesia and Australia. Considerable effort went into these early initiatives, but numerous problems would emerge over time. One was that the programs tended to disappear after the initial funding had ended. And when they did continue, students went only one-way, to Indonesia; Indonesian students did not come back along the channels opened. Some universities ran useful small programs where some of their students went to Indonesia in exchange for an Indonesian staff member coming the other way, but the numbers were small, particularly in comparison to the numbers envisaged in the Ingleson report.

Problems also emerged in relation to the students themselves when in Indonesia. The first was just getting them there, as the visa application process was so long and difficult. The second was providing advice about study programs once students were in Indonesia. They needed their study in Indonesia to qualify for credit back home, and sometimes they needed quick advice about the choices available to them when they arrived, or later during the program. Then there was the issue of care and advice for all the range of problems that students can face when living in another country, from home-sickness to culture shock and, most urgently, illness. There were matters that needed attention after students went home, particularly that transcripts be sent promptly to their home universities. These were all teething problems that were faced by universities in Indonesia and in Australia.

It became clear that some sort of back-up organization was needed for these students, and that these problems would be best addressed by sending the small groups of students as one single coordinated group, backed up by an Australian academic resident in Indonesia. Thus ACICIS (the Australian Consortium for In-Country Indonesian Studies) was established in 1994.

At Murdoch University, Paul Stange and David Hill undertook the planning and negotiations with the Indonesian government, and the first group of some 20 Australian students arrived in mid-1995, with Paul Stange as the first resident director (currently Elena Williams is the eighth). The model was that students would spend a semester at Universitas Gadjah Mada in Yogyakarta, and those staying for a second semester would take a field study program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang.

From around 20 in the first seminar in mid-1995, numbers rose quickly to about 60-70 per semester at the end of the 1990s, but various security issues coming from a long series of events (rioting around the fall of Suharto in 1998, unrest over Australia's role in East Timor in 1999, then the bombings from 2002 to 2006) hit the program hard and also put plans to expand off-Java on hold.

ACICIS decided to seek, in addition to the Indonesian Studies students, other students who could profit from an in-country experience. The first proposal was for a journalism 'professional practicum', a six-week summer program drawing on David Hill's media expertise and contacts: two weeks at Atmajaya University, with four hours Indonesian language each morning, and relevant seminars from experts in the field in the afternoon, and a four-week practicum in a relevant organization. The success of the journalism summer course led to the gradual inclusion of more practical subjects. In January-February 2017, 106 students studied in Jakarta in four 'practica' programs: journalism, development studies, business and creative arts and design, with a law professional practicum planned for 2018. The New Colombo Program, begun in 2014 as a signature policy of Foreign Minister Julie Bishop, has been of key importance in opening up these new fields.

New programs have also come from Indonesian initiatives for international programs in which Indonesian universities teach their own students in English, and welcome outside participation. This has led to the Indonesian Business, Law and Society program at Universitas Islam Indonesia (UII) in Yogyakarta, the International Studies program at Universitas Parahyangan in Bandung, and the Agriculture Studies program at the Institut Pertanian Bogor (IPB). As well as immersion in Indonesian life and culture, many of these students include language study in their programs. Other new programs taught largely in Indonesian include the Development Studies immersion semester at UGM and the Indonesian Language Teacher Immersion semester program at Universitas Sanata Dharma also in Yogyakarta.



Above: A group of ACICIS students in-country involved in the AIYA Yogyakarta committee. Photo courtesy of ACICIS.

Various shorter courses have also been developed for specific clienteles, including the Indonesian From the Ground Up (IFGU) 10-13 day tour for school-teachers, some school tours, and more recently a Public Health two-week intensive study tour. A short language course for (European and Australian) summer and winter is now being planned. Overall, in-country study is increasingly popular, with many programs developed and more planned. Over 2000 students have taken part in these ACICIS programs since the first group in 1995, but this is still a very small total compared to the numbers of Indonesians studying in Australia each year. The numbers in various programs have waxed and waned, and considerably more students could be accommodated in the existing programs, if universities would send them. The idea of study in Indonesia still needs considerable promotion. But teachers of Indonesian in Australian universities have mostly been delighted with the results of in-country study, with students coming home with generally much higher levels of language skills, and much more familiarity and confidence with Indonesian society and values.

In 2017, ACICIS has grown to include 24 member universities in Australia, plus important international members, such as Leiden University and SOAS in London. There are 16 staff in the in-country operation, looking after all the programs, and a small Australian secretariat at the University of Western Australia. But numbers are still uneven, and much more progress is possible. Most people associated with the program, academic staff, in-country staff and above all the students, are extremely enthusiastic about the range of benefits of study in-country in Indonesia.

David Reeve, Conjoint Associate Professor, The University of New South Wales (UNSW), Sydney; Deputy Director ACICIS (d.reeve@unsw.edu.au).