

September 21, 2020

This is an open letter to the President, Provost, and Dean of Arts, calling for action to keep the University of Alberta's Department of East Asian Studies (EASIA) as an independent department in the face of the Faculty of Arts Academic Restructuring Initiative.

Firstly, we acknowledge all the graduated, current, and prospective students of EASIA who chose this department among more than two hundred undergraduate programs and over five hundred graduate programs. Having made illustrious advancements independently since 1981, we believe that if EASIA were to merge with another department, the students it represents would lose a sense of identity and representation.

We understand that the University of Alberta is suffering major budget cuts, and an academic restructuring is the last option to save millions of dollars. At the same time, our position to keep EASIA independent is in line with the University of Alberta's commitment to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.

The department's independence is closely related to the identity of thousands of East Asian students on campus. With the departure of EASIA comes the departure of KGK: East Asian Studies Undergraduate Students Association (KGK). This department association represents not just the students taking classes in East Asian Studies, but also all the students from East Asian countries. Last year, over 3300 international students from East Asia enrolled at the University of Alberta. The KGK creates a safe and welcoming environment for students who may feel alone and unsure. They can receive guidance and support from domestic students hailing from all disciplines. Through various cultural events throughout the year that attract hundreds of people, conversation clubs, and more, the KGK has promoted cross-cultural exchange unlike any other association on campus. Collapsing EASIA with another department will also, by extension, collapse the KGK, leaving thousands of students without representation and a place they can express their cultural identity.

Furthermore, considering the sheer number of students studying the historically more powerful West, East Asian Studies will no doubt be eclipsed in a merger. By keeping this department alive, we are advocating for the study and celebration of cultures, especially those who represent a visible minority on campus. We would also like to note that many departments in the Faculty of Arts are significantly larger than EASIA. The Modern Languages and Cultural Studies Department (MLCS), for example, is roughly three times larger than EASIA. If EASIA were to merge with a larger department, our ATS and professors would be underrepresented and prone to being outvoted in department and council meetings. We believe in order to maintain autonomy over major program decisions and course offerings, it is imperative that EASIA remain an independent department.

With regards to its academic features in the university, EASIA has a variety of courses to offer, including the culture, history, and language of East Asia. Whereas a majority of courses in the Faculty of Arts focus almost exclusively on Western cultures like North America, Latin America, and Europe, EASIA has the benefit of focusing on East Asian culture, which we feel is not represented enough on campus. Our department promotes global education both as a program and as a virtue — a virtue we feel is only becoming more crucial with the need for cross-cultural understanding and the rise of multiculturalism within the workforce.

A merger with another department may also endanger funding opportunities from government-funded organizations like The China Institute, Prince Takamado Japan Centre for Teaching and Research, and the Consulate General of the Republic of Korea in Vancouver. After all, EASIA also acts as a figurehead for the University's East Asian populace and research, making it a prominent target for such funders and sponsors. Historically, when the Faculty of Arts put out a plan to merge EASIA with MLCS in 2019, the Korea Foundation and Consulate General of the Republic of Korea in Vancouver actively voiced their opposition to the idea. These organizations help fund scholarships, travel abroad programs, faculty positions, Graduate Teaching and Research Assistantships, and other aspects within EASIA. Students who would benefit from these supports, including those outside the Faculty of Arts, would no longer have those supports available to them. Also in 2019, EASIA and the China Institute provided financial support to 46 University of Alberta students who attended the Summer in Harbin China program.

Considering that only 30% of those students were from the Faculty of Arts, a merger would mean that many students, within or outside the department, would be victim to this loss of funding.

Listed below are universities that have East Asian Studies as a separate department; these universities understand that the courses offered by EASIA cannot be simplified into another department. It is imperative that, as a university with aspirations to achieve, we recognize this fact and stand by it.

We urge on behalf of all the students enrolled in EASIA and thousands more students from East Asian countries for an independent EASIA.

Sincerely,

The Undersigned Students and Alumni of the University of Alberta

<http://tiny.cc/signedeasia>

Universities that have East Asian Studies as a independent department

Australia

Australian National University
The University of Western Australia

Austria

University of Vienna

Czech Republic

Charles University in Prague
Palacký University of Olomouc
Masaryk University

Canada

McGill University
Simon Fraser University
University of Alberta
University of British Columbia
University of Calgary
Université de Montréal
University of Toronto
University of Victoria
University of Waterloo
University of Western Ontario
York University

France

INALCO
Jean Moulin University Lyon 3
Univertié de Paris
School for Advanced Studies in the
Social Sciences

Germany

Poland

Jagiellonian University

Slovakia

Comenius University in Bratislava

Singapore

National University of Singapore

Spain

Autonomous University of Barcelona
Autonomous University of Madrid
University of Málaga
University of Salamanca
University of Seville

Sweden

Lund University

Thailand

Chulalongkorn University
Thammasat University

United Kingdom

University of Bristol
University of Cambridge
University of Edinburgh
University of Kent
University of Leeds
University of Manchester
University of Nottingham
University of Oxford
University of Sheffield

United States

	Ruhr University Bochum	Brown University
	University of Cologne	Brigham Young University
	University of Heidelberg	Columbia University
	University of Duisburg-Essen	Cornell University
Hong Kong		Duke University
	Chinese University of Hong Kong	Georgetown University
	City University of Hong Kong	Harvard University
Finland		Florida International University
	University of Turku	Indiana University Bloomington
	University of Helsinki	Michigan State University
India		New York University
	University of Delhi	Ohio State University
	Jawaharlal Nehru University	Princeton University
Iran		Rutgers University
	University of Tehran	St. John's University
Italy		Stanford University
	Ca' Foscari University of Venice	University of California, Berkeley
	Università degli Studi di Napoli	University of California, Los Angeles
	"L'Orientale"	University of California, Santa
	Sapienza University of Rome	Barbara
Japan		University of Chicago
	Waseda University	University of Hawaii at Manoa
	Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University	University of Illinois at
Taiwan		Urbana–Champaign
	National Chengchi University	University of Iowa
Republic of Korea		University of Kansas
	Sungkyunkwan University	University of Michigan
	Sogang University	University of Minnesota
	Korea University	University of Oregon
	Seoul National University	University of Pennsylvania

Yonsei University
Lithuania
Vytautas Magnus University
Macau
University of Macau
Malaysia
University of Malaya

University of Rochester
University of Southern California
University of Utah
University of Virginia
University of Washington
University of Wisconsin–Madison
Yale University