



a place of mind

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

## Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

### PROGRAMME

The Final Oral Examination  
For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
(Educational Studies)

### SOPHEAP PHAN

B.Ed., Royal University of Phnom Penh, 1995  
M.Ed., La Trobe University, 2002  
M.A., Ohio University, 2008

Wednesday, September 16, 2015, 9:00 am  
Room 203, Graduate Student Centre  
*Latecomers will not be admitted*

**“Envisioning a Higher Education System for the 21st Century:  
Cambodia”**

### EXAMINING COMMITTEE

Chair:

Dr. Peter Seixas (Curriculum Studies)

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Lesley Andres, Co-Research Supervisor (Educational Studies)  
Dr. Kjell Rubenson, Co-Research Supervisor (Educational Studies)

University Examiners:

Dr. Pierre Walter (Educational Studies)  
Dr. Ryuko Kubota (Language and Literacy Education)

External Examiner:

Dr. Ruth Hayhoe  
Department of Leadership, Higher and Adult Education  
University of Toronto  
Toronto, Ontario

## ABSTRACT

Higher education is essential for human, social, cultural, and economic development in Cambodia. Yet, in its current form, it is ineffective and inefficient. Improving higher education, especially making it more responsive to the economic and social needs is one of the most urgent reforms Cambodia needs to undertake. The main purpose of the study is to provide an evidence-based future direction for Cambodian higher education. It aims to provide relevant authorities and policymakers with an informed basis for policy discussions and dialogues for building a higher education system that matches Cambodia's social, political, and economic needs and context.

A document review of statistics, technical reports, policy papers, and academic literature sources obtained from both local and international institutions was conducted throughout the research project. During July and August 2014, semi-structured interviews with 18 Cambodian participants were conducted to obtain their perspectives about Cambodian higher education development and challenges. These participants were purposively selected from various backgrounds and included students, parents, faculty, university administrators, higher education officers/experts, employers, and non-governmental staff member.

In keeping with the research purpose, three questions were employed to guide the study: (a) What are the challenges facing higher education in Cambodia? (b) What lessons can Cambodia learn from policy and practice reforms in developing countries and how can these lessons inform higher education policy development in Cambodia? and (c) What do key stakeholders see as issues and directions for Cambodian higher education?

Overall, the findings indicated that, despite rapid development and growth after the introduction of private higher education in the mid-1990s, Cambodia's higher education subsector still faces many overarching challenges that need to be addressed to ensure greater effectiveness and efficiencies. This study points out those problems. Also, it suggests some key changes that higher education institutions and the Cambodian government need to make to correct the mismatch between higher education and labour market requirements. The directions proposed in this study are expected to provide policymakers in Cambodia (and hopefully elsewhere) with a foundation for their future higher education policy discussions and debates.

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Place of Birth: Kandal, Cambodia

Academic Studies: B.Ed., Royal University of Phnom Penh, 1995  
M.Ed., La Trobe University, 2002  
M.A., Ohio University, 2008

## GRADUATE STUDIES

Field of Study: Higher education

### Courses

EDST 511	Organization and Administration of Higher Education
EDST 515	Survey Research Methods
EDST 601A	Doctoral Seminar
EDST 601B	Doctoral Seminar
EDST 602	Doctoral Seminar

### Instructors

Dr. Metcalfe, Amy
Dr. Lesley Andres
Dr. Claudia Ruitenberg
Dr. Jennifer Chan
Dr. Shauna Butterwick

## SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE

Dr. Lesley Andres, Co-Research Supervisor (Educational Studies)  
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Dr. Hans Pechar (Higher education), Alpen Adria University, Austria