REPORT OF THE 2008 STRATEGIC REVIEW OF THE COLLEGE OF ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

The Australian National University

October 2008
The Strategic Review of the ANU College of Asia and the Pacific was conducted in October 2008. A range of preparatory material was provided to the panel before a week-long visit to College for a series of meetings with a range of staff and students.

This report was produced by the Panel as a result of their Strategic Review, and is endorsed by all members.

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Setting

ANU has established the College of Asia and the Pacific (CAP) to:
- deepen understanding of this dynamic region,
- train more effectively students who want to operate in this theatre, and
- serve to enhance the core intelligence underlying Australia’s strategic interests.

Each of these tasks is part of ANU’s original charter—the College of Asia and the Pacific was created in 2006 to make the University more effective at carrying them out.

The founding units of CAP have their own distinguished heritage. The Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies (RSPAS) has long held one of the world’s most respected faculties devoted to disciplinary understanding of the region. The Faculty of Asian Studies (FAS), soon to be the Faculty of Asia and the Pacific, counts among its distinguished alumni a very proud Prime Minister; the Crawford School of Economics and Government is arguably already the leading policy school in the Asia-Pacific region and is on a clear track to be among the best in the world. The Asia-Pacific College of Diplomacy, although small, is impressively influential in diplomatic circles in the region. Standing alone, these units contained an outstanding array of academic talent. When this talent is fully engaged within an integrated College, it will represent a truly formidable intellectual powerhouse.

This endeavor by ANU is part of a broader plan to advance the University’s already high standing as one of the world’s leading research and teaching universities. Building a world-class research university is an extraordinarily difficult task and there are thousands of efforts underway around the globe. The key ingredients involve organizational structure, the size and allocation of its budget, the dynamic vision of its leadership, effectively communicated to the university as a whole. History also matters. Academic reputations are built over time, and the critical role that students play in both enhancing and demonstrating the quality of research training—at undergraduate and graduate levels—is by definition a multi-generational process.

Because of the University’s charter and the sheer magnitude of resources devoted to the units that make up CAP, the success of the College is absolutely central to the broader goals of the University. Such success is anticipated because of ANU’s long and widely recognized history of accomplishment in research, training, and public service in all disciplinary aspects of the study of Asia, the Pacific, and Australia’s relations with the region. But the success is not guaranteed. Just because four distinguished units have been combined into CAP does not automatically ensure that the new College will extend its reach, magnify its influence, and make ANU the premier place for Asia-Pacific-related activities in the twenty-first century, a century that many associate with the rise and global prominence of Asia. There is an opportunity here that is not to be missed, but seizing the opportunity will take leadership, resources, and—above all—the good will and energy of everyone involved.
The review panel believes that strengthened organizational integration, appropriate performance criteria, and a rigorous strategic planning process can transform CAP from an institutional umbrella into a coherent and energetic center of activities related to Asia and the Pacific, Australia, and the world. The premise is not to diminish but to enhance the different parts of the College, to create new synergies among them and with the wider university, and to do so by utilizing cooperatively the currently available resources. Going forward, it will be essential to develop new sources of support.

These are challenging goals and reaching them will involve a complex process. To encompass the three roles of the College—scholarship, teaching, and public impact—our report tries to untangle these institutional and intellectual complexities by addressing three core topics:
(1) an organizational structure for the College that aligns incentive structures, managerial roles, and budget realities;
(2) a framework for evaluating performance of individual faculty, programs, and thematic initiatives; and
(3) a transparent process of strategic planning as it relates to research and teaching missions as well as to budgetary procedures for raising, allocating, and spending resources.

Structure

For historical reasons, the current organizational and management structure does not serve the College well. Indeed, it is dysfunctional. CAP was created by merging a research staff, a teaching staff, and a policy-studies staff under a common Dean who, at the moment, commands no integrated administrative structure and controls virtually no resources.

The separate cultures of each academic unit run deep, and merging them inevitably generated tensions. The good news is that collegial leadership from the pre-existing units has rapidly defused most of these conflicts, and a number of individuals are now working together across the old structural boundaries; the bad news is that remaining tensions, especially the age-old one between disciplinary approaches and area studies, are deep-seated and will only be resolved over time and through a gradual shift in the culture of the College and its constituent members.

It is, however, urgent that remaining tensions not impede continued--and rapid--movement toward an effective management structure. This means a Dean empowered by flexible resources that can be used to support innovations and provision of college-level “public goods.” For the time being, these resources must be mobilized from inside the College, perhaps through a modest tax on recurrent budgets. An alternative approach would be to allocate the Block Grant to the Dean’s office and have individual units compete for these resources, or at least to use some of them for common purposes.
Performance

Evaluating performance of such a diverse group of scholars and activities must involve multiple criteria, but excellence should be the common denominator. Our panel recommends a “portfolio approach” to evaluation of academic staff, where research, teaching, university service, and external engagement would each be valued, with appropriate weights to be determined by agreement with the Dean. A central role for the Dean is to balance the broad needs of the College with the specific skills of individuals. Strong disciplinary skills will remain an essential foundation for all portfolios.

Quality rather than quantity should dominate the evaluation, whose goal is to encourage balance among the different categories of activity. This means, for example, that undergraduate teaching will be a part of every portfolio, if in different levels and amounts. Incentives should be established to encourage the changes required for faculty to produce such balance, and flexibility should be encouraged during the period of transition.

Individual promotion and collective resources should be decided on the basis of such evaluations, so that faculty and units are rewarded for their individual achievement and for their cooperative contribution to the mission of the College and the university as a whole.

Strategy

Strategies for the development of academic institutions are often grandiose and vague. Especially when drafted “from the top” for external distribution, these are usually dismissed by academic staff as irrelevant to their day-to-day activities. A better approach is to engage them in a process of creating a strategic plan for the next five years, which offers the opportunity to formulate a shared vision of CAP’s mission, budgetary processes, performance expectations, and the reality of resource constraints and fundraising opportunities. Having an academic staff that trusts one another and its leadership is essential to academic productivity. Such trust is built from the process of strategic planning when the end result is a plan that reflects shared interests both in design and implementation.
Structure

The College of Asia and the Pacific was established to bring a more efficient and effective structure to ANU’s teaching, research and policy outreach to the region. All the complementary units already existed—the challenge was to draw greater synergies from them. As outsiders, the Panel members saw obvious merits in a harmonious merger between FAS and RSPAS, to bring closer the teaching and research contributions. Our week of deliberations also brought us a deeper understanding of cultural and structural impediments to such a step, so we have left that process to be put on the agenda as strategic planning gets under way in a serious fashion.

The new College is designed to respond to emerging challenges facing institutions of higher learning. The original structure of ANU was based on a research university in which building knowledge about Australia’s immediate region was central. From the beginning, the Research School of Pacific Studies was organised on a disciplinary basis with empirical orientation towards the region; Asia was added as economic and political ties emerged. RSPAS quickly established itself as the internationally leading research institution of Asia and the Pacific, with top ranking scholars across a range of disciplines.

A fully integrated and collaborative CAP requires input from RSPAS scholars almost across the board. Achieving this input on an equitable and collegial basis is a real challenge given the historic culture within RSPAS. But RSPAS stands to gain significantly from active participation in the leadership of an integrated College through even greater intellectual presence, increased classroom engagement, and enhanced claim on administrative and budgetary resources.

In recent years demands for teaching--and thus the necessity to create systematic curricula and allocation of teaching resources--have grown substantially. Indeed, they are in part the cause for the restructuring of the University that also produced CAP. This development has generated some understandable tensions, which became apparent both in the materials submitted to the review panel and during our meetings with different groups.

The mission of the University requires different units to respond to different demands. In addition to carrying out academic research, some units also function as policy advisers engaged with long-term problems as well as current events. The Asia-Pacific College of Diplomacy and the Crawford School of Economics and Government have clear missions oriented to public service. Less clear are the organizational futures of the Faculty of Asian Studies, which is organized by area-based Centres and Programs, and RSPAS, which is based on disciplinary departments. The main structural tension seems to lie in (and between) these two units.

The causes of the tensions are twofold. First, they reflect longstanding divisions in higher education between discipline-based research and problem-based research. ANU has long reflected these tensions as well. Second, however, ANU has exacerbated these tensions through its historical growth patterns, as organisational reforms with new structures have been overlaid on top of the old ones, creating confusion about mutual relationships and expectations.
In all bureaucratic settings it is easier to add administrative layers than to remove them. In our discussions, almost all of the area specialists requested some kind of overarching and uniting institutional framework within CAP. The emerging prototype seems to be the “Institute” that would serve as an umbrella to showcase and coordinate country (or region) capacities as well as to serve as an efficient portal to channel outside interests and resources to affiliated scholars and activities. China and Korea Institutes are already established. Japan, Southeast Asia, South Asia, and the Pacific are waiting in the wings.

These Institutes can play an extremely valuable role at ANU, but merely adding them on top of existing administrative structures can also be expensive and inefficient. A priority of CAP’s strategic planning process should be to foster the kinds of Institutes and initiatives that synergise activities across the College and beyond it, across the wider university. This kind of institutional cooperation is essential in order to meet curricular and teaching demands -- from undergraduate teaching to HDR training across the disciplines with different area specializations -- and to do so in such a way that these programmes are linked to the research activities of the faculty.

The Panel unanimously feels that country- or regional Institutes are likely to emerge as the winners in this planning process. But we would want to know how they will be led and funded, and what existing administrative structures might be jettisoned. At the moment, the integration of research and teaching--under present organisational arrangements--seems to create constant friction between units of academic activity and budgetary units. Budgetary practices should be developed in a way which would provide incentives for teaching across programme and disciplinary boundaries, while still recognizing the fundamental role that disciplines make at the cutting edge of research.

Performance Evaluation

A “portfolio approach” to performance criteria entails a set of common categories flexibly applied. Quality is valued over quantity, although the number in any given category, whether publications, number of undergraduate students, or administrative loads, is of obvious relevance as well.

The main categories are:
1. Research, including current projects, grants received, publications, and honors or prizes;
2. Teaching, including undergraduate and graduate courses, training of HDR students, Masters students, etc. (including numbers enrolled, degrees completed, placement data for graduates);
3. University Service, including directorships, administrative positions, committees, etc.; and
4. Service to the Field and/or Outreach, including public commissions, policy advising, national and international activities, etc.

None of these components can be evaluated on its own, and judging the overall weight in individual cases necessarily involves some discretion. Still, in the case of research, for example, disciplines know their top journals and publishers; citations measure scholarly impact; research grants are awarded for recognized merit; and peer
assessment of research quality is a reasonably reliable guide to this dimension of an
individual’s portfolio. “Choosing the right pond” also matters, since applied research
may score poorly if the standards are those of core disciplinary journals focused on
theory and method. But since it is up to the individual to present his or her credentials
in the appropriate context, the benchmarks and judgments applied to them need not be
arbitrary.

For teaching, too, quality rather than quantity alone, is the appropriate criterion.
Student reviews count, but so, too, does tracking of student performance in their
subsequent career paths. For this purpose placement records are essential and should
be maintained by the College. The same criteria apply to classroom teaching as to
research supervision. Indeed, great research universities often build their influence on
the quality of their undergraduates, not just their doctoral programs.

Service to the university is critical to the effective functioning of an institution like
CAP. The College depends on faculty who have “ownership” of the various
Institutes, Centres, and programmes, even as they work with the professional staff in
their implementation. Administrative service is also undeniably time-consuming and
should be recognized in performance evaluations with appropriate rewards for service
contributions.

Many CAP scholars are actively engaged beyond the University in policy analysis,
advisory capacities, and advocacy efforts. Research is often externally funded and
performed to the donor’s terms of reference. This work should be recognized and
valued for two reasons: First, it provides opportunities to bring the “real world” into
the classroom and the university, enriching the learning experience of the students and
the research outcomes of the faculty. Second, this work often has real impact in the
world, sometimes in profound and lasting ways. It should not be undervalued in a
College whose members have contributed so much to Asia and the Pacific, Australia,
and the world.

The Panel also recognizes a serious dilemma in valuing external engagement and
contribution to Australia’s vital interests. It is relatively easy to value Indonesian
expertise when Australian police are assisting Indonesian police in the search for
bomb-makers. No need for knowledge of Hindi, or languages and cultures in the
South Pacific, in that endeavour. But when might such knowledge be needed? How
will it be built and maintained if performance criteria do not include the likelihood
that Australia’s strategic interests in any specific country or island cannot be predicted
with full certainty? Making strategic investments in the face of uncertainty is a
national issue and an ANU issue, but these investments resonate especially with the
College of Asia and the Pacific.

We recommend that a standard form consisting of the four categories identified above
be submitted to the Dean by each individual faculty member on a regular, perhaps
biennial, basis, and that these forms become the basis for promotion and salary
increments, with incentives provided to help effect the desired balancing of the
portfolio during the transition period.

A similar, if simplified, collective form should be asked of the various Centres,
Institutes, Programmes, etc., and used as a basis for the allocation of budgetary and
other resources. These decisions may be made by the Dean in concert with a Local Promotions Committee for the faculty or a Planning and Budget Committee for the College.

The College should in turn submit a digest of these performance records to the university as evidence of its achievements and worthiness for university or government resources such as the Block Grant and others.

**Strategic Planning**

The Vice-Chancellor has made it clear to the Panel that this review is *not* intended to be a cost-cutting exercise. He is prepared to provide the necessary resources for the College to develop and grow. He wishes, however, to know where the College is heading and how it intends to get there. In other words, he needs the College to provide a clearly articulated and well-thought-out strategic plan.

Having met with various groups, the Panel is of the impression that faculty members generally know what they want and are highly motivated in pursuing their respective research and teaching agendas. Collectively, however, with the exception of the Crawford School and APCD – which have clear and well-defined remits – the strategic intent and development plans of the other parts of the College, and of the College as a whole, need to be articulated more clearly. CAP has submitted a strategic plan, and while it has the relevant parts – strategic goals, objectives, action and measurements – the document is vague and lacks operational details, concrete outcomes, and resource requirements.

What should strategic planning entail? The Panel recommends that the College adopt a rigorous strategic planning *process* to guide the next phase of CAP’s development. It is not sufficient for a top-level, exclusive committee to sit together and merely list a number of intents and objectives. The planning process must be inclusive and should involve, as far as possible, all teaching and research staff, administrative staff, relevant student representatives as well as external stakeholders – the public service, private sector employers, alumni, etc. This process of transparency and involvement is important because it will provide the opportunity for the College and its stakeholders to formulate a shared vision for the College. While a ground-up process is important, leadership of this process, especially in terms of focus and prioritization, is critical. The outcome of this process will be a strategic document that would serve as the road-map and an operational plan for the College in the following few years.

The final strategic plan should be a comprehensive document detailing a 5-year plan that stipulates clearly the College’s strategic intent and directions, objectives, action/operational plans, targets (including time-lines and measurement metrics) as well as required resources (mainly specific budgets and space requirements). It should address the mission of CAP directly and deal with critical issues such as definition of roles, performance expectations, budgetary process, optimizing the use of resources, identifying areas of emphasis and creating new synergies in the College. This document, which should be made public, would then form the basis on which the College would negotiate its annual budget with the Vice-Chancellor, who, if he agrees with the plan, should ensure that the Dean be provided with the necessary operating budget and administrative levers to implement the plan. In turn, the management and
implementation of the strategic plan should constitute a key part of the Dean’s performance evaluation.

We recommend that every group wishing to establish an Institute submit a strategic plan as above, endorsed by the Dean, for the Vice Chancellor’s consideration. In this regard, we commend the Pacific group for the manner in which it has articulated its priorities and plans, and we suggest that other groups look to them as a positive example of coordinated and systematic thinking on how to move forward.

**Budget Flow**

The review panel urges changes in the CAP budget process to provide an effective integration of strategy and resource allocation. Currently the principal units of the College (RSPAS, FAS, and Crawford) receive an operating allocation via the University budget process, with the amounts determined in part by a University-level formula and in part via negotiation with the Vice-Chancellor.

The panel acknowledges--and applauds--the move this year which saw the Directors of CAP’s budget units and the Dean negotiating with Chancelry as a group rather than individually. This is a major step forward and demonstrates the collegiality that the panel observed throughout the week, and is one of the most promising features of CAP. The College needs to take the next step, and consider how best to deploy its combined operating budget and other available funds to achieve the College’s strategic goals. The University does not mandate that operating funds be allocated to units as per the University-level formula. CAP needs to take advantage of this flexibility.

As already emphasized in the report, the Panel strongly recommends a tighter strategic plan with resources, time frames and responsibilities clearly stated. The Dean needs the responsibility, authority, and means to drive that strategic plan. The allocation of the Block Grant based on an historical formula does not put the funding where it is most strategically important.

The College strategic plan, and the budget model that supports it, need to acknowledge the different missions and contributions that each of its component parts make to CAP. The Crawford School of Economics and Government, for example, chose to be part of the College, and it has demonstrated a strong entrepreneurial flair that supports its high academic standing. The Asia-Pacific College of Diplomacy is obviously valued by its constituencies and is clear about its mission. These component parts should, however, also be part of the collective vision for the College, and should continue to contribute from their self-generated revenue to College-level initiatives. The Crawford School and APCD should expect to be stronger and more visible as part of a successful CAP.

The College is fortunate to have an Executive which epitomizes the collegiality and drive of CAP. The next step is for this group, led by the Dean, to be empowered with the authority to combine resources. Different revenue streams can flow differently around the College. Some areas have a strong entrepreneurial culture, and have built up substantial revenue streams through, for example, delivery of graduate coursework programs. Others have had limited experience in this area. The college needs to
agree on a transparent model that generates and deploys its resources to support its priorities.

The Panel identifies the relationship between RSPAS and FAS, and particularly the increased integration of the undergraduate teaching into the broader College, as critical for the College’s future. As noted, we discussed the possibility of a quick merger as the obvious way forward. Lacking that, and in order to make continued progress on integration a reality, the College needs a budget model that provides rewards and incentives for contributions to undergraduate teaching, but leads ultimately to the College-wide understanding that undergraduate teaching is a valued and expected part of academic life which contributes to research productivity over the long run.

**Recommendations going forward**

In four important dimensions, the profile of CAP must change over the next decade if the College is to succeed in the vision laid out above. Its *academic staff* will see CAP as their administrative and intellectual home. There will be significantly more taught *courses*, especially at undergraduate level, driven mostly by a substantial increase in the number of international students recruited to the College. The *research profile* of the academic staff will be spread more evenly across individuals, although the portfolio approach to performance evaluation will still permit—even encourage—research specialization where that results in visibly excellent output. Finally, the *outreach* from the College will be widely recognized by the government, business, donors and international bodies as essential to their day-to-day functioning and long-term planning.

The steps that need to be taken to realize this new profile include the following:

- Start a strategic planning process
- Agree on the profile CAP needs for the future and design a way of getting there
- Review existing structure and redesign to enable the strategic plan
- Design a budget model that follows the new structure and enables the strategic plan
- Design and implement a transparent and effective performance evaluation process
- Design and implement an administrative structure that supports the College’s future

The Panel would be badly remiss if we failed to acknowledge the substantial progress that has already been made in the face of what seem wrenching changes in an established order that has served ANU for half a century. We are encouraged by this progress because it augurs well for future success.

*Submitted Wednesday, November 5, 2008*
This report was prepared in late October, 2008, by a visiting panel comprised of Professors C. Peter Timmer (chair), Jukka Siikala, and Tan Tai-Yong. The original designated chair, Professor Carol Gluck, was prevented from visiting for medical reasons, but was engaged continuously from New York by email and daily telephone conversations. We would like to thank Dr. Liz Eedle for service to the panel that went well beyond any conceivable terms of reference she might have been assigned by the Vice Chancellor, Professor Ian Chubb, to whom the panel reported. We acknowledge his full, even forceful, support for the process. We also wish to thank the scores of academics and professional staff who met with the panel, often under potentially tense and awkward circumstances (many are close professional acquaintances of members of the panel). Our questioning was often sharp, sometimes to the point of being rude, but everyone tried to answer in ways that were as helpful as possible. We hope we have not misconstrued your messages.