

October 29, 2004

The Vice-Chancellor
Prof Kwong Lee Dow
Chair
Planning and Budgets Committee

Dear Vice-Chancellor,

The Faculties of Arts and Law propose the establishment of **The Centre for the Study of Contemporary Islam.**

We believe that this Centre will position the University at the forefront of an important and exciting research area that will augment and enrich research and teaching programs of the University in the study of Islam and Muslim societies over the next decade.

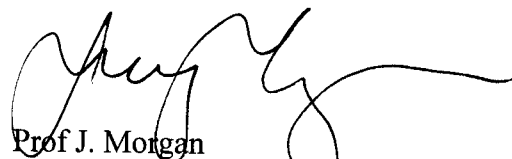
The Centre will be located within the two Faculties, drawing on the resources of the Melbourne Institute of Asian Languages and Societies and the Asian Law Centre. The Institute will be able to use funds released by the creation of the Chair of Islamic Studies to support the Centre.

Would you be able to place this recommendation before Planning and Budgets Committee for their approval?

Yours sincerely,



Stuart Macintyre
Dean of the Faculty of Arts



Prof J. Morgan
Acting Dean of the Faculty of Law

Centre for the Study of Contemporary Islam

1. PURPOSE

The Centre for the Study of Contemporary Islam (CSCI), is proposed as a joint centre of the Faculties of Arts (where it would be based in MIALS) and Law. The Centre has as its primary goal the facilitation and support of Islam-related research and education projects across the University, in particular those related to contemporary Islamic thought.

The Centre will position the University at the forefront of an important and exciting research area that will augment and enrich the research and teaching programs of the University in the study of Islam and Muslim societies over the next decade.

The establishment of the Centre is prompted by the need to:

- consolidate and support several strong, Islam-related research programs extant within the University; and
- develop additional expertise and research strengths in one of the most important areas of global interest: contemporary Islamic thought.

The Islam-related programs available at Melbourne, primarily those in MIALS and Law, are already recognised nationally and internationally. Their linkage under the auspices of the Centre will enable the University to enhance its already strong presence in this area, and to develop the activity in a more systematic way.

The specific aims of the Centre are:

- To create a global centre of excellence in Islamic studies at the University of Melbourne.
- To promote interdisciplinary approaches to contemporary Islamic thought at the University of Melbourne, with particular focus on areas such as law, human rights, pluralism, Islam in the West, inter-religious relations and responses to militant Islam.
- To coordinate the procurement and efficient utilization of resources and infrastructure for the study of contemporary Islamic thought at the University of Melbourne
- To attract researchers in the study of contemporary Islamic thought of the highest calibre to the University of Melbourne
- To function as a think-tank for issues related to Islam and Muslim societies in the modern period.
- To offer short courses and training to enhance community understanding of Islam, Islamic thought and Muslim societies.

2. INTER-DISCIPLINARY STRUCTURE

Scholars in the Faculty of Law will be key partners with those in MIALS in establishing and running the Centre. The bulk of Islamic belief is co-identical with its law, *shariah*. The study of Islamic law is thus the study of the Islamic religion. The Asian Law Centre's well-developed *shariah law* program (which is already offered to Arts graduate students) can thus make a significant contribution to expertise in Arts, and vice versa. The Centre will build on the existing synergy between the two Faculties.

In addition to staff in MIALS and the Faculty of Law, the Centre will draw on expertise in School of Art History, Cinema Studies, Classics and Archaeology, the Department of History (including its Gender Studies program) and the Department of Political Science in the Faculty of Arts, the Faculty of Architecture Building and Town Planning, and the Faculty of Education, among others.

The Centre's focus will be on the issues raised by contemporary Islamic thought rather than on more narrowly defined discipline groups such as 'Islam' or 'politics' or 'law'. Indeed, a cross-disciplinary basis is essential if it the Centre is to achieve its purpose of linking the University of Melbourne to scholars in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, North America and Europe.

It is expected that key initial partners will include the Harvard Islamic Law Program and scholars from McGill University, UIN Jakarta, Sultan Qaboos University (Oman), Leiden and Princeton.

3. LEADERSHIP

It is proposed that the founding Director of the Centre be Professor Abdullah Saeed, Sultan of Oman Professor of Arab and Islamic Studies. Associate Professor Tim Lindsey will be the founding Deputy Director of the Centre.

The Centre's Advisory Board will include:

- At least one former national figure of Australia
- At least 2 former high profile Australian Ambassadors
- High profile figures from the business sector

- At least 2 academics of international standing from Southeast Asia, Middle East and North America
- The Deans, or nominees, of the Faculties of Law and Arts
- The Director of MIALS
- Academic staff associated with the study of Islam

The University has strong programs in the general areas of:

1. Modern Islamic history covering the Middle East, North Africa and Southeast Asia
2. Islam in Indonesia
3. Islamic law, both classical and contemporary
4. Islam in Australia
5. Modern Islamic thought (in areas such as Qur'anic hermeneutics, philosophy, human rights)

To ensure the University maintains this academic excellence in the field of Islamic Studies, it is necessary to ensure access to external resources and people. The University must therefore ensure its researchers have a coordinated, high profile to give them the best opportunity to secure the funding needed.

5. OPPORTUNITIES

Study of Islam and Muslims in the modern period as well as contemporary Islamic thought are areas that are attracting government and non-government funding at both national and international levels, as a result of the current emerging engagements between the West and Muslim societies. An increasing number of postgraduate students are also attracted to this area of research.

At present Melbourne is at a disadvantage vis a vis ANU, which has already established a Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies. The CSCI will correct this imbalance. The Centre will position the University to compete for government and non-government funds (locally and internationally), provide the profile to attract endowments, help it to coordinate its research outcomes, support its infrastructure and maintain the University as a preferred destination for postgraduate students in the areas of interest to the Centre from Australia and the region.

Existing support for the study of Islam at Melbourne include a \$2.5 million endowment which funds the Sultan of Oman Chair in Arab and Islamic Studies; an endowment that funds the lectureship in modern Middle Eastern and Islamic History; a number of DFAT funded projects; and support for teaching and research within MIALS and Asian Law Centre.

Current ARC Large / Discovery Grants relevant to the proposed Centre include:

- Professor Saeed
 - “Negotiating Religious Change in Australian Muslim Communities”
 - “Reconfiguration of Islam in Australia”
 - “Muslim-Jewish Relations in Australia” (Linkage Application with Dr Abramovitch)
- Associate Professor Lindsey
 - “Islamic Law in Indonesia”
 - “Islamic Law in Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei” (application)