

Center For Sustainable Educational Development

At Lembaga Pendidikan UniSadhuGuna

A LOST OPPORTUNITY

Introduction

This paper analyses the person to person “relationship strength” resulting from Australia’s substantial commitment to the International Student Program. It is our opinion that this program has been important, and has built some bridges, but we believe it is nowhere near as strong it should be. We feel it has not built a passion (or compassion) for the Australian people. This lack of passion for Australia is contrasted to that often evident in Indonesian students who study in Holland, and some other countries – where students return with a great feeling of warmth and affection from their experience. Dr Nirwan Idrus, of the Indonesian Institute of Management (IPMI) has written

- “We must accept that there are fundamental differences in the perceptions of Indonesians about Holland and Australia. Although Indonesia was raped and rampaged by the Dutch for 350 years, the people were discriminated against (particularly in terms of education!), Indonesians generally, and quite regrettably also those in power (in the past and now) still look at Holland and the Dutch with some reverence, awe and respect. A sort of attitude that no one can really explain. Having the benefit of exposure to both Dutch (my parents were Dutch educated in Indonesia – i.e. not sent to Holland) and British (Australian) education systems, approaches etc. I would expect Indonesians to be extremely upset, disappointed and angry with the Dutch who taught them nothing and in fact some analyses would even venture to say, who deliberately hid education from Indonesians. But facts are facts, I suppose. So despite all these, Indonesians generally and again those in power, are certainly still kow-towing to the Dutch. Inexplicable really.
- In my opinion, Indonesians should really be grateful to Australia, for without Australia’s strong support in the late 40’s (against the Dutch, mind you) the Republic of Indonesia itself may not exist. ALP’s protagonists such as Jim Cairns and his peers were so responsible for freeing Indonesia from the Dutch. The same thing in 1963 when West Irian/Irian Jaya/Papua was annexed into Indonesia. I believe, this is where Australians should start analyzing or looking for the reasons why Indonesians do not look at Australia as both a friend and supporter. Australia had been a very strong supporter for Indonesia’s independent existence.
- Recent events, East Timor in particular, had created the sort of animosity between the two countries. But at the recent launch of the BIES CD ROM at CSIS , it was (at least for me) pleasing to learn that the late Prof Heinz Arndt of ANU and others of his peer and later his students had maintained a very close relationship with Indonesia and Indonesian power elites. Pak Boediono, the current Minister of Finance, is a graduate of ANU’s – and surprise surprise I did not know that!!! He was only able to praise what Prof Arndt did for him and family while in Canberra. Thus the personal ties and closeness would not be different from one that an Indonesian would develop with his/her Dutch professors either. I am sure there are other similar stories. How do we capitalize on these?”

The Objective of this Paper

The purpose of this paper is to set down details of problems in the International Student Program, and suggest solutions. The potential “goodwill value” of the Australian Governments intention in embracing international students is enormous, but we believe it is not achieving maximum potential, and it is affecting Post Graduate enrolment in Australian courses ie those who are “not converted” in heart and mind do not consider returning.

Who are we to draw this conclusion? Lembaga Pendidikan **UniSadhuGuna (USG)** (refer our Profile Document) is an NGO whose aim is the development of quality education in Indonesia through facilitation of private investment in education and the subsequent control and QA of the management and progress of the ventures created. USG carries out a major Australian Universities Foundation Studies program (Uniprep) in Jakarta, acts as a counseling/recruitment agent for five Australian Universities, and has been involved in many University Post Graduate Scholarship Projects (AusAID, ADB, AUSAID). USG also manages a very large English Language / Training institution, The British Institute, in 5 locations in 3 cities in Indonesia, employing 45 Expats and having over 5,000 students. In total USG has sent over 1,000 students to study in Australia over the last 7 years. USG has substantial consultant networks in Higher Education through our work with 8 Universities in Australia. We and our counselors have talked to hundreds of “returned” students. The Centre for Sustainable Educational Development, is a new part of the NGO and hopes contributes to Research and Development in relation to educational development in Indonesia and the region. This is its first Discussion Paper.

PERCEIVED PROBLEMS WITH THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT PROGRAM THAT AFFECTS ITS IMPACT ON PERSON-TO-PERSON RELATIONSHIPS

- Many Institutions view International Students like a commodity - they must be "produced" at the lowest average cost. With Government budget allocation cuts this has become worse over the last 4 years, particularly since the revenue from international student fees has become a vital source of “replacement funding” for non-international student activities. As a corollary to this Indonesian parents (mostly Chinese Indonesians) are often commercially oriented people who can be seen as customers seeking to buy high quality, brand value education for their children. The result however is that the interplay of this conjoint commercial outlook leads to the situation where person to person relationships can easily be viewed by both sides as unimportant.

The Australian government, as its Prime Minister stated in Jakarta in February 2002, expects and hopes for positive relationships to blossom, but currently none of the controlling/supervising entities in Australia play a role in nurturing this vital element of the International student program. Social budget initiatives (as distinct from logistical) in the universities, needed to build goodwill between International and Australian students, are usually pitifully small as a percentage of gross student revenue, since it is not seen as a major requirement.

- Some Indonesian parents see the benefit of relationship building, but to many it is a low priority, to the purchase of a brand name, and technical skill training. This is especially true

of Chinese Indonesians who make up about 90% of the student population in Australia from Indonesia.

- Very few senior University Faculty Administrators have any idea about Asian cultural values often creating barriers to social assimilation. Academic staff are not adequately trained to deal with Asian students. When tasks are to be done in tutorials, less visionary, or lazy Faculty staff are comfortable to let Asians group together. It is then harder for Asian students to form friendships with Australian classmates.
- The first months at an institution are critical. Students are naturally very apprehensive (and perhaps even more so post September 11), and when they have very little friendly interaction with the general student body this does not help the building of friendships and emotional attachment. Postgraduate students are often even harder to get to interact with Australians, and since social budgets for building bridges with their Australian colleagues are dominated by UG activities little money is available/spent.
- A serious antagonism to Asian students has developed on some campuses – Indonesians have overheard comments by Australians of resentment, eg. that they have to wait behind Asian students for library service. As international student numbers on campuses such as the main Campus at Monash Clayton, Melbourne University and UNSW Kensington grow, this has worsened. The bigger more popular Institutions are raising entry standards in the traditionally popular courses so as to reduce the number of Internationals in some Campuses.
- An exacerbating factor is the immigration department' (in-situ) treatment of wealthy parents or relatives wanting to visit their sons or daughters. Getting a tourist visa is not easy – especially if one of the family does not meet all the “monetary” criteria (eg a non-rich uncle!). Where a parent has paid most of his money on sending his children to study and has not had \$US5,000 in the bank for 3 months he does not comply – he and the student lose great faith in Australia. Immigration also shows no judgement in relation to past history. Every time a parent (often a wealthy influential person) applies for a visa they go through the same rigmarole. It would seem logical that if they have visited Australia a number of times and returned after spending thousands of dollars in the local economy Australia should not insult them by moronic procedural requirements every time they apply to visit Australia.
- There have been some obtuse visa rules for students wishing to study in Australia – for example the rule that prohibited Foundation Studies students studying in Indonesia from applying for pre processing of 2 types of student visa (ie you must apply for University or TAFE not two separate applications) upsets our students trying to study in Australia. This is because should they then not make the grade for University selection they lose six months of time before they can apply and enter TAFE the natural (and former) alternative for lower performing students. Whereas this only affects 5% of our graduates it seems to reflect a rule that is designed for administrative convenience rather than having any basis in common sense
- There appears to be no published benchmarks for turn around time in respect to visa applications to the Dept of Immigration representatives in Embassies. Even the Indonesian Consulate sets and makes known the time for processing a visa. There are no such customer service imperatives evident at the Australian Embassy. Having said this the performance of the Australian Embassy Immigration Section in Indonesia in year 2002 showed a marked improvement in flexibility and turn around time for student visas

- The commitment of Institutions to linking with International Alumni in a real way is patchy to say the least. The interesting phenomena is that the big 8 universities where the most Internationals enroll are in most cases the worst service providers to international alumni. This is worsened by the lack of any significant State or Federal spending on this “after sales service”. It is surprising that the various tourist commissions have not realized the niche market opportunities that exist through this aspect of the foreign market.
- An interesting and disturbing development of recent times is the entry of some Australian State high schools into the secondary education market for recruiting international students - the performance of these State schools is patchy to say the least. There are often no specially trained staff to manage these students from arrival to start, to introduce them culturally to the Australian way of life, and to look after them with special language support and pastoral care - at least the Tertiary institutions are fairly good at these processes! Teaching staff allocated the job of managing the "internationals" are often stressed because of teaching load and the difficulty of managing young foreign students.
- The post September 11 ‘fallout’ in Australia is a greater fear of foreign students – in fact a new phenomenon unfolding at International airports in Australia exhibits this paranoia on a institutional level already – Immigration officials have started random ‘grilling’ of incoming people who are first time arrivals in the country- regardless that they have a valid visa. The author has witnessed this on a number of occasions in the last 2 months, and it will happen to students and parents arriving to Australia. It is hardly a good start to the relationship!
- The AEI Office in Jakarta has a very small promotional budget, and despite the exceptional efforts of people like Catherine Campbell & Shirley Hadji, and their predecessors, the good work that the Australian Government does through supporting ADS scholars, and other AusAID sponsored special training programs, is in our opinion very poorly promoted in the mass media. There are some great success stories post scholarship that could be portrayed in advertorials in print and electronic media. It is the old story - it is good to be good but you must also be seen to be good in PR matters.

SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

1. Undertake a study in Indonesia and Malaysia to interview the many recent returning students to establish information about the “experiences and feelings“ retained by them on return to Indonesia. This information would allow social analysis by your many experts in this area. The study should involve students who studied in Europe in order to compare responses to Australian based students. There should also be comparison of Chinese Indonesian / Malaysian views and those of Pri-Bumi Indonesians and Malaysians. There is incidental evidence that Australia would attract a lot more Pri-Bumi students if it were not for a cultural social religious gap between the societies. Such a study could conjointly analyze this situation.
2. Look at designing quality “social guidelines” for Universities, measuring effectiveness by creating quantitative measures of “social experience” and rapport with Australians. Require the Universities to submit plans (for each intake of international students) of what will be done and spent to comply with a ”quality social guidelines” for international students. This should include ongoing social “selling”/integration programs for the length of their stay in the University
3. Ask the Indonesian Government to introduce a "guideline for International Students" that asks them to become Ambassadors for their country, and for themselves, by forming friendships and gaining an understanding of Australian people. Show even - handedness

- in this regard by requiring Australian Universities to have, as part of their introduction to first year Australian students, a session and handout on “Why your University is internationally focused, and how you can benefit from this by being an ambassador for Australia and yourselves”
4. Introduce sessions for Students (and Parents of incoming students to Australia) that prepare the students for this Ambassadorial role on behalf of Indonesia and themselves. These sessions should outline why it is important for students to mix and make friends with Australians. These sessions should not be done by the Embassy, but by contracted experienced Indonesian student Counseling groups.
 5. Require Institutions to train their staff in Asian values (eg. loss of face and shyness etc), and in how to assist students to socially interact with Australians.
 6. Try to encourage more positive reporting about Indonesia in the press (including the ABC) This place certainly has its problems and dangers, but Australians and Australian students only ever see bad news stories about Indonesia – there are newsworthy, and entertaining stories that show many positives in Indonesia.
 7. In respect to Post Graduate students, Universities can fund visits by students to social events, but on the basis that Australian participants join in also.
 8. Do something about the Department of Immigrations lack of judgement about family members of students visiting them, and set standards for processing visas in January/February at the Jakarta Embassy. Review the paranoia process for first time incoming students and parents. If a parent has already visited a student and returned, make subsequent visa applications easy – just do it!
 9. Institute Federal and States funded initiatives into the niche postgraduate alumni market that fosters tourism, business investment, and helps organizations like IKAMA in Indonesia, to be more effective. Implement a quality measure in relation to the “social guidelines” that enervates the Universities to spend money on social & professional linking with their Alumni.
 10. Double the promotional budget of the AEI in Jakarta, but direct the increase at selling what the Australian Government does now in terms of education and training support, as well as telling the story of how Australia has supported Indonesia from Independence through to the present day.
 11. Institute similar controls as in 1-8 above for State secondary schools running international programs

CONCLUSION

The situation where Indonesian students return with a less than hoped for empathy with Australia, is symptomatic of a number of factors, most of which are outlined above. The fact that Indonesians show a greater empathy with Holland compared with Australia is probably more to do with the fact that Indonesians have long respected strong father figures i.e. Holland, over new young friends, although the factors set out above show that Australia needs to stress its historical and continued support of Indonesia. The Authors believe that the Australian International Student Program should be much more than a massive export earner for Australia, and that the fact that it may not be reaching its potential, is a significant lost opportunity for all participants. We therefore hope that all participants in the Program will seriously review some of the suggestions provided in this paper.

**Robert J. Cochrane
Director
2 July 2002**