Impactful relationships with government

2018 is shaping up to be the busiest year yet for the Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs.

Lasting and meaningful relationships with government continue to make an impact, both within and beyond Australia. Let me highlight just two examples. The Department of Pacific Affairs (DPA) continues to lead the way with its Pacific Research Program — a twenty-million dollar contract from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in association with the Lowy Institute for International Policy and the Development Policy Centre. I also take the opportunity to celebrate a new project, the Australian Army Research Fellows. This initiative, led by the Strategic & Defence Studies Centre (SDSC), will see two Post-Doctoral Fellows embedded within the Army Head Quarters to contribute to the research and thinking of Army and Defence.

It is important to remember that underpinning the ability of the Bell School and its five departments to produce policy-relevant work is academic excellence. I am constantly impressed by the range and depth of research undertaken here in the Bell School. Whether it be in understanding history, rebuilding theories and concepts, or trying to understand political and social challenges of the Asia-Pacific from canvases as large as the entire region to as small as an individual village, the Bell School continues to excel. This academic excellence, coming ultimately from the commitment of the academics who work here, is the foundation of all our activities.

We are also looking at an exciting year for the students enrolled in the various Bell School programs. With our colleagues from the ANU College of Arts and Social Sciences, we are delighted to offer a new degree, the Masters of Political Science. Bringing together the unrivalled depth of expertise from across the ANU, this degree program offers world-class training in political science and sits alongside our existing graduate offerings in Diplomacy, International Relations and Strategic Studies. At the undergraduate level, we are taking steps to build our new dual-degree program with Japan’s Ritsumeikan University. Students in the program will move between Canberra and Osaka, giving them unparalleled exposure to leading scholarship and different cultures as they build the skills necessary to thrive in the Asian century.

Finally, I would like to thank our outgoing Director, Associate Professor Brendan Taylor, for his stewardship of the Bell School over the last 18 months. It has been a great privilege to work closely with Brendan over this time. I am honoured to serve as the Interim Director until Professor Toni Erskine takes up the position mid-year. My thanks also to Associate Professor Sinclair Dinnen who has come to the end of his term as Deputy Director (Research) for the School. Dr Margaret Keen, one of the foremost ANU researchers of the Pacific region, is taking up that role.
Comfort Women: Japan & South Korea’s simmering flashpoint

In her new book project, Lauren Richardson explores the issues that continue to test Japan and South Korea’s relationship – and won’t seem to go away.

The historical issue of “comfort women” is still a simmering source of tension between Japan and South Korea. Dr Lauren Richardson, the new Director of Studies at the Asia-Pacific College of Diplomacy, is finishing a book that asks how this and other similar issues centred on victim redress are reshaping the diplomatic relationship of the two countries.

Questions of redress for Korean victims of forced sexual slavery by Japan before and during World War II remains a flash point between the two countries.

Being economically interdependent, with a common enemy in North Korea, “they have every reason to cooperate,” Dr Richardson says, “yet, they have all this trouble because of their mutual historical past.”

The puzzle Dr Richardson seeks to solve now is why these problems between Japan and Korea have become more contentious over time.

Her answer highlights the role of non-state actors: the victims of these injustices, and their advocates.

“These issues are not likely to go away unless the two governments really start listening to what victims want and what their conception of redress is,” she says.

With Japan and South Korea being the US government’s two key allies in Asia, it’s an issue for America, too. As Dr Richardson notes, “it’s a bit of a headache for Washington.”

Complex Diplomacy: A field in flux

With modern diplomacy rapidly changing, the latest edition of Pauline Kerr and Geoffrey Wiseman’s book on the field seeks to capture that complexity

Modern day diplomacy faces a rapidly changing, increasingly complex environment. The new edition of a field-leading textbook edited by ANU scholars Pauline Kerr and Geoffrey Wiseman from the Asia-Pacific College of Diplomacy confronts these challenges with the latest research. Diplomacy in a Globalizing World: Theories and Practices was first published by Oxford University Press in 2013, with a second edition published at the end of last year based on its strong global reception and pressing new areas of study.

The analysis of 23 international scholars is contained in the revised edition, including three new chapters covering some of the field’s most significant advances.

The first new chapter looks through the lens of practice theory, where patterns of everyday action and routine are emphasised, to demonstrate how enhanced understandings of bilateralism and multilateralism can be achieved.

The second presents an urgent reflection on the upsurge in studies of women and diplomacy, where women still remain less likely than men to be appointed to senior positions.

In the third new chapter, former senior Australian diplomat Michael L’Estrange examines what the use of force by non-state actors, amid rising geopolitical tension between great powers, demands from modern diplomacy.

The findings of the first edition led Kerr and Wiseman to conclude that their concept of ‘complex diplomacy’ - with its core elements of hyperconnectivity, adaptivity and diversity - best encapsulates today’s global diplomatic system. The chapters of this second edition, new and revised, serve to reinforce that conclusion.
Comic Relief: Unpacking the politics of pop culture

In his newly designed course for international relations students, Alister Wedderburn is bringing culture back to the fore.

Culture, as a concept, has often fallen by the wayside in international relations theory. Alister Wedderburn, a new postdoctoral fellow at the Bell School, has designed a course for the first semester of 2018 to change that.

With TV, film, literature, leisure practices and objects of the everyday at its core, the big reveal of ‘Cultural Approaches to International Relations’ is that politics and culture are indivisible. “We look at the world through lenses we can’t remove,” Wedderburn says.

“What the new course offers is a way of studying how those lenses shape political subjectivity and political possibility.”

While some traditional theories of international relations may disregard culture as “window-dressing”, a growing number of theorists see it as a place where power inevitably circulates. Wedderburn cites the Danish cartoon crisis from 2005 and the Charlie Hebdo shootings of 2015 as two instances where comics and violence became interlinked.

His own interest in pop culture and international relations delves from the politics of humour to cartoons and comics. The themes that underpinned his own PhD on the topic – aesthetics, visual culture, resistance and the everyday – now inform his new course.

For Wedderburn, the ‘cultural turn’ is a party to which international relations is only very belatedly arriving. “Without thinking about culture, we’re missing something important,” he says.

Performing Unity: The symbol and ritual of ASEAN

In his latest book project, Mathew Davies argues that, at its core, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is really just one big performance.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has been a paradox from the very beginning. So argues Dr Mathew Davies in a book he is writing for Cambridge University Press. The intergovernmental organisation is often criticised as being ineffective, with its principles of non-interference and sovereign equality often unenforced or undermined. “The question is why do these states stick with it?” Davies asks.

“Why do they agree to all these things and then not do any of them in a consistent way?”

The role of performance, ritual and symbolism is a large part of his answer. Davies argues that ASEAN simulates its expressed principles, it doesn’t embody them. In his words, the Association is a shared performance.

The flags, banners, group photos, smiles and handshakes of its summits are all symbols of unity. For Davies, “that is actually all there is.”

But even such acts serve a purpose. “Where ASEAN achieves the goals of its founders is that this performance serves to limit regional tensions,” he says.

It is his hope that by focusing on the role of performance he can cut a middle path between perspectives that either overinflate or discount the Association’s significance.

“This is actually what ASEAN is,” he says, “these orchestrated, embodied performances.”
Researching the Urban Pacific

On the heels of a long-running research program on urbanisation in the Pacific, a recent partnership with the Pacific Island Forum testifies to DPA's expertise in the region.

The Pacific islands are rapidly becoming more urbanised, with mounting pressures on infrastructure, services and social relations. The Department of Pacific Affairs (DPA) has been running a research program on urbanisation in the Pacific since 2016 as part of its partnership with DFAT for Pacific research and collaborations with Pacific islands government and regional bodies.

The value of the research program on urbanisation was recognised recently when DPA was asked to partner with the peak regional agency, the Pacific Islands Forum, to run a workshop on the regional impacts of urbanisation in the Pacific, drawing together experts from Australia and the region.

The workshop, held in Suva in December 2017, was opened by Dame Meg Taylor, Secretary General of the Pacific Island Forum. Its goal was to help profile academic research, and use it to contribute to future policy development and regional policy frameworks.

It highlighted the urban implications of the increasing severity of climate change impacts in densely populated areas with low levels of disaster preparedness; the interrelationships among food, water and land security issues; and the changing political and social relations in urban centres as they become more ethnically and demographically diverse.

The outcomes of the workshop will be presented at the upcoming World Urban Forum in Malaysia during a side-event at the 9th World Urban Forum on SIDS and the New Urban Agenda.

Delivering the Women’s Leadership Initiative

The launch of a new initiative striving to promote women’s leadership in the Pacific has found a key partner in the Department of Pacific Affairs.

The Women’s Leadership Initiative was recently launched by Foreign Affairs Minister Julie Bishop at Parliament House in Canberra. The Department of Pacific Affairs’ (DPA) excellence in research on women’s leadership and empowerment has been recognised through its successful partnership with Cardno Emerging Markets to deliver aspects of the new DFAT-funded initiative.

The Women’s Leadership Initiative (WLI) is a five-year, $5.4 million Australian Government initiative that aims to promote women’s leadership and build a future generation of elite women leaders in Papua New Guinea and the Pacific region. It will engage with women and men studying in Australia on Australia Awards scholarships and offer a suite of skills development, mentoring and other resources to build participants’ confidence and capability to exercise developmental leadership. It also aspires to create links between emerging women leaders and influential women in Australia and the Pacific, and help participants build coalitions and networks to support and sustain their leadership efforts once they return home.

One of DPA’s key contributions to WLI is to provide expertise on the region and the leadership challenges with which participants will engage upon their return home from Australia. The department’s expertise on the region and its policy engagement will also be leveraged through a mentoring program. Researchers will provide advice and mentoring to participants to help them refine a nominated study topic, understand its current status, its potential for change and possible first steps in taking action.

The strong partnerships with these future Pacific island leaders, senior Australian government officers and ANU staff provides a potential platform for future collaboration and enhanced mutual understanding.
Understanding the Local: Good governance and Southeast Asia

Awarded funding for a massive new research project across Southeast Asia, Ed Aspinall and Paul Hutchcroft put local government under the microscope.

The extent to which local governments either facilitate or frustrate the delivery of public services is a critical issue in the rapidly growing urban centres of Asia. In November 2017, Professors Ed Aspinall and Paul Hutchcroft were awarded Australian Research Council Discovery funding for a project that taps into that urgency.

Their research will span at least three years, and four countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand.

“In terms of scope, it is the most ambitious project comparing local government politics across Southeast Asia yet undertaken,” Professor Aspinall says. By focusing on health and infrastructure services, the researchers hope to gain an understanding of how politics either makes people’s lives better or traps them in cycles of substandard living conditions.

“We really see ourselves speaking to a range of audiences but among those are policy makers in the development community,” says Professor Hutchcroft.

Along with their collaborators Meredith Weiss of the State University of New York and Allen Hicken of the University of Michigan, they hope their research will make significant contributions to discussions on national-subnational ties, public administrative service delivery, and patronage and money politics.

Up next is the task of selecting a city in each of the four countries to be the focus of the research project, careful comparison being a key aim.

“No one else has ever picked up this kind of study and done it across four countries,” Professor Hutchcroft says.

New Mandala: Spotlighting the year ahead

As Editor of Southeast Asia blog New Mandala, Liam Gammon considers what the year ahead has in store.

Covering elections is something of a specialty for New Mandala. Now, the Bell School-based website (www.newmandala.org) is preparing for one of its most anticipated: Malaysia’s general election, due in the first half of the year.

With support from the Bell School’s Malaysia Institute, New Mandala is planning a series of events, publications, and podcasts to cover ‘#GE14’.

The team has also brought on experienced Malaysian journalist Kean Wong as a contributing editor. It is the first time the publication has hired a journalist from abroad at the editorial level.

In his first start to the year as Editor, Liam Gammon thinks there’s a tremendous amount of knowledge and insight into how Southeast Asia works that is generated within academia, “but only a tiny proportion of that reaches the public,” he says.

“One of the great things about New Mandala is that it gives scholars the opportunity to have a stab at interpreting major events pretty much as soon as they happen.”

Gammon’s time as editor has been marked by new partnerships and ongoing collaborations, such as an upcoming conference on Cambodia in March supported by Indonesia’s TIFA Foundation which provides support to civil society organisations.

A regular New Mandala podcast could also be in the pipeline. “I’m very keen on experimenting with podcasts,” Gammon says. “The podcast boom shows no sign of slowing down.”
**Don’t Panic: Australia without America**

Envisioning Australia in Asia without America may be a controversial thesis to some, but for Hugh White in his latest Quarterly Essay, it is common-sense.

America has already lost the contest for primacy in Asia. That iconoclastic statement forms the core argument of Professor Hugh White’s recent Quarterly Essay ‘Without America: Australia in the New Asia’.

It is controversial, and a darker hypothesis than the one he published seven years ago. His essay ‘Power Shift’ in 2010 asked whether China would replace the US as regional leader. ‘Without America’ claims that is exactly what has happened.

“We’re now more or less at the point where it’s practically impossible for the United States to win that contest,” he says.

Professor White also calls for Australia to “wake up”. Australian political leaders still assume that America will remain the primary power in Asia indefinitely. “That’s not what’s happening,” he says. “We have to start recognising that we’ll be living in an Asia in which China is the dominant power.”

While it’s a serious issue, the third key point in White’s essay is “don’t panic”.

White observes Australia is in danger of sliding from utter complacency to moral panic on the issue.

He calls for finding a cautious middle ground, and to prepare for the adjustments that come with a change in leadership.

It means Australian identity will gradually change, too. “But it was always going to change,” White says. “That’s what living on a continent at the edge of Asia means.”

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**Access Denied: Defending Australia from the north**

When it comes to the defence of Australia, look north, says Paul Dibb in a major research paper for the Australian Strategic Policy Institute.

Between them, Richard Brabin-Smith and Paul Dibb have nearly fifty years of experience at the Department of Defence under their belt. Now working down the corridor from each other at the Strategic & Defence Studies Centre, they began talking mid-last year about what they identified as Australia’s deteriorating strategic outlook.

The subsequent report they produced together on Australia’s management of strategic risk made headlines in *The Australian* and was launched by former Chief of the Australian Defence Force Sir Angus Houston in November 2017.

Its core concern is a growing regional capacity for a military attack on Australia from the north.

According to Emeritus Professor Paul Dibb, there is only one country which could do that.

“China is developing a capability that in the foreseeable future could have the capacity, should relations deteriorate, to attack us,” he says.

“A country with which we don’t share values, that’s authoritarian, with no freedom of the press, no freedom of the judiciary and a dreadful human rights record.”

Dibb is not predicting war. But in managing risk, defence strategists need to think in the long term. His is an approach that demands greater attention to Australia’s maritime capacity and military bases in the north, including stockpiles of fuel and ammunition. “We must have a capacity to deny our vulnerable northern and western approaches to a future power,” he says. “It’s prudent planning.”
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