

PhD Research Scholarship Opportunity at National University of Singapore

Governing Compound Disasters in Urbanizing Asia

With a pronounced pattern of shifting populations to expanding mega-urban regions, including in coastal zones, urbanization in Asia is placing people in areas that are most susceptible to threats posed by many hazards, including sea rise, extreme weather events, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes and tsunami. Environmental disasters arise from the interplay of complex society-nature relationships that go beyond the particular moment of impact of an environmental hazard. These relationships often take the form of compound disasters that are manifested as a series of cascading event that go well beyond an initial trigger and can continue for very long periods of time. Three dimensions of compound disasters are of particular interest in here: (a) disasters that generate a series of subsequent disasters; (b) more localized impacts such as flooding leading to evictions, loss of community and livelihoods, or, at a city scale, the acceleration of the decline of an already troubled urban economy; (c) extensive ripple effects that spread through global supply chains and economic networks beyond a specific disaster site to impact even the world economy.

Urbanization and compound disasters are two key factors that provide compelling reasons for going beyond treating disasters as management problems to be solved by experts operating outside of public purview. Both show how disasters invariably involve social, political and economic relations extending beyond a single event. For these reasons, a governance approach to disasters is adopted in this research program to signal that disaster mitigation and recovery involve such questions as whose knowledge is privileged, how vulnerability is defined and by whom, and what tools are to be used in crafting policies. Mainstream sector-based management approaches obscure the history and sociology of knowledge such as the influence of personalized power-relations in disaster preparedness agendas, recovery programs and development priorities.

In accepting that environmental disasters occur in political space, invoking the concept of governance makes both epistemological and practical contributions to disaster research. Epistemologically, it complements a multi-disciplinary research approach by drawing upon different research skills, ranging from ethnographic tools to quantitative modelling, to bring various forms of knowledge to bear on disaster events and aftermaths. From a practical point of view, a disaster as a question of governance speaks to the relationships between voice and knowledge, namely, that in many cases people with even generations of cumulative knowledge and know-how remain invisible in disaster preparedness and response because disasters are presumed to require professionalized technical decision making alone rather than engaging professionals in public discourse and inclusive decision-making with people of have other experiential forms of knowledge.

With an ideal start date of 1 January 2016, **one Research Scholarship (RS) is available in the Department of Geography at the National University of Singapore (NUS) for prospective PhD students interested in completing research on disaster governance and urbanization in Asia.** The RS linked directly to the *Governing Compound Disasters in Urbanizing Asia* project, based at the Asia Research Institute (ARI). The RS covers four years of full-time study (fees and maintenance). Additional funds are also available to cover fieldwork and conference attendance. The end-date of the award will be the fourth year of study. The scholarship is targeted for applicants who have basic training and skills in the following areas and will continue to focus on these topics in their PhD programmes:

- **Environmental disaster**
- **Governance and public policy**
- **Urban planning**

Department of Geography & ARI at NUS

The QS World University rankings (2014) place NUS in the top 25 universities in the world and number one in Asia. In the same rankings, and for the third year running, the Department of Geography, NUS (<http://www.fas.nus.edu.sg/geog/>), is ranked in the top ten Geography programmes globally. ARI (<http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/>) was established as a university-level institute in July 2001 as one of the strategic initiatives of the NUS. The mission of the Institute is to provide a world-class focus and resource for research on the Asian region, located at one of its communication hubs.

Application procedure

Graduate research students in the Department of Geography follow a semi-structured programme that involves a taught component in the first two years of registration. The programme allows a PhD student to acquire and develop to a high standard both subject-specific and transferable skills, thus enabling a student to access a broad range of future employment opportunities – in business, industry, consultancy, education, research etc.

Please note that the application deadline (for a January 2016 start) is **15 September 2015**. For further information, please contact in the first instance Professor David Taylor (email david.taylor@nus.edu.sg) and/or Professor Mike Douglass (email: arimike@nus.edu.sg).

Applicants must be university graduates with at least an upper second class honours degree or equivalent and at the time of the award of the Research Scholarship. Applications from candidates who also already hold a graduate degree (e.g. Masters) are particularly welcome. There is no restriction on the nationality of applicants.

Please note that all applications must include a **Statement of Purpose**. Details are at: <http://www.fas.nus.edu.sg/geog/graduates/application.html> Essentially the Statement of Purpose places less emphasis on the “Research Proposal” and more on the ability of an applicant at the application stage to write concisely, precisely and with effect. The underpinning assumption is that the successful applicants will spend much of their first year as a PhD student in the Department developing their PhD research proposal, as part of the Qualifying Exam (Q/E), linked to the aims and objectives of the larger *Governing Compound Disasters in Urbanizing Asia* project. Applications will be assessed against the following criteria:

- The quality of their Statement of Purpose
- Academic performance as evident in the grades received in the completed Undergraduate and Graduate programmes
- Demonstrable evidence of capacity to carry out independent research and present complex ideas in English
- Potential to pursue a career in advanced research as demonstrated in the Statement of Purpose

Interested applicants should in the first instance email Ms Pauline Lee (geoleep@nus.edu.sg) to request an application form to complete. Please indicate in your email to Ms Lee that you are interested in applying specifically for the “**Governing Compound Disasters in Urbanizing Asia**” scholarship in the Department of Geography/ARI.

Completed applications must be received by 15 September 2015

Applicants may be asked to appear for interview (including over SKYPE).