The Faculty’s Centre for International Security Studies has a vital role to play in tackling the urgent international security issues facing government and business, writes Professor Alan Dupont.

SINCE THE 9/11 terrorist strike on the United States and the associated emergence of new threats such as pandemic diseases, organised crime, food, water and energy scarcity and climate change, the demand for academic expertise on international security issues has grown exponentially. These threats pose novel, complex challenges to security at a time when traditional military conflicts are far from vanquished, as Iraq and Afghanistan remind us. As a consequence, international security has moved to centre stage in the policy concerns of governments all over the world. No longer the preserve of a small elite group of academic and defence professionals, international security has entered the mainstream of public discourse touching virtually every aspect of modern life. Business worries about the potential impact of bird flu and terrorism while NGOs demand a say in defence, foreign and trade policy. Newspapers and the electronic media are dominated by stories about international conflicts and anxieties stemming from the environmental and resource pressures on an increasingly fragile and stressed planet.

Unsurprisingly, there is a growing demand for graduates with the functional, country and language skills required to analyse the issues and provide the necessary solutions. The newly established Centre for International Security Studies, located within the Faculty of Economics and Business, is part of the University’s response to addressing this important need. Through its teaching, research and outreach programs, the Centre encourages a multi-disciplinary approach to the study of 21st century security problems, with a particular emphasis on Australia’s Asia-Pacific neighbourhood.

Among its recent initiatives, the Centre is leading a university-wide research program which aims to develop new approaches to identifying, ameliorating and preventing biosecurity threats to Australia and the region. They include naturally occurring infectious diseases that have the potential to develop into human pandemics and cause serious political, social and economic damage. In the area of counter-terrorism, a joint research study with the United States’ RAND Corporation due for publication later this year will shed light on the causes and consequences of terrorism in South-East Asia and recommend strategies for improving government responses.

Some of the most interesting and innovative collaborations are taking place within the Faculty itself, where academics from the Centre are working closely with colleagues in international business
to develop Australia’s first truly integrated business and security program for undergraduate and graduate students. The program gives students an understanding of the political, social and strategic factors which shape the business environment and an appreciation of the critical importance of ethical considerations and intercultural communication. Individual units within the program focus on the links between international security, economic development and social change; international law and organisations; trade and investment; technology and innovation as well as covering more specialised subjects such as cyber crime and risk management.

The business and security program seeks to impart real world analytical and problem-solving skills to the Faculty’s students through best practice teaching which emphasises team-based learning, case-study and country risk assessments. The aim is to graduate students who understand that the successful businesses of tomorrow will be led by entrepreneurs who can combine traditional business skills with an innate understanding of the key political and security influences which will impact on their company’s bottom line.

Alan Dupont was appointed the Michael Hintze Professor of International Security and foundation Director of the Centre for International Security Studies in 2006. For more information about the Centre for International Security Studies, please visit its website at http://ciss.econ.usyd.edu.au/