An annual Flinders workshop focusing on Asia Pacific’s transitional nations – East Timor, Bougainville, Aceh and the Solomon Islands – will make a direct contribution to coherent development strategies in the region and help to forestall further armed conflict, according to Flinders academic, Dr Udoy Saikia.

The initial workshop, held recently at Flinders University Victoria Square, brought together community and political leaders from the regions with representatives of the Australian Defence Force, the Australian Federal Police, practitioners from international development organisations and academics and researchers from universities in Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

Workshop organiser Dr Saikia, from the School of the Environment, said that while the four regions are called transitional or post-conflict societies, the threat of a relapse into chaos and violence remains very real.

“The feeling at the workshop was that the challenges ahead are greater even than those of the periods of conflict,” Dr Saikia said. He said all of the societies have a common potential for division and confrontation if their three sources of authority – the traditional community leadership, new democratic, political institutions and the resurgent Roman Catholic church – send conflicting messages to the populace.

“There is confusion among the people about who they should listen to, and it is very important that the three groups should talk to each other and establish common ground,” Dr Saikia said.

There is tension too between materialistic values drawn from the globalised economy and the desire to embed traditional values as the basis of nation-building.
Teaching

Faith on side with a saint

Professor Faith Trent

Professor Faith Trent feels an affinity with Australia’s first saint – and it goes beyond this month being awarded the Mary MacKillop Medal by the Australian College of Educators (ACE).

Announcing the award, President of the SA chapter of ACE, Ms Mary Asikas, said that “as a champion of social justice, Mary MacKillop was one of Australia’s greatest educational innovators”.

“The SA Branch of the College is delighted to present the Mary MacKillop Medal to Professor Trent who has demonstrated many of the same qualities and the same commitment and passion to education as Mary MacKillop,” she said.

Accepting the award, Professor Trent said that while she did not share a religious affiliation, her research of Mary MacKillop revealed a person “that I would have both liked and admired, even if I would also have disagreed with her in some ways”.

“When I think about Mary MacKillop, I think she must have been an ‘outsider’ who believed that education in its broadest forms was the key not only to a happy life but to one of breadth, opportunity and excitement,” Professor Trent, the Executive Dean of Flinders Faculty of Education, Humanities, Law and Theology said.

“I see myself as an ‘outsider’ in the same way – an accidental educator and academic whose background and life experiences have provided opportunities which I feel are incumbent on me to use to broaden others’ experiences, in mentoring, in educating and in keeping alive those values which I consider make us human,” she said.

“Like Mary, I have tried to stand up for those things in which I believe, even if it caused personal strife or discomfort for the bureaucracies and organisations of which I have been part or with which I have engaged.

“This ‘outsiderness’ means that the lens through which one views the world is tempered by the nature of one’s experiences and choices which, in my case, includes being a ‘refo’ child. My parents came to Australia in 1939 and for them education was a given – as natural as breathing.”

Inspired by that beginning, Professor Trent graduated with a degree in science and a diploma in teaching, and completed a masters degree in sociology at Canada’s Simon Fraser University. She began her academic career at Macquarie University in 1973 where she became part of its pioneering teacher education program and worked on a national curriculum project as well as undertaking postgraduate research in indigenous and multicultural education.

After several other academic posts in NSW, Professor Trent became principal of the Sturt College of Advanced Education where she played a key role in its incorporation in an expanded national university system as part of Flinders University. Subsequently appointed to a Chair in the School of Education at Flinders, she became Dean of the School for four years before winning the position of Executive Dean of the Faculty of Education, Humanities, Law and Theology.

In this position, Professor Trent has been instrumental in expanding Flinders commitment to international and indigenous education.

Peter Gill

... continued from page 1

“An identity crisis is emerging, and it appears at times that the younger generation is merging into a hybrid culture without a concrete direction,” Dr Saikia said.

Dr Saikia said that several speakers, including the former head of the Australian Defence Force in East Timor, made it clear that there was a strong inverse correlation between human development and the level of violence.

International and domestic efforts need to focus on achieving basic security in terms of health, education and food to avoid disappointing the high expectations of those who took part in winning political freedom, Dr Saikia said.

“As Alice Pollard, a community leader from the Solomons said, our nation has been conceived, but it is not yet born,” he said.

“These societies need to invest in their human capital and in particular they need to bring their youth into the mainstream.”

Participants were highly enthusiastic: East Timor’s Ambassador to Australia, initially scheduled to be at the workshop’s opening sessions, stayed for all three days, while East Timor’s Secretary of State described his participation as “a privilege.”

The Defence Science and Technology Organisation has expressed interest in renewing their sponsorship next year, and further funding is anticipated from bodies such as AusAID, Dr Saikia said.

“The workshop will play an important role in assessing progress and in setting the agenda for development, and perhaps most importantly will provide a single platform for regional leaders to exchange and share their knowledge and experiences.”

Charles Gent

Cover photo: East Timor village © Albert Ziraj

Dr Udoy Saikia
Agreement a boon for nursing and midwifery

Flinders University’s School of Nursing and Midwifery will collaborate on teaching and research projects with one of the world’s leaders in nursing education, Johns Hopkins University and its School of Nursing, under an agreement signed this month. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two institutions frames collaboration across a wide range of activities including staff, postgraduate and undergraduate student exchanges, joint research projects and the development of joint courses.

Dean of the School of Nursing and Midwifery, Professor Paul Arbon said the relationship with Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing grew out of a joint interest in the emerging fields of forensic nursing and forensic healthcare.

“Through Associate Professor Linda Starr’s leadership in this area, some informal staff and student exchanges have taken place in recent years,” Professor Arbon told Flinders Journal.

“This MoU consolidates that relationship. It opens up many opportunities, especially for undergraduate study tours which are often difficult to coordinate due to the important clinical component of their studies,” he said.

“The higher degree student exchanges will focus on research projects that benefit from visiting either place. And staff will be involved in exchanges, too.”

A member of the Johns Hopkins staff will visit Flinders between March and July 2011 to develop a joint online course in forensic health.

Professor Arbon said research grant applications for projects in aged care and population health will be submitted in coming funding rounds.

“The first of those is likely to examine dehydration in the elderly, particularly during heatwave. That’s of special interest in South Australia and Johns Hopkins has expertise in hydration and physiology,” he said, adding that the link with the Institute for Johns Hopkins Nursing — which connects the School with nursing staff at the perennially top-ranked Johns Hopkins Hospital — is a bonus.

Family firms must consider financing options

There is a growing need to educate family firms of the financing options available through private equity providers if Australia is to avoid large scale business closures and job losses, according to Dr Pi-Shen Seet.

Dr Seet, an Associate Professor in management at Flinders Business School, says the ageing of the post-war baby boomer generation “means that about 60 per cent of family business owners are expected to retire by 2016”.

“Although many of these owners intend to pass the business on to the next generation, it’s expected that half won’t be able to do so because of a lack of available or suitable successors,” Dr Seet said.

“As a consequence, many family owners will have little option but to close the business with a resulting loss of jobs and economic activity,” he said.

“The successful transition of ownership of small to medium family enterprises is critical to the Australian economy. It’s estimated that a successful transfer conserves, on average, five jobs, whereas a start-up generates, on average, two jobs. Research to date suggests most family business owners are unwilling to bring in outsider investors for fear of diluting family control. Those owners willing to do so often have little understanding of what’s required to engage with private equity investors.”

In a study with Dr Chris Graves of the University of Adelaide Business School, and supported by a grant from CPA Australia, Dr Seet explored whether private equity is a workable solution for the impending crisis in family business succession, and whether advisers to family firms can assist in bridging the gap between family firm owners and private equity investors.

The study has resulted in a few publications including a report for CPA Australia and a paper that received the Best Research Paper Award at the International Family Enterprise Research Academy’s (IFERA) Annual Conference held recently in Lancaster, UK.

Some of the factors identified as reducing the current role of private equity were high transaction costs and risks stemming from a lack of information sharing between owners and investors. At the same time, private equity investors perceived family firms as lacking professional management practices.

The two researchers recommended that business and government networks, accountants and professional advisers should use seminars and other communication tools to increase the understanding of private equity amongst family firms.

Vincent Ciccarello

Peter Gill

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Research presentations take Flinders innovation

Flinders University’s first Research Innovation Showcase attracted more than 200 researchers, business people and government officials to the campus in late September.

Twenty of Flinders top researchers described their research capabilities in a series of rapid-fire presentations which were complemented by a series of display booths promoting the University’s research in groundwater, medical devices, marine science, biofuels, eye and vision, nutrition, clinical change and cancer prevention, psychology and molecular technologies.

Introduced by Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), Professor David Day, and likened to “speed-dating”, the three-minute presentations provided a comprehensive insight into the breadth and calibre of the research being undertaken at the University.

The research projects discussed ranged across all four faculties at Flinders and a number of presenters took the opportunity to make overtures to industry and government stakeholders to become financial and research collaborators. These included Professor David Catcheside who detailed the development of a “DNA bullet” which reduces the preparation time for DNA sampling from hours to about a minute. Professor Catcheside said the technology would have particular application for disaster victim identification.

Associate Professor Martin Johnston described how his team was designing, building and testing silane-based methods of corrosion protection which hold significant safety and cost advantages over traditional protection methods like galvanizing and chromating.

Flinders University has capitalised on its strength in nanotechnology, one of the most dynamic fields of science, with the establishment of the Flinders Centre for Nanoscale Science and Technology.

Flinders Vice-Chancellor Professor Michael Barber said the new Centre recognises the strength of molecular-scale research that has been developed at Flinders over a decade, and complements the University’s very successful Nanotechnology degree, which was the first in Australia.

He said the centre would enable researchers from different disciplines with appropriate expertise and skills to be brought together to provide more complete solutions to individual projects, increasing capacity and flexibility to respond to new, larger challenges.

“One of the most exciting aspects of nanoscience is its potential to provide...
Professor Leon Lack gave encouragement to those people for whom sufficient sleep is compromised by night shift work and travel with the ability to reset one’s body clock with light-emitting glasses. With assistance from the University’s commercial arm, Flinders Partners – which initiated the Showcase jointly with the Marketing and Communications Office – the Re-Time glasses are expected to be on the market next year.

Guests were given several insights by PhD Student, Mark Bissett, into the almost invisible world of nanotechnology where carbon nanotubes – measuring one to two billionths of metre and having 100 times the strength of steel and 1000 times the conductivity of copper – are being employed to create futuristic desalination and solar power generation applications.

Ms Vicki Edwards reported on research that has found a range of compounds, sourced from an Australian marine species, that stimulates the production of estrogen (as protection against breast cancer), kills reproductive cancer cells and is safe in normal cells.

Inspired by the loss of communications in the wake of the Haiti earthquake, Dr Paul Gardner-Stephen described how his Serval Project team has written software to enable conventional mobile phones to be able to communicate without mobile towers – a breakthrough with wide potential application not only in disaster zones but also in remote areas and sectors like the mining industry.

The benefits of industry partnerships was outlined by Dr Milena Ginic-Markovic who described the development with SA Water and Wind Prospect of new desalination membranes which dramatically reduce the biofouling of existing reverse osmosis membranes. Reductions in cleaning and maintenance times could cut desalination plant operating costs by $1–2 million annually.

Professor Karen Reynolds – recently awarded South Australia’s Professional Engineer of the Year – also reported on the benefits of industry and political collaboration experienced through the Medical Device Partnering Program. Professor Reynolds said the State-Government supported program had assisted 47 companies through the development of new prototype medical devices, proof-of-concept and technical studies, expert technical advice, and market and commercialisation advice.

Another researcher looking to take an existing pilot project to commercial development was Professor Howard Fallowfield who detailed the benefits of biological filters to reduce the use of disinfectants and enhance the safety of water supplies for human consumption.

Peter Gill

scale nanoscience

The Centre will assist our researchers to achieve scientific and technological breakthroughs by increasing their ability to attract funds from government and industry,” Professor Barber said.

The Director of the new Centre, Professor David Lewis, said “Flinders nanoscale research is already finding novel solutions across fields that include innovative energy generation and water resource technology, as well as the development of biosensors with applications in health, security, forensics and the environment”.

“We anticipate that many of our efforts in nanoscale research will result in practical technologies that will improve lives in Australia and beyond,” Professor Lewis said.

Professor David Lewis
Tourism a safe port in an economic storm

While the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) and the appreciating Australian dollar may have cast a pall over Australian tourism, Flinders Head of Tourism Dr Steve Brown believes there are many reasons to be upbeat about the industry.

“Tourism remains the biggest industry globally and it continues to grow,” Dr Brown said.

“It might not be growing as rapidly as before the GFC but it will again. We’ve endured the threat of SARS. Like the sharemarket, tourism has peaks and troughs. It’s cyclical,” he said.

Dr Brown said tourism in South Australia was arguably less affected by the GFC than other parts of the country and internationally.

“While we don’t have the scale of tourism as those places, what we do, we do really well.” Any modest downturn has had little impact on the employability of Flinders tourism graduates, with between 85 and 95 per cent still able to get jobs within 12 months of graduating.

Dr Brown attributes the impressive success rate to the unique nature of the Flinders undergraduate and postgraduate courses, which have enjoyed consistently strong demand over the years.

“Ours is a niche degree with a quota of only 40 students,” he said.

“Students become part of the ‘family’ and the staff get to know them very well. By the end of the first semester, we generally know the students’ strengths and we can tailor the degree to suit each person.”

Industry engagement is a vital part of the courses: each student will have face-to-face contact with a number of guest industry lecturers.

“Our courses have a theoretical underpinning but our philosophy is the learning must be applied,” Dr Brown said.

He cited as an example a longitudinal study of the Royal Adelaide Show’s main arena entertainment program that Flinders students have been working on since 2005.

“This year, a Masters student managed the audience survey; it was conducted by undergraduates. At the same time, a third-year student was the assistant stage manager of the arena program; and another was examining ‘best practice’ of the management of the program, documenting what’s currently done and recommending what can be done to improve it.”

Vincent Ciccarello

Photo: Johnny Janusz Kamma © SATC

Parents also a target for violence and abuse

Violence by children and adolescents directed towards their own parents and siblings is a serious enough social problem to require its own dedicated support agency, a new report – Exposing the dark side of parenting – has found.

Flinders University Legal Studies lecturer Mary McKenna, the lead author of the report, said that the trauma and stress arising from such violence can lead to severe long-term consequences for individuals and families, but that the phenomenon is not well recognised or understood, even by professionals.

The report was prepared by the Regional Alliance Addressing Child and Adolescent Violence in the Home, South Australia, and is based on the analysis of a phone-in survey organised by researchers at Flinders and conducted in late 2008.

The survey responses showed that the violence occurs in homes across the socio-economic spectrum; that mothers are most likely to be the targets of the violence and abuse; and that the victims are often held responsible or blamed for the behaviour.

Ms McKenna said because there is comparatively little public recognition of the problem, victims have difficulty in accessing effective assistance from support agencies.

“In contrast with child abuse and other forms of domestic violence, child and adolescent family violence remains a relatively hidden and unexplored phenomenon,” she said.

“We are hoping the report will go some way towards raising awareness of the problem and the need to address the ongoing damage that results.”

Ms McKenna said the findings are backed by anecdotal evidence from family support agencies suggesting that child and adolescent violence by both boys and girls towards family members is an increasing issue.

“As well as concerns about their own physical and psychological safety and of other members of the family, the interviewees were concerned about the violent children, many of whom were harming themselves and in some cases were attempting suicide,” she said.

The report’s recommendations include the raising of community and agency awareness of the issue, education and training of professionals in appropriate responses, and the provision of effective accessible support for families, including the establishment of a dedicated agency.

The full report is available at www.flinders.edu.au/ehlt/humanities/exposing-the-dark-side-of-parenting.cfm

Charles Gent
Flinders aims high in search of green solutions

Flinders new School of the Environment will deliver relevant research and solutions to the challenges facing environment and sustainability policy-makers, according to Professor Andrew Millington.

Under his stewardship, the recently appointed Dean of the School of the Environment will seek to emulate best practice found in the world’s leading environmental schools including Yale’s School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, Duke University’s Nicholas School of the Environment, the School of Sustainability at Arizona State University, the Lancaster Environment Centre and the University of East Anglia’s School of the Environment.

“Environmental science is interdisciplinary, with experts coming from a range of backgrounds including geography, geology, biology, health and the social sciences,” Professor Millington said.

“Because of this, newer more flexible institutions may have the edge when it comes to establishing leading environment schools. Flinders is ideally placed to create a highly visible, cohesive and focused hub of environmental teaching and research excellence,” he said.

Professor Millington said that Flinders had research strengths in a number of areas that are witnessing the most significant change including climate, land use, politics, demographics and economic development.

“Most of the environmental schools around the world are very good at critical analysis, but less progressive in terms of the solutions they offer,” Professor Millington said.

“Flinders has been given an opportunity to be different. As well as solutions-focused research, we have high levels of community engagement and environmental advocacy through our work in policy, planning and development with a range of government agencies,” he said.

“Flinders has been given an opportunity to be different. As well as solutions-focused research, we have high levels of community engagement and environmental advocacy through our work in policy, planning and development with a range of government agencies,” he said.

New international focus for Law School

Professor Susan Breau’s role as a consultant on the legalities of armed conflict will significantly boost Flinders’ focus on international law, which already spans war crimes, treaty negotiations and humanitarian law.

A new appointment to the Law School, Professor Breau has provided advice to the European Community on Turkey’s human rights record in relation to the Kurds; she also contributes legal advice and research to the Oxford Research Group’s Recording of Casualties of Armed Conflict project, which seeks to argue that there is a legal obligation to record the number of civilian deaths attributable to war.

The daughter of a Canadian soldier who served as a UN peacekeeper, Professor Breau spent 18 years in conventional legal practice before changing the course of her career by going to study at the London School of Economics, where one of her supervisors was Christopher Greenwood, an international judge and world expert on the legalities of armed conflict.

“Everything fell into line; I felt as if I was doing what I was intended to do,” Professor Breau said.

While considering herself a pacifist, Professor Breau believes that there are some circumstances in which war has a legal basis.

“One of those could be to protect civilians who are in peril of such things as genocide. There are circumstances where the United Nations has to intervene, and it this aspect of collective security that I’m very interested in,” she said.

Her other major interest is in whether armed conflicts are conducted in accordance with human rights law and international humanitarian law.

She said that while the deliberate targeting of civilians persists, particularly in ethnic conflicts, there is a growing sense internationally of the legal accountability of political and military leaders.

Professor Breau said that the new research cluster based in the Flinders Law School will build on existing strengths – several current academics have a strong record in international law research and practice.

“As the group’s senior figure, I want to see us giving advice to organisations around the world,” she said.

“It’s not just about writing articles or books: academics have a genuine role in making the world a better place.”

Charles Gent
Pictures capture the daily realities of war

From the trenches of Flanders to the deserts of North Africa and the jungles of Vietnam, paintings by official war artists have brought back home vivid and evocative impressions of the lives of Australia’s armed services on their tours of duty, in combat and at leisure.

Lyndell Brown and Charles Green are the latest exponents of this proud tradition. Following in the footsteps of artists such as Ivor Hele, their work depicts and records the day-to-day realities for Australian Defence Force personnel in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Framing Conflict: Iraq and Afghanistan is a travelling exhibition of the Australian War Memorial on show at the Flinders City Gallery from October 23 until December 5.

"Not only do Brown and Green’s works show us the experiences of Australian men and women involved in these difficult conflicts, but they also reveal the strange and complex nature of contemporary warfare," said Warwick Heywood, senior curator of art at the Australian War Memorial, which funded the artists’ six-week tour of the region.

The Gallery, located in the State Public Library on North Terrace, Adelaide, is open Tuesday to Friday (11am to 4pm) and on weekends (noon to 4pm).

Poignant memories of a home lost in mud

The destruction of 12 entire villages by the East Java mudflow was symbolically reenacted as the centerpiece of a performance in the Indonesian pendopo at Flinders, as part of Adelaide’s annual OzAsia Festival.

The pendopo, a replica of the large open-sided pavilions of Java, acts as the cultural hub for the Flinders Asia Centre, and houses a full-scale traditional gamelan orchestra.

Indonesian artist Jumaadi, the Flinders Asia Centre’s visiting artist-in-residence, used the pendopo as both studio and stage, creating hundreds of paper houses for the Museum of Memory, a story-telling performance that also incorporated traditional Javanese shadow puppetry, music and dance to describe the plight of the people of Sidoarjo, the artist’s home region.

The ongoing mudflow, believed to have been triggered by petroleum drilling operations, began in May 2006 and has since displaced some 70,000 rural Javanese, obliterating their homes and destroying their livelihoods.

During his five-week residency, Jumaadi also toured primary schools to give workshops in puppetry and grass-sculpture, collaborated on multimedia arts projects with Flinders students, and began plans for a 2011 exhibition in association with the Flinders Art Museum.

Lyndell Brown and Charles Green – Market, Tarin Kowt, Uruzgan province Afghanistan