

Media Release

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Attention: Newsdesk

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Australia's engagement with Thailand increased through research

Thai Studies in Australia will be reinvigorated with an injection of \$100,000 provided by the Royal Thai Embassy through a series of research grants to be administered by the Asia Institute at the University of Melbourne.

The first round of grant recipients has just been announced with 17 students from across Australia, including five from the University of Melbourne, being given a funding boost for their research projects.

Topics cover subjects such as human trafficking and displaced populations on the Thai-Burma border, the construction of modern Thai identity and environmental impact of British businesses on Thailand's teak forests.

Among the students sharing in the grant pool is Prime Minister's Australia Asia Outgoing Post Graduate Award recipient Sunsanee McDonnell from the University of Melbourne who will look at China's engagement with south east Asia and the importance of trans-national transport links.

Director of the Asia Institute Professor Pookong Kee said the Institute was particularly pleased with its close collaboration with the Royal Thai Embassy, particularly over the past 12 months.

"The grants provide a unique opportunity for promising scholars of Thailand across many different disciplines to conduct in-depth field research.

"We are grateful for the opportunity to reinvigorate Thai Studies in Australia and I am particularly excited to see the outcomes of the research that these scholars will be undertaking."

Mr Kitirat Panupong, First Secretary of the Royal Thai Embassy Canberra said he was keen to set up a Thai Studies Centre in Melbourne as part of the 60th anniversary of Australia and Thailand diplomatic relations in 2012. He was thrilled that the University of Melbourne, through the Asia Institute had shared the Embassy's enthusiasm and vision.

"We need to build up a pool and create a network of experts on Thailand and Thai studies in Australia. By offering a grant to support field research in Thailand, more academics will become interested in Thailand and realise first hand the strategic importance of Thailand to Australia.

"These grant recipients will hopefully come back to Australia with a better understanding of Thailand and disseminate their knowledge to a wide audience," he said.

The 2011 Thai Studies Field Research Grants were open to postgraduate and honours level students currently enrolled at any Australian university.

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