Dear Vice-Chancellor,

It is my pleasure to present for your consideration the report of the Review of Area Studies Work Slate Project.

The Review Panel has consulted widely over the last five months. We have found there to be overwhelming support among academic staff and students who participated in the Review for the University to pursue a considered strategy to support the development of Area Studies at the University of Sydney.

Our report makes 11 recommendations which we believe, if implemented and pursued with sustained rigour by the University’s leadership, will ensure the success of the Area Studies strategy we have proposed.

This includes a recommended model for the establishment, funding and operation of new Area Studies centres at Sydney that we are confident will, critically, have the broad support of the University’s academic community.

The Panel believes that there is great potential for Sydney to enhance its international reputation for excellence in education and research through an approach to Area Studies that seeks, initially, to build on the University’s existing disciplinary and area strengths.

We recommend that as a first step the University invest in the establishment of centres focused on two areas of significant current strength and strategic importance to Australia - Southeast Asia and China.

We further recommend that the University leadership, in particular the Provost and DVC International, monitor the development of other existing or new cross-disciplinary area networks and programs and, where appropriate, assess their importance as elements of the University’s Area Studies strategy, and promote these networks wherever possible.

We believe that the success of the proposed Southeast Asia and China centres will lay a strong foundation for the establishment of other Area Studies centres over time.

The Panel would like to thank all staff and students who contributed to the Review, whether by making a written submission, participating in a consultation session, or providing information relevant to the mapping of expertise we have undertaken. Our report draws heavily on their input which, in our view, adds weight to the case for the pursuit of a concerted Area Studies strategy at Sydney.

We look forward to discussing our report and recommendations with you, and with all members of the University community with an interest in the issues.

We look forward to working with you to implement a strategy for Area Studies at the University of Sydney and trust that our report proves useful for this purpose.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Stephen Garton
Provost & Deputy Vice-Chancellor
Chair, Review of Area Studies, 23 October 2009


**Review of Area Studies Terms of reference**

The Review Panel was asked to conduct a Review of Area Studies at the University of Sydney and advise the Vice-Chancellor in relation to the following terms of reference:

- whether the University should implement an institution-wide strategy for Area Studies; and if so,
- the preferred model, or models for Area Studies that should be pursued; and
- the design, implementation, financing and administration of any preferred strategy for Area Studies, or any alternative approach that the Review determines is preferable.

**Review panel membership**

The Review Panel established to undertake the Review of Area Studies Work Slate project comprised:

- Professor Stephen Garton, Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Chair)
- Professor John Hearn, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (International)
- Professor Bruce Robinson, Dean, Faculty of Medicine
- Professor Peter Wolnizer, Dean, Faculty of Economics and Business
- Professor David Goodman, Director, Institute of Social Sciences
- Professor Jeff Riegel, Professor and Head, School of Languages and Cultures
- Associate Professor Robyn McConchie, Director, Research Institute for Asia and the Pacific
- Professor Geoffrey Garrett, Chief Executive Officer, United States Studies Centre

**Recommendations**

**Recommendation 1**

That the University commit to implementing an institution-wide Area Studies strategy and embed this strategy as a key part of its new Strategic Plan.

**Recommendation 2**

That the University adopt the following statement of objectives for its Area Studies strategy:

- To increase the quality, quantity, impact and profile of the University’s research and education activities.
- To enhance the University’s international reputation - thereby increasing its ability to attract and retain high quality staff and students.
- To mobilise, coordinate and promote the University’s Area Studies strengths in a way that complements the University’s pursuit of excellence in disciplinary and cross-disciplinary education and research.
- To offer programs that are attractive to students and give the University a competitive advantage.
- To lead and inform public debate about Australia’s relations with the rest of the world and the development of public policy relevant to key regions and countries.
- To serve Australia by fostering knowledge, understanding and linkages with countries and regions of strategic and cultural interest to the nation.

**Recommendation 3**

That the University draw on leading domestic and international practice to develop and implement a state of the art web-based expert database that allows anyone within or outside the university to find and make contact easily with disciplinary and area experts.
Recommendation 4
That the University ensure that its new economic model enables funding from undergraduate and postgraduate-coursework student load that results from cross-disciplinary programs to be shared between participating University units in proportion to their contribution towards the provision of each program.

Recommendation 5
That the University’s current PhD Rule be amended to formally accommodate joint or panel supervision of PhD students by academic staff from different faculties.

Recommendation 6
That the University ensure that its new economic model ensures that funding for higher degree by research student load is shared between participating University units in proportion to the share of supervisory workload undertaken by staff in each unit in relation to each PhD candidate.

Recommendation 7
That the University pursue reform of policy and funding for the provision of higher degree by research training in Australia to better enable students to undertake cross-disciplinary research degrees.

Recommendation 8
That the University adopt the following model as its preferred model for the establishment of new Area Studies centres within the University:

- Each centre to be established in accordance with the University’s Centres Policy.
- A high quality academic leader to be appointed as the Director of each centre.
- Each Director to be supported, initially, by an Associate Director, with high level experience in the area, one Project Officer, running and other costs.
- Each centre to have an Advisory Committee, comprising senior scholars in the area drawn from each participating faculty and appropriately qualified non-university members.
- Each centre to initially focus on research and higher degree by research training activities, but to aim to provide or coordinate postgraduate and undergraduate coursework programs.
- Each Director to report directly to the Provost.
- Centres to initially access administrative support from a faculty or cluster of participating faculties.
- Once a number of centres are established, their Directors could be co-located administratively within a faculty or central portfolio and share some administrative services.
- Initially centres will be mostly ‘networks’ of staff appointed in disciplinary units.
- If it is deemed appropriate for a particular centre, funding to be provided at the discretion of the Provost at the outset to enable a small number of joint appointments to the centre.
- Over time, as centres establish operating arrangements and programs, and as additional funding becomes available, additional joint appointments to the centres should be encouraged.
- Each centre to be reviewed after two and five years in accordance with the Centres Policy, and success against the achievement of the objectives agreed for each centre and the University’s Areas Studies strategy as a whole.
- Within these broad constraints, each Director to be empowered to pursue strategies and activities as agreed with participating academics, departments and faculties.
Recommendation 9
That the University adopt the following criteria for the selection and review of Area Studies Centres:

- current capacity at the University;
- relative international standing of current capacity at the University;
- competitor analysis;
- strategic importance to Australia; and
- potential for growth to achieve the objectives of the University’s Area Studies strategy.

Recommendation 10
That the University establish Area Studies centres for Southeast Asia and China to complement existing Area Studies initiatives such as the recently established United States Studies Centre.

Recommendation 11
That in addition to the establishment of initial Area Studies centres for Southeast Asia and China, the University encourage and promote where possible other cross-disciplinary Area Studies networks and programs.

Introduction
In March 2009 the Vice Chancellor endorsed the establishment of a Review of Area Studies, as part of his Work Slate, to assess whether there was a strong academic rationale and a strategic opportunity to build a strong Area Studies capacity in the University. Area Studies are cross-disciplinary fields of research, scholarship and teaching organised around the study of particular geographical, national, or cultural regions.

Between March and October 2009 the Review Panel has engaged in an extensive process of consultation with the University community – inviting written submissions and conducting open forums with staff and students – with a view to offering advice and recommendations concerning the feasibility and strategic importance of Area Studies for the University of Sydney.

Over the course of the Review the committee found that there is overwhelming support among academic staff with an interest in Area Studies for the University to pursue an institution-wide strategy for Area Studies.

Moreover the Panel has identified over 350 members of academic staff with research and/or teaching expertise relevant to different countries or regions of strategic interest to Australia. We believe that even this figure is likely to understate the true extent of area activity within the University.

Based on submissions received, our discussions with academic staff, our research and analysis of the issues, we recommend that the University adopt and implement the institution-wide strategy for Area Studies set out in this report and its recommendations.

Of all the possible models available to support Area Studies, we recommend the establishment of a series of small focused area centres, reporting to the Provost. We are confident that the proposed model is likely to have the support of most of the members of academic staff upon which any strategy must depend for its success.
We have also assessed twelve areas (eight regions and four countries) according to criteria including the current capacity within the University, strategic importance to Australia, potential for growth and the level of investment likely to be required in order to achieve international competitiveness.

We recommend that as a first step the University invest in the establishment of centres focused on Southeast Asia and China.

Of all the areas the Panel assessed, we believe Southeast Asia and China offer the best prospects for building strong centres to complement existing Area Studies initiatives such as the recently established United States Studies Centre.

The Panel stresses that merely facilitating and funding the establishment of Area Studies Centres at the University of Sydney will not, by itself, be enough to ensure the strategy’s success.

Clear and sustained leadership from the University Centre will be critical to the successful implementation of any strategy, as will be the encouragement provided to existing and new networks focused on areas other than Southeast Asia and China.

The Panel believes that the prospects of success will be good if the University commits wholeheartedly to the proposed strategy and to working closely with the centre Directors, faculties and departments to steer the strategy towards the achievement of agreed objectives.

**Background**

Area Studies are cross-disciplinary fields of research, scholarship and teaching organised around the study of particular geographical, national, or cultural regions. Area Studies typically concentrate on the history, geography, society, politics, philosophy, economics, languages and cultures of a country or region, but can include the sciences and other disciplines relevant to the area. An academic practitioner in Area Studies typically has a strong disciplinary grounding, as well as a sound understanding of the culture and language of a specific area. Similarly, students educated in an Area Studies environment obtain a disciplinary foundation focused on, or complemented by, knowledge of a particular geographic area.

In recent times many leading international universities have developed new Area Studies capabilities that align with their strategic interests and the global interests of their nations. As a result, many of the University of Sydney’s international comparator institutions have well established Area Studies structures and programs. These structures have been refined in response to factors such as the ever-increasing connectedness of people and economies through globalisation, and increasing interest in cross-disciplinary approaches to research and teaching.

The Review of Area Studies was included on the Vice-Chancellor’s Work Slate out of concern that there may be significant long term reputational costs to the University and lost opportunities in emerging areas of research and teaching in failing to develop, and to be seen publicly to have, a strong capacity in at least some areas of strategic importance to Australia.

Concerns were held that the University may be at risk of falling behind its national and international competitors in its capacity to attract high quality staff and students due to a perceived lack of high profile, high quality teaching and research centres enabling people to come together to work across disciplinary boundaries with a focus on particular geographical or cultural areas.

The Review was also influenced by the view that far from being weak in Area Studies, the University actually has significant strengths in scholarship relevant to particular areas, but that the extent of these
strengths is relatively hidden from public view; and as a result, insufficiently recognised domestically and internationally. There were also concerns that our area experts are often difficult to identify — not only by people outside the University, but by University students and staff who may share common or complementary interests.

**The Review process**
The Review Panel approached the review in three phases. First, written submissions were sought from members of University community in response to a Discussion Paper released in April 2009. Second, the Panel held a series of face-to-face discussions with faculty staff and postgraduate students. Third, alongside Phases 1 and 2, and following the conclusion of the consultations, the Panel sought to ‘map’ the University’s existing capacity for Area Studies, researched and considered various possible operating models for Area Studies at Sydney, and prepared this report.

**Support for Area Studies at Sydney**
An overwhelming majority of those who took part in the various consultation phases of the review were in favour of the University of Sydney developing a concerted, institution-wide strategy for Area Studies. A recurring theme in the written submissions and face-to-face consultation sessions was that the University already has strong area-related expertise and that this expertise should be harnessed for the betterment of research outcomes, the education of students, and the enhancement of the University’s profile and reputation.

A small minority of participants argued against the pursuit of an Area Studies strategy at Sydney based on concerns that in the modern global era Area Studies is an out-dated paradigm, that geographically or culturally based definitions of ‘areas’ were too restrictive, or because of the past failure of similar initiatives. In addition, it should be noted that despite the Review being promoted widely within the University and directly within all faculties, there was generally limited engagement with the Review by staff in the more discipline-focussed faculties. Despite this apparent lack of interest from some faculties and despite the reservations expressed by some participants in the review, based on the evidence presented to it, the Panel is strongly of the view that the University should implement an institution-wide Area Studies strategy.

**Recommendation 1**
That the University commit to implementing an institution-wide Area Studies strategy and embed this strategy as a key part of its new Strategic Plan.

**Objectives for an Area Studies strategy at Sydney**
The Panel’s vision is for the University of Sydney, in five to ten years time, to have a handful of highly visible and accessible Area Studies centres, a flourishing range of equally visible area ‘networks’, and a growing international reputation for the quality of its cross-disciplinary research and education organised around the scholarship of areas.

We see a University where it is easy for staff to locate colleagues with complementary disciplinary or area expertise and where people from outside the University experience no difficulties accessing information about our disciplinary or area expertise, programs and activities.

We see a University where diverse disciplinary units are collaborating in pursuit of clear purposes; and where any revenue growth that results from that cooperation is shared between the partners in each area centre. We see the University’s great disciplinary strengths mobilised and refracted through an Area Studies lens to shed light on global challenges. We see students from diverse disciplinary
boundaries, but with a common interest in a particular country or region, coming together routinely to share experiences and knowledge. We see more of our students at all levels studying other languages and cultures, and spending more time in the countries or regions of interest to them.

The interest in an Area Studies strategy among staff sits within a broader context highlighted by the Vice Chancellor’s strategic planning consultation process. This process has highlighted a widespread concern that the University is marked by too many disconnected research and teaching silos and that there is insufficient collaboration across school and faculty boundaries. These silo structures are also seen to produce overlaps and duplication. Staff generally favoured the development of strategies that might foster greater collaboration and in this context Area Studies may be one means of linking researchers and students with like interests and expertise from different parts of the University. In other words, Area Studies might be one strategy for capacity building and doing more with what we have.

**Recommendation 2**

That the University adopt the following statement of objectives for its Area Studies strategy:

- To increase the quality, quantity, impact and profile of the University’s research and education activities.
- To enhance the University’s international reputation - thereby increasing its ability to attract and retain high quality staff and students.
- To mobilise, coordinate and promote the University’s Area Studies strengths in a way that complements the University’s pursuit of excellence in disciplinary and cross-disciplinary education and research.
- To offer programs that are attractive to students and give the University a competitive advantage.
- To lead and inform public debate about Australia’s relations with the rest of the world and the development of public policy relevant to key regions and countries.
- To serve Australia by fostering knowledge, understanding and linkages with countries and regions of strategic and cultural interest to the nation.

**Obstacles to success**

While the Review found considerable evidence of productive cross-department and cross-faculty collaboration that could be characterised as ‘Area’ in nature, a theme recurrent throughout the consultations was the degree to which current University policies, funding, and operating arrangements act as barriers to collaboration between units within the University.

**Access to information about expertise**

At the most basic level, as the Review itself found through its attempts to map the University’s Area Studies strengths ([Appendix 6.1.4](#)), identifying people within the University with expertise in particular disciplinary fields or geographical regions is far from a straightforward process. We may have considerable expertise in many areas and regions but it is extremely difficult for anyone external, let alone internal, to access this pool of expertise or even know of its existence without spending hours trawling through department and school web sites.

**Recommendation 3**

That the University draw on leading domestic and international practice to develop and implement a state of the art web-based expert database that allows anyone within or outside the university to find and make contact easily with disciplinary and area experts.
Financial disincentives to collaboration
A second clear obstacle to collaboration between departments and faculties, raised repeatedly in submissions and during the consultation sessions, was the way that the University currently allocates funding for the support of undergraduate and postgraduate teaching programs. The current internal funding model promotes competition and duplication between departments and faculties. In the Panel’s view, unless these systemic financial barriers to cross-disciplinary collaboration are addressed, the prospects of any Area Studies centres (or any other initiatives that depend upon cooperation between faculties, schools and departments) succeeding at the University of Sydney are limited.

Noting that the University is currently developing a new economic and funding model, the Panel urges the University to ensure that the new model establish financial incentives to encourage faculties, departments and staff to collaborate in the areas of teaching, research and research training. In order to achieve this, in addition to the specific recommendations below, the University should explore other available mechanisms for providing financial incentives to encourage cross-disciplinary collaborations.

Recommendation 4
That the University ensure that its new economic model enables funding from undergraduate and postgraduate-coursework student load that results from cross-disciplinary program to be shared between participating University units in proportion to their contribution towards the provision of each program.

Recommendation 5
That the University’s current PhD Rule be amended to formally accommodate joint or panel supervision of PhD students by academic staff from different faculties.

Recommendation 6
That the University ensure that its new economic model ensures that funding for higher degree by research student load is shared between participating University units in proportion to the share of supervisory workload undertaken by staff in each unit in relation to each PhD candidate.

Quality concerns about the Australian PhD
At a number of consultation sessions, in the context of discussions about how Area Studies approaches might be used to improve the quality of research training in Australia, concerns were raised about the competiveness of the Australian PhD compared to the programs available at leading universities in North America and Europe. In particular, the Australian system’s emphasis on short completion times means there is limited capacity to build coursework elements into programs, or to provide students with the same type of cross-disciplinary and ‘in-country’ opportunities that are available elsewhere.

Recommendation 7
That the University pursue reform of policy and funding for the provision of higher degree by research training in Australia to better enable students to undertake cross-disciplinary research degrees.

Assessment of models
A challenge for the Panel was to identify the model and approach to implementation of a strategy for Area Studies that would be most feasible and likely to succeed at the University of Sydney – given the need to achieve broad academic support for any proposal, existing operating structures and financial constraints. The point was made repeatedly by participants in the Review that any strategy will struggle to succeed unless it has the support of the academic communities around which it must be built. Our
challenge was therefore to identify a model for Area Studies that can fit within the University’s existing structures and is affordable, but which has the right mix of ‘top down’ and ‘bottom up’ flexibility allowing staff room to move and be innovative in the approaches they take.

During the course of the Review the Panel considered and consulted widely on numerous possible models, and variants of models. These included: minimalist/virtual networks, programs or centres; centres housed within major International Institutes with different reporting and accountability lines; centres as distinct entities outside of faculty structures; centres hosted within different faculties or clustered together within a single faculty; centres with different forms of staff appointments and membership. Details of the types and varieties of models considered are included in Appendix 6.1.5.

Models for Area Studies can be distinguished based on: their physical location and size; source of administrative support; reporting lines; management structures; the focus of their activities; the way they are staffed; and the way they are funded.

The Panel analysed and assessed these features of models based on the extensive consultation undertaken during the review and the analysis and experience of Panel members. The following model, detailed in Section 5.3.8 of the report, is the model the Panel recommends for the establishment of new Area Studies Centres at Sydney.

Recommendation 8
That the University adopt the following model as its preferred model for the establishment of new Area Studies centres within the University:

- Each centre to be established in accordance with the University’s Centres Policy.
- A high quality academic leader to be appointed as the Director of each centre.
- Each Director to be supported, initially, by an Associate Director, with high level experience in the area, one Project Officer, running and other costs.
- Each centre to have an Advisory Committee, comprising senior scholars in the area drawn from each participating faculty and appropriately qualified non-university members.
- Each centre to initially focus on research and higher degree by research training activities, but to aim to provide or coordinate postgraduate and undergraduate coursework programs.
- Each Director to report directly to the Provost.
- Centres to initially access administrative support from a faculty or cluster of participating faculties.
- Once a number of centres are established, their Directors could be co-located administratively within a faculty or central portfolio and share some administrative services.
- Initially centres will be mostly ‘networks’ of staff appointed in disciplinary units.
- If it is deemed appropriate for a particular centre, funding to be provided at the discretion of the Provost at the outset to enable a small number of joint appointments to the centre.
- Over time, as centres establish operating arrangements and programs, and as additional funding becomes available, additional joint appointments to the centres should be encouraged.
- Each centre to be reviewed after two and five years in accordance with the Centres Policy, and success against the achievement of the objectives agreed for each centre and the University’s Areas Studies strategy as a whole.
- Within these broad constraints, each Director to be empowered to pursue strategies and activities as agreed with participating academics, departments and faculties.
Assessment of areas

The Panel has assessed twelve areas (eight regions, Australia, China, Japan and Korea), according to criteria including: current strength and spread of expertise across faculties; the strategic importance of the area to Australia; the potential for the University to develop a competitive advantage in the area – including competitor analysis and analysis of the relative international standing of our existing capacity. In making our recommendations about which areas the University should focus on initially, we have also taken a pragmatic approach in recognition of the financial challenges the University currently faces as a result of the Global Financial Crisis and other factors.

The Panel stresses that the ‘mapping’ information obtained through the review process and included within the report does not necessarily represent the full extent of activity relevant to any particular area. We fully expect that further details about area strengths will emerge following the release of this report, and welcomes such feedback, as it will assist the University to gain a better understanding of the breadth and depth of area expertise relevant to specific countries or regions.

Recommendation 9
That the University adopt the following criteria for the selection and review of Area Studies Centres:

- current capacity at the University;
- relative international standing of current capacity at the University;
- competitor analysis;
- strategic importance to Australia; and
- potential for growth to achieve the objectives of the University’s Area Studies strategy.

The regions assessed within the report are these: Africa, Australia, China, Europe, Japan, Korea, the Middle East, Latin America, North America, South Asia, Southeast Asia and The Pacific. Preliminary mapping suggests that there is expertise in all the assessed areas across a range of faculties. There are at least 94 full-time academic staff members with a research interest in Southeast Asia across 11 faculties, and at least 50 academic staff across 8 faculties with a research interest in China. Overall, the report has identified more than 350 academic staff with a research interest in one or more of the areas assessed, along with more than fifty existing centres, networks, departments or programs relevant to ‘areas’ outside of Australia.

These figures strongly support the implementation of a University-wide strategy for Area Studies. With resourcing issues in mind and on the basis of the assessment of current strength, strategic importance and competitive advantage made within the report, the Panel makes the following recommendations in relation to Areas:

Recommendation 10
That the University establish Area Studies centres for Southeast Asia and China to complement existing Area Studies initiatives such as the recently established United States Studies Centre.

Recommendation 11
That in addition to the establishment of initial Area Studies centres for Southeast Asia and China, the University encourage and promote where possible other cross-disciplinary Area Studies networks and programs.
**Conclusion**

The Panel concludes by stressing that merely facilitating and funding the establishment of Area Studies Centres at the University of Sydney will not, by itself, be enough to ensure the strategy’s success. We agree with the many contributors to the Review who emphasised that clear and sustained leadership from the University Centre will be critical to the successful implementation of any strategy.

Systemic barriers to collaboration posed by the current internal funding model must be addressed. Otherwise, Area Studies are destined to be perceived as a source of competition for limited resources, rather than as a mechanism by which to deliver additional resources to all units that support each centre. In addition, the University must make it easier for staff, students and the wider public to access information about the disciplinary and area expertise of individual staff and units within the University.

While we believe the University should act now to support the establishment of centres in two specific areas, care must also be taken to encourage and support other Area-based networks and groupings, with the potential to grow into centres in the future, if the strategy proves to be successful.

The Panel believes that the prospects of success for an institution-wide Area Studies strategy will be good if: the University adopts the statement of objectives set out in this report (*Section 5.1.5*); moves to pilot the establishment of two centres based on our recommended model (*Section 5.3.8*); and works closely with the Centre Directors, faculties and departments to steer the operation of centres down a path that aligns with the critical success factors we have identified (*Section 5.5 and Appendix 6.4*).