

WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY



DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE AUSTRALIA AWARDS MID YEAR EVENT

29 JUNE 2016

VC'S SPEAKING NOTES

I would like to acknowledge Traditional Custodians of the Land on which we stand. I would also like to pay respect to the Elders both past and present and extend that respect to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples present here.

Ladies and gentlemen, I was delighted to be invited to address recipients of the Australia Awards – both the graduating cohort and the new award recipients – at today's event. I'd like to thank the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade for extending the invitation to speak with you all, to farewell those of you returning home after a productive time in Australia, and to welcome those of you commencing your programs of study in Australia.

Although Australia welcomed international students to its shores well before the Colombo Plan was established, the Colombo Plan is one of the most well-known initiatives of the twentieth century that helped facilitate engagement between Australia and South and Southeast Asia.

The Colombo Plan was a regional initiative, beginning in 1951, aimed at providing foreign aid to assist the development of newly independent Asian nations, such as India, Indonesia and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka).

A significant proportion of the foreign aid was in the form of scholarships to Britain, Canada, New Zealand and Australia, and thousands of students took advantage of them.

Australia was an enthusiastic supporter of the program and an estimated 18,000 to 20,000 Colombo scholars ventured to Australian universities between 1950 and the mid-1980s.

The first group of Colombo scholars arrived in Sydney in June 1951. The Sydney Morning Herald, dated 22 March 1951, noted that there were six in this very first group of arrivals: from Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), Indonesia, Malaya, and Sarawak. Indonesian, Mr Sumadi was an employee of the Ministry of Information and would study at the New South Wales University of Technology (now UNSW).

Students from Indonesia comprised a significant percentage of Colombo Plan scholars in those early years with numbers of arrivals peaking in 1955/56. Of a total of 675 Colombo Plan scholars in 1955/56, 220 were from Indonesia.

Jemma Purdey (researcher with the Alfred Deakin Research Institute, Deakin Institute) notes that 'To transport them, the Australian Government chartered two aircraft. The first flight carried 117 Indonesian to Sydney, including the 1000th Colombo Plan student.' The remaining group of Indonesian students were flown to Melbourne.

Jemma Purdey goes on to note that the 1000th Colombo student was a 22 year old chemical engineering undergraduate, Entol Soeparman (Sou-pah-man) who would complete his degree at the NSW Institute of Technology (UNSW): 'Prior to its departure [from Jakarta], the delegation led by Soeparman (including one female student only) were given receptions at the Australian Embassy with the [Australian] Minister for External Affairs, R.G. Casey and with President Soekarno at the Presidential Palace. Soeparman, a student at the Bandung Institute of technology was, like many of his fellow students, fresh from working as volunteer at the Bandung Conference of Asian and African nations assisting international press.'

On their return home, many scholars went on to contribute to the economic and social development of their home countries; with some taking up positions of leadership. Well-known Colombo Plan scholars include the Vice-President of Indonesia, Boediono [Boe-di-yono] from 2009 to 2014 who completed an economics degree at the University of Western Australia in 1967; and the Coordinating Minister for Infrastructure and Minister for Transport in Singapore, Khaw Boon Wan who, in 1973, was awarded the Colombo Plan Scholarship from Singapore to study a combined degree program in Engineering and Commerce at the University of Newcastle in Australia. He graduated in 1977.

History shows that many Colombo scholars spoke of their experience in Australia with fondness. Despite some experiences of culture shock and problems of adjustment, they studied hard and participated fully in campus life. Their ties to both Australia and their Australian institutions remained strong even after the scholars returned home.

However, the Colombo scholars were not the only students to benefit from the program. Australian students benefited as well. Colombo scholars enriched the cultural and social experiences of Australian students at the time.

The scheme provided many opportunities: for the building of bridges between East and West; for the development of people-to-people links; and for the growth of life-long friendships with their Australian colleagues that continued well after the Colombo scholars returned to their home countries.

As recipients of the Australia Awards, and a part of a much larger group of international students, you are in essence the successors to this first group of scholars and 'bridge-builders'.

The Australian government remains committed to international education. The recently released National Strategy for International Education 2025 sets out a 10 year plan for expansion and improvement while ensuring that the needs of students, business and industry are met.

You've already heard from the Director, of StudyNSW, Peter Mackey, about some of the initiatives set in place by the NSW government body dedicated to support international students in NSW, including the establishment of an International Student Welcome Desk at Sydney Airport and the creation of student-facing website.

The annual International Student Awards, another StudyNSW initiative, recognises and celebrates the contributions that international students make to the wider communities. In 2015, Marina Khan, a student from the institution that I represent, Western Sydney University was a finalist for this award and was recognised for her role in establishing the Western Sydney University International Student Club and for campaigning for refugee rights.

Over 60 years, universities have been at the vanguard of Australia's global engagement efforts, building enormous reserves of cultural capability and competency and developing rich institutional and people-to-people links. Inbound mobility schemes, like the Australia Awards scheme and the Colombo Plan before it, as well as outbound mobility programs, such as the New Colombo Plan, have played an integral role in advancing these objectives.

Educational institutions, however, also have a responsibility to their students. In an increasingly globalised world, universities and TAFEs alike must now not only provide education and vocational training, but they must also foster their students to be global citizens. Put simply, they must now prepare all their students for careers that can take them anywhere in the world, be it Jakarta, Manila, New York or Kinshasa.

To do this successfully, they must ensure their students are exposed to a multitude of worldviews and mindsets. And this is accomplished in a number of different ways: through increased international research collaborations, offering curricula that addresses global issues; embedding work experience into the education experience; and by encouraging cultural exchange through mobility, both inbound and outbound. As Australia Award scholars and as international students, you play an important role in helping universities achieve their goal of developing and fostering global citizens. International students enrich our student community in providing cross-cultural experiences and opportunities for our Australian students to form friendships and build an understanding of other cultures. They add a greater degree of diversity to our campuses, bringing a multicultural lens to the learning environment.

And nor is this a one-way exchange. As members of a broader student community, whether at a university or TAFE, these same cross-cultural experiences and opportunities to gain a world perspective are available to our international student cohorts as well. This is a part of the student experience for all our students, be they international and domestic.

To those of you here today who we are here to farewell, I would like to congratulate you on your achievements so far. You not only have the distinction of being the recipient of a prestigious award but of being the young leaders of the future. Like the Colombo scholars of 65 years ago, the experiences and skills that you have acquired during your time in Australia will equip you well for the contributions that you will now go on to make in your home country. I look forward to hearing more about your successes in the future.

I urge you, however, to maintain those links that you have established in your time in Australia. Stay in touch with your Australia Award colleagues and of course with your institutions, through the various alumni networks that are offered.

To those of you here today who we are welcoming, I would encourage to make the most of your time in Australia. Take advantage of all available opportunities. University life is not all about studying. To succeed, it is important to find a balance between study and extracurricular activities.

So get involved in sport and social activities to experience student life to the fullest.

Studying abroad is an exciting and challenging experience. Your study experience in Australia will be enriched through the exposure to a different teaching style and environment. The teaching styles you will encounter and the study techniques required might be very different from what you are used to in your home country. Make use of the support services that are provided in order to achieve your academic goals.

Most importantly, though, take the time to make friends. These friends will be a wonderful support to you as you settle into life here. I understand that a part of today's proceedings includes the opportunity to network. Speak with your graduating colleagues about their experiences; and start building those links I spoke about earlier.

To conclude, I would like to share the experience of a past Australia Award scholar from Western Sydney University which captures the spirit of a successful student experience.

Luh Micke Anggraini, from Indonesia, undertook a PhD in Tourism with the Institute for Culture and Society, Western Sydney University between 2012 and 2014.

While at Western Sydney, Micke, as he was known, made the most of his time and threw himself into campus life. He said: 'It has been a fun uni life for me joining [university] events, tours, BBQs etc. I also founded the Indonesian Students Association at WSU and became the first club president for 2012-2013 to promote Indonesian culture as well as to establish networks with campus communities...I found this experience important for my personal development, by fostering leadership and networking capability while pursuing my doctorate degree...'

Apart from these extracurricular activities, Micke also noted the academic expertise and support services he had access to as well as the opportunities to present his

research at a range of Australian and international conferences. He said that in the four years in Australia, Western Sydney University had a big impact on his life. Micke returned to Indonesia in mid-2014 and is currently working at the Ministry of Tourism and lectures at the Bali Tourism Institute.

Thank you.