Careers in Asian Studies: Pathways, Challenges and Success

With an increasing focus on the global economy, employers will increasingly be looking for global competencies among graduates. These include:

- Inter-cultural knowledge and sensitivity (understanding of and a drive to learn about other cultures)
- Global mindset and strategic thinking – awareness of cultural diversity and ability to think laterally and handle ambiguity.
- Self-awareness and Emotional Intelligence (EI)
- Adaptability and the ability to work effectively in real-world and virtual global teams.

A degree in Asian Studies offers a strong foundation in developing such competencies.

Furthermore, with high levels of future economic growth anticipated specifically within the Asia Pacific region, majoring in Asian Studies opens the door to opportunities neighbouring Australia as well as within the region. For instance, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade recently revealed that trade with China, Japan and South Korea accounts for as much as 40% of our total two-way international trade in goods and services – a figure that is anticipated to increase. Furthermore, Australia has now opened its largest embassy in Jakarta, indicating the importance of diplomatic and economic relations anticipated with Indonesia.

Studying at Murdoch offers you the unique opportunity to progress your studies with support from researchers based at the Asia Research Centre on the South Street Campus. The Centre is renowned as an international leader in the study of East and Southeast Asia, undertaking research examining a range of social, political, historical, environmental and economic forces and developments within the region.

Murdoch also collaborates with a number of partner Universities in the Asian region, which enables students to gain experience by taking up in-country study and internships as part of their Asian Studies major.

Where you take your degree is largely up to you. Engaging in your career before you graduate and creating the right university experience for you, is an important step in this process.

Engage in your career before you graduate

Some of the ways you can create a more meaningful experience at university and impress future employers include:

- Participate in multi-discipline team competitions that focus on problem solving and collaboration (useful employability skills).
- Be a strategic volunteer – the Murdoch Volunteering Hub is a useful resource for ideas on where to gain relevant experience. NOTE: you can also graduate with a “Community and Career Skills Development Transcript”.
- Contact The Volunteering Hub via email: volunteering@the-guild.com.au or phone: 08 9360 6307
- Join relevant student clubs/associations. If there isn't one, create one! The Student Guild is most helpful with this. They even provide training.
- Apply for Student Leadership (e.g. MSEL), Peer Mentor and/or Tutor opportunities.
- Consider a second major or minor to complement your Asian Studies qualification, offering additional competencies/skill sets in areas of interest such as: Business, Community Development, Politics and International Studies, Tourism and Events, Asian Languages (Indonesian or Japanese) or International Aid and Development.

Some of the ways you can create a more meaningful experience at university and impress future employers include:

- Seeking out overseas industry internships such as the Development Studies Professional Practicum in Indonesia (intensive Indonesian language classes, lectures on Indonesian development issues and a 4 week supervised internship with local and international NGOs), or the semester-long Development Studies Immersion Program in Indonesia, are options available through the ACICIS program. Scholarships are available and these courses can be taken for academic credit. For more information head to www.acicis.murdoch.edu.au
- Consider a short or longer-term Study Abroad/Exchange experience – time spent studying overseas is well regarded by employers and recognised as enhancing a student’s future employability in terms of developing resilience, independence, initiative, communication, adaptability, flexibility and intercultural skills. The Asian Studies 12-point Semesters in Indonesia and Japan offer this exceptional opportunity to gain experience in the region.
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Asian Studies is a versatile Arts degree. Some common job titles or roles (which may require additional competencies/skill sets) include, but are not limited to:

- Community Development Officer
- Diplomat
- International Development Consultant
- Commercial Liaison / Trade Advisor
- Exchange/ Study Abroad Program Co-coordinator
- Foreign Affairs Policy Officer
- International Student Support Officer
- Multi-cultural Events Promoter/ Organiser
- International Business Consultant / Strategic Analyst
- International Volunteering Program Coordinator
- Lecturer/ Trainer
- Translator
- Language Teacher
- Research Project Officer
- Tourism Operator
- Think Tank participant

To help launch your career, you may wish to also consider applying for multi-disciplinary Graduate Programs from the beginning of your final year. Employers offering Graduate Programs are keen to develop recent graduates and are often looking at your general skill set. Therefore detailing what skills you have developed throughout your university experience is an important feature on your resume. Some of the skills to promote to employers include:

- **Cross Cultural competency skills** - studies in language and/or culture enable Asian Studies graduates to interpret and respond with appropriate skills in cross-cultural situations that require sophisticated and sensitive engagement within business and the wider community settings.

- **Communication skills** – through essay writing, oral presentations and group work, Asian Studies graduates are able to integrate complex information and communicate it concisely both orally and in written form. Highlighting any language proficiencies is also helpful.

- **Critical Thinking skills** – a degree in Asian Studies requires you to critique a lot of information - question the written word, its source and validity. Graduates have therefore learnt to understand a range of social, political, historical, environmental and economic issues in context and see the limitations of an argument.

- **Analytical / Problem Solving** – Asian Studies students learn to break ideas and issues down into their component parts, isolate problems and attempt to understand why these problems occurred. You also develop the ability to think outside the square and come up with creative and innovative ideas and solutions.

- **Research skills** – Asian Studies students spend considerable time researching a large number of primary and secondary resources to create a clear argument. Being able to quickly and skilfully navigate the tangled web of information to be found online can be a useful skill employers look for.

Make the most of your time at university and the versatility of your Asian Studies degree. There are a number of fulfilling career pathways in policy, business, education and international development, just to name a few. Remember that careers are dynamic – they evolve along with your life experiences and you have the ability to make yours meaningful through active engagement in the world around you (both locally and internationally), strategic volunteering and being open to opportunity.