

## **Trends in African Studies in Australia and New Zealand**

**Tanya Lyons**

**Flinders University**

**and**

**University of the Free State**

**[Tanya.lyons@flinders.edu.au](mailto:Tanya.lyons@flinders.edu.au)**

### **Abstract**

This paper updates research I began with Elizabeth Dimock back in 2003 specifically for the AFSAAP Conference held in Adelaide, at Flinders University (Lyons and Dimock, 2003; Lyons and Dimock 2007). It was not until 2014 that I was able to update this 2003 data with my colleague Aime Saba (Lyons and Saba, 2015), which also included data from New Zealand's universities, for the AFSAAP Conference held in Dunedin, New Zealand. AFSAAP has supported this data-collection, and since 2011 has conducted a three yearly survey of African Studies scholars, academics, and topics or courses available in Australian and New Zealand Universities (see AFSAAP, 2011; 2014; 2017).

### **Introduction**

In 2003, Lyons and Dimock concluded that "African studies exists in Australian universities because of the dedication of a core group of enthusiastic scholars who have had the opportunity to deliver topics on Africa, and develop research in specific fields of interest in their respective university departments." (Lyons and Dimock, 2003, 2007).

In 2014 Lyons and Saba (2015) demonstrated "that knowledge about Africa in Australia remains limited" and not much had changed in the preceding decade. That was "despite the rapid increases in scholarships offered to Africans; and despite the 'new engagement' with Africa espoused by the former Labor government". The budget cuts to international aid directed towards African issues under the subsequent Liberal Coalition government has clearly not helped this appeal.

Now in 2017, with the assistance of Wanda Warlik, who collected the data for AFSAAP across Australia and New Zealand, we can again confirm this trend. Not much has changed in the university and knowledge sectors, and the handful of African Studies topics available in Australian Universities appears to come down to a dedicated handful of academics, who are able to teach in their field, either one or two undergraduate or postgraduate topics on Africa.

Yet, what this survey reveals is that there are many more academics who have an interest in Africa, and may indeed conduct research in Africa or on issues that affect Africans, but they work in isolation from other Africanists. Speculation on 'why' could lend to the consideration that perhaps the generic attacks within the academy on so-called 'area studies', may play a part in this isolation and invisibility. Area Studies are not recognised as an 'FoR', otherwise known as a 'Field of Research', unlike for example Political Science [FoR code 360100]. Although Africa is listed as a sub-theme under "Historical Studies" (FoR

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code 430100) as “History: Africa” (code 430106), it is not valued in any other stream or discipline, and therefore less likely to attract acknowledgement as research, funding or even workload points.

Another revealing aspect of this survey which reinforces the argument that these scholars work in isolation from other Africanists, is that the majority of these scholars revealed through the AFSAAP (2017) survey of Africanists, are not members of AFSAAP. Further research is needed to ascertain why these interesting yet disparate scholars with an interest in African issues are not connected and networked through this region’s only academic association of scholars interested in African Studies. Could it be that after 40 years of existence, the changing university sector has made such associations impossible or irrelevant?

Nonetheless, as this paper will demonstrate below, there are academics teaching and researching Africa, and thus the role of AFSAAP is far from redundant. Therefore it is important to quantify the numbers and availabilities of African studies researchers and topics in the Australian university sector. This paper will now focus on is what topics are available within the university sector for students to learn more about Africa (See Table 1).

### **African Studies Topics**

In 2017, according to the AFSAAP data collection project (AFSAAP, 2017) and insights from the author, there were only 10 academic staff teaching 16 undergraduate or postgraduate topics with a pure focus on Africa in Australia and/or New Zealand universities (See Table 1). All of the academic staff that appeared in this audit were contacted via email by this author to confirm the availability of their topics in 2017. From this survey it was determined that Victoria is the place to study African issues, with a total of five academic staff involved in teaching seven topics overall (which includes one field trip to Africa, and one field trip to visit the African-Australian community in Victoria).

With at least three academics involved in teaching five topics overall, the University of Melbourne has the most African Studies staff, and the most topics available to choose from (3 Music, 1 Geography, 1 Development Studies). **Graeme Counsel** has taught ‘*African Music and Dance*’, ‘*African Music and Dance Ensemble 1*’, and ‘*African Music and Dance Ensemble 2*’ since 2014, and these have been previously offered since mid-2000 by other teaching staff (See Table 1). According to Counsel, “They are the only subjects devoted to the study of African music offered in Australia” (Counsel, 2017, *personal correspondence*). **Simon Batterbury** has taught ‘*Africa: Environment, Development, People*’ at The University of Melbourne “continuously since 2005” (Batterbury, 2017, *personal correspondence*), however since 2017 it is now being taught by **Peter Boateng**. According to Boateng his topic has been popular, with between 130-170 enrolments (so it’s not as if students are uninterested in Africa given the choice). The topic examines current issues on the African continent, and he also -

organised a seminal fieldtrip to an area where many African migrants have settled [in Victoria]. We had a panel discussion with invited speakers from various demographic and cultural groups of Africans, the Victorian Multicultural Commission, and other relevant organisations (Boateng 2017, *Personal Correspondence*).

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Furthermore, at The University of Melbourne, at the postgraduate level, there is one topic offered entitled '*Politics and Contested Development: Africa*'. In 2017 the convener was **Rachel Diprose**.

Since 2002, La Trobe University has offered a topic called '*African Archeology*' in alternate years, but according to the current topic convener **Nicola Stern**, it has not been held since 2015 (Stern, 2017, *Personal Correspondence*). Nonetheless, her colleague **Andy Herries** has been able to offer two unique field trip experiences to South Africa as part of the Archaeology course at La Trobe University. 'Australian-South African Geoarchaeological and Paleoanthropological Field School at the Drimolen hominin site', has been available since 2013, although it was not offered in 2017, it will return in 2018. "It has the equivalent of a full 12 week teaching load specifically on the Human Evolution and Archaeology of South Africa" (Herries, 2017, *Personal Correspondence*). The opportunity to attend a field trip to the Amanzi Springs Palaeolithic Site (February annually), South Africa "ran in May 2017 and we are there again in Nov 2017 with both Australian and South African students" (Herries, 2017, *Personal Correspondence*). This is the first year that Herries has taught this.

Victoria University offers just one topic '*Contemporary Africa and Social Change*', taught by **Charles Mphande**, and this has been available (according to their website) at least since the AFSAAP data collection began in 2011.

However, the Victorians aren't all perfect! RMIT has previously offered one topic entitled '*Contemporary Africa*' which was last taught between 2011 and 2014 by **Jonathan Makuwira**. However, it has not been offered since he left the university to take up a post as the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Malawi University of Science and Technology. There are plans to offer it in the future, so it has remained on RMIT's books, however, for the purpose of this audit it was not available in this period of 2017.

The University of Western Australia, closest of all universities in this region to Africa, and home to the Africa Research Cluster (see [http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/research/clusters/Africa\\_Research](http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/research/clusters/Africa_Research)), boasts only two academic staff, teaching between them one History topic (an Introduction to African Politics, taught by **Jeremy Martens**), and two Politics topics (taught by **David Mickler** 'The International Politics of Africa', at third year undergraduate level, and another one at Masters level, 'Peace and Security in Africa'). Indeed, the UWA's Masters in International Development promotes "Africa-related content and experts", and yet out of the topics required in this degree, only 2 are specifically related to Africa, and they appear to only be elective choices among many - see <https://study.uwa.edu.au/courses/master-of-international-development>. There is another topic available in their Mining course entitled '*Ore Deposit Field Excursion (South Africa)*'. However, this is a technical topic, related only to Africa by the location of the excursion, and will thus not be included statistically in this study.

South Australia, home to the 2017 AFSAAP Executive, offers three topics on African Politics and International Relations at Flinders University. Taught by **this author** (and 2017 AFSAAP President), at second year undergraduate level - '*Africa on a Global Stage*'; at third year undergraduate level - '*Africa: International Interventions*' (now a core topic in the Bachelor of International Relations, rather than a usual elective choice); and '*African Politics: Global Issues*' - taught at the Masters Level. These have been offered for over a

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decade. The University of South Australia has in 2017 cancelled its degree in International Relations, and the academics with potential to teach or supervise on African related themes in this field at least, have been made redundant. Although fortunately Africa is represented at UNISA by Ibrahima Diallo (2017 AFSAAP Secretary) through the teaching of Francophone Africa languages.

At the Australian National University, there is only one topic available directly related to Africa, and that is 'Law and Governance in Africa', taught by **Jolyon Ford**, but only every two years due to low demand. Therefore, it was not offered in 2017. However, it does appear that the UNSW in Canberra (ADFA) will be offering a new postgraduate topic in 2018 entitled History of Post-colonial Warfare in Africa: An Introduction (ZHSS8232). It is not clear who is teaching this yet (see <http://www.handbook.unsw.edu.au/postgraduate/courses/2018/ZHSS8232.html>).

Macquarie University in New South Wales, once boasted a great topic on 'Africa and Globalisation' taught by **Geoffrey Hawker** (former AFSAAP President). However, this topic was last offered in 2014. Hawker is now an Honorary Researcher at Macquarie and enjoying his retirement. This was the only topic offered across NSW related to African Studies directly, for some time. However, UNSW in Sydney now offers a new topic, taught by Anne Bartlett, entitled 'Contemporary Issues in Africa and the Middle East'. 2017 was the first year that this was offered, thus was missed in the original AFSAAP audit. Fortunately, the topic convener attended the 2017 AFSAAP Annual Conference, and made us all aware of her new and exciting topic.

New Zealand offers less opportunity to study Africa, however, at least there are two topics offered at the University of Otago on geography and development in Africa. Taught by **Tony Binns**, he focusses on the 54 African nations in 'Transformations in Developing Countries', and 60 percent of his topic 'Sustaining Rural Livelihoods in Developing Countries' is based on African issues (Tony Binns, 2017, *Personal Correspondence*).

Thus it would seem that the future of African Studies within the university curriculum in Australia remains dependent on the strength of a small core group of academics who are fortunate enough to be able to teach in their areas of expertise, and have not yet fallen foul to the market pressures of the "sausage-making factories" (Bond, 2017).

### **Topics That Mention Africa**

Table 2 below lists those topics available that are either indirectly related to Africa, or contain African case studies as examples or as part of the curriculum. In 2017, there were 26 such topics in Australia and New Zealand, 2 more than when counted in 2011, but 6 less than when counted in 2003. While these numbers may vary only slightly between 2003-2017, it is interesting that students are at least provided an opportunity to focus on an African case study within the broader curriculum or context. What this Table 2 also shows is the ever changing topics within the university sector since 2003, perhaps as academics come and go, perhaps as courses or programs are discontinued or created. However, what remains constant is that there are more topics available that just 'use' African case studies to tell a bigger picture, than actual African Studies topics available. These topics span the academic disciplines, thus confirming the multidisciplinary dimension of African Studies in Australia. Further research

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is needed to examine the issue of Africa being a mere footnote or just a case study in the broader theoretical focus being articulated by the academy.

### **African Studies Researchers**

The AFSAAP Audit also gathered information on the research focus of academics. What this audit revealed (See Table 3 below) was that for the 58 academics whose research theme included a stated Africa focus, this did not translate into any teaching topics for the benefit of students – either undergraduate or postgraduate, apart from the 10 academics with the privilege of teaching a topic on Africa as detailed above.

It is noteworthy that, according to the AFSAAP membership list, there are more members of AFSAAP within Australia and New Zealand, than this audit of academics reveals. Perhaps this either indicates the limits to the universities' websites data searches, or could reveal that AFSAAP members are not acknowledged by their institutions for their research interests in Africa.

Murdoch University hosts the biggest contingent of scholars with a focus on Africa, likely the result of successful research grants from and in partnership with the mining sector (further research is needed to assess this claim and determine the longevity of such partnerships). Melbourne University comes a close second in terms of the numbers of staff declared to be researching on Africa, which is unsurprising given that this university also offers the largest number of African studies topics, as discussed above. The University of Western Australia, with its Africa Research Cluster only has eight academic staff with a focus on Africa in some way (although further research on the make-up of this cluster may reveal other dynamics and trends).

As Table 3 below clearly demonstrates, there are many more universities which house these disparate African Studies scholars. There are 26 universities with three or less academic staff working on African issues in some capacity. In nine of these universities, there is only one staff member demonstrable with a focus on Africa. This limits opportunities for collegiality and research partnerships within universities, but by necessity requires these 'experts' to network across Australian and New Zealand Universities (ideally through the support of AFSAAP!). Otago University has the largest number of Africanists with a total of four in the whole of New Zealand (although anecdotally there are others across New Zealand, like Jay Marlowe at the University of Auckland, but these scholars' core role is not African studies based, and therefore they are invisible within the audit).

### **Conclusion**

If nothing else, these figures make a good case for the necessity and requirement of an African Studies Association in Australasia and the Pacific to network these scholars across areas of research and teaching, and facilitate communications through publication and conferences. Furthermore, if Australia wants to ensure a base knowledge of other regions of the world, for business, security and development, then it is obvious that further investment and encouragement in the university sector to develop African Studies courses and research is paramount. It has always been a good time for the Australian government to attend to the detailed 2011 Recommendations of the *Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Inquiry into Australia's Relationship with the Countries of Africa*. (JSCFADT, 2011), in particular Recommendation #10 which calls for the establishment of a

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Centre for African Studies and sufficient funding for “research, education and training”, and to “raise the profile of African Studies in Australia”. Unfortunately, this recommendation, among others from the inquiry were not acted upon, and Australia remains in the dark about the complexities of the African continent.

**Table 1: Undergraduate and Postgraduate Specific African Studies topics in Australian and New Zealand Universities 2003, 2011, 2014 and 2017**

University	2017
Adelaide	0
Australian National	0
Curtin	0
Flinders	Africa on a Global Stage. (TL) Africa: International Interventions (TL) African Politics Global Issues. (TL)
La Trobe	Amanzi Springs Palaeolithic Site (Feb annually), South Africa. (AH) (and Australian-South African Geoarchaeological and Paleoanthropological Field School at the Drimolen hominin site- June annually, but not offered in 2017).
Macquarie	0
Melbourne	African Music and Dance (GC) African Music and Dance Ensemble 1 (GC) African Music and Dance Ensemble 2 (GC) Politics and Contested Development: Africa.(RD) Africa: Environment, Development, People. (SB/PB)
UNSW	1 Contemporary Issues in Africa and the Middle East - INST1007 (AB)
UNSW (Canberra)	0
RMIT	0
Sydney	0
Victoria	Contemporary Africa and Social Change.(CM)
UWA	The International Politics of Africa. (DM) Peace and Security in Africa. (DM) Introduction to African History (JM).
Wollongong	0
Monash (South Africa Campus)	0
<b>AUS-TOTAL</b>	<b>14</b>
Otago, NZ	Transformations in Developing Countries. (TB) Sustaining Rural Livelihoods in Developing Countries. (TB)
<b>NZ- TOTAL</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>REGION TOTAL</b>	<b>16</b>

**Note:** Universities listed with a score of 0 are included as they previously offered African Studies Topics – Refer to Lyons and Dimock (2003). Also, some topics may have been missed if university website search engines did not reveal them from the basic search. Please contact the author if you are aware of topics available but not listed here. Sources: Lyons and Dimock (2003); Lyons (2013); Lyons and Saba (2015); AFSAAP 2014; AFSAAP 2017.

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**Table 2: Comparative Perspectives on African Studies offered in other courses/topics in Australia and New Zealand - 2003 - 2011 – 2014-2017**

<b>University</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2017</b>
Australian Catholic University	na	Indigenous Peoples in Settler Nations  Gender in World History  European Expansion 1500-1800 (2011, 2013)  Music of the World	HIST327 Global Histories: First Nations and Colonisation (2015) HIST328 Gender in world history (gender in regions such as Africa,etc) HIST210 European Expansion 1500-1800 –(Euro colonisation and Africa) MUSC257 Music of the World - music in selected cultures, eg Oceania, Africa.. etc)	HIST327 Global Histories: First Nations and Colonisation  POLS210 Racism in Our Times: Global Perspectives on Indigenous Politics.
Bond University	0	0	Alternative Globalisations (INTR13-310) (with examples from ... and Africa). (started in 2013) Global Institutions and Political Conciliation (INTR71-206), examines the African Union (AU) among other global institutions. (started in 2012)	INTR13-310 Alternative Globalisations  INTR71-206 Global Institutions and Political Conciliation.
Charles Darwin University	0	0	War and Peace in World History (L-HST220)....( Includes colonial empires, South Africa) Integrated Methods of Humanitarian Action and Community Studies(HCS365). (This course places students in humanitarian agencies, some of which working in/on Africa.)	MHIX211 War and Peace in World History.  HCS260 Introduction to Humanitarian Practice  HCS350 Professional Practice Placement (national/international)  HCS365 Integrated Methods of Humanitarian and Community Studies
Deakin University	na	ND	AIS302 - Developed and developing worlds. (started in 2014) (... impoverished regions in Sub- Saharan Africa ...etc)	AIP211 Politics of Development.  ADS734 Political Development Record.
Edith Cowan University.	na	The Empire Talks Back: Postcolonial Voices	The Empire Talks Back: Postcolonial Voices	NA
Flinders University	3	NA	NA	NA
Griffith	na	Intercultural Understandings of	NA	5223LAW Transitional Justice and the Rule of Law.

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University		Design.		
		Cross-Cultural History		
La Trobe	3	Genocides and the Holocaust: Europe, Asia, Africa	Genocides and the Holocaust: Europe, Asia, Africa (HIS2GAH + HIS3GAH)	HUS1THJ The Human Journey; ARC3PAL Palaeolithic Archaeology; AER3ATE Ancient Technologies. ENG3PRE Postcolonial Reading.
Melbourne University	na	The Holocaust & Genocide (HIST20013) (... case on Rwanda). (appears to have started in 2010)	The Holocaust & Genocide (HIST20013) (... case on Rwanda).  Violence, trauma and Human Rights (CRIM90017) (...lessons from South Africa/Rwanda). (Grad/PG - MASTers Level) (offered alternative years)  Development, Culture and Conflict (DEVT50001) (Grad/PG - MASTers Level) (offered alternative years, case studies and illustrative material from Africa).	The Holocaust and Genocide (HIST20013).  Violence, Trauma and Reconciliation (CRIM90017).  Development, Culture and Conflict (DEVT50001).  Race in America (HIST30059).  Modernism and Avant Garde (ENGL20022).  Jazz: The Improvisatory Spirit (MUSI10202).
Monash University	1	na	na	na
Murdoch University	na	NA	Land law and land tenure in developing countries. (Convener Associate Professor John Mugambwa, interests in Uganda case studies).	NA
Newcastle University	4	Indigenous Health Around the World	Indigenous Health Around the World (ABOR3440) (Indigenous ... colonised including ... Africa).	Indigenous Health Around the World
RMIT	na	Governance and Democracy in Developing Countries  Health Issues in Development	Governance and Democracy in Developing Countries (HUSO2073)  Health Issues in Development (HUSO2072).  Aid, Adjustment and Development (Third World focused) (HUSO2078).	NA

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			International NGOs, Civil Society and Development (HUSO2096).	
Southern Queensland University	na	World History Since 1500CE	NA	NA
University of Adelaide		Na	na	ANTH2036 Anthropology of Conflict and Crisis.
University of Queensland	2			
University of New England		Post-Conflict Justice and Reconciliation Processes	Post-Conflict Justice and Reconciliation Processes (cases include South Africa, Liberia, etc)	PEAC354/454/554 Post-Conflict Justice and Reconciliation Processes.  PEAC 352/452/552 Peace Building in Post-Conflict Situations.
University of New South Wales	2	Sound, Society & Self in World Music; Comparative Management Systems	(MUSC2116) Sound, Society & Self in World Music; Comparative Management Systems (World Music includes West Africa).	NA
University of Sydney	9	Plagues, Calamities, and Empires: World History 1300-1700 (Centre for continuing education)	na	na
University of Tasmania	1	na	na	na
University of Western Australia	7	na	na	na
Wollongong	na	Black Writing from Africa, the US and the Caribbean	Black Writing from Africa, the US and the Caribbean	NA
NZ University of Victoria, Wellington	na	NZ HIST-117 – Empires and Peoples (was also taught back in 2007).	NZ HIST-117 – Empires and Peoples	HIST331 The Transatlantic Slave Trade.

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Monash Uni (Sth Af Campus)	na	ATS 3623 Nationality, Ethnicity and Conflict	NA	ND
Monash Uni - Clayton	na	NA	ATS 3623 Nationality, Ethnicity and Conflict (Case- South Africa)	ND
Totals	32	17	24	26

**Sources: Lyons and Dimock 2003, 2007; AFSAAP 2011; AFSAAP 2014; AFSAAP 2017**

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**Table 3: Number of Academic Staff Focused on Africa by University - 2017**

Murdoch	12
Melbourne Uni	11
UWA	8
Uni of Queensland	7
Charles Sturt Uni	6
La Trobe	6
Uni of New England	6
ACU	5
ANU	5
Uni of Sydney	5
Griffiths	4
Western Sydney Uni	4
Edith Cowan	3
Macquarie	3
RMIT	3
Adelaide Uni	3
Uni of New South Wales	3
UNISA	3
Bond	2
Charles Darwin	2
Curtin	2
Deakin	2
Federation University	2
Flinders University	2
James cook	2
Queensland Uni of Technology	2
Uni of Notre Dame	2
Swinburne	1
Uni of Canberra	1
Uni of Newcastle	1
Uni of Southern Queensland	1
Uni of Sunshine Coast	1
Uni of Tasmania	1
Uni of Technology Sydney	1
Uni of Wollongong	1
Victoria Uni	1
Otago University	4
Auckland Uni	3
Massey Uni	2
UNITEC Institute of Technology	2
Toi-Ohomai Institute of Technology	1
Victoria Uni – Wellington	1

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