

PRESIDENT'S REPORT
AMERICAN INSTITUTE FOR SRI LANKAN STUDIES
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The work of AISLS as a scholarly organization depends on the generosity and energy of many people and I would like to begin this year's president's report with a recognition and expression of gratitude to them.

Last year, Jeanne Marecek stepped down as president of AISLS after six years in office. I would like to thank her for all that she did during those six years that enabled AISLS to grow, for leaving the organization in such good shape, and for her continued work on behalf of AISLS in the office of past-president, as a member of the executive committee, and also for continuing to provide oversight over the activities of our Colombo Center.

I would also take this opportunity to thank John Rogers for his work as AISLS' US Director and Ira Unamboowe AISLS' Sri Lanka Executive Director for their own excellent and essential work that enables the work of AISLS to proceed effectively and smoothly.

The staff of our Colombo Center, Deepthi Gunaratne and M. de S. Weerasoriya, also have continued to work creatively to make our services available in Sri Lanka. In the United States, Don Keller (administrative support) and Selma Omerefendic (accounting) continued in the roles that allow AISLS to meet its organizational responsibilities.

The work of AISLS depends on its listserve in many key ways, and I would like to thank Michelle Gamburd for her steady hand as our listserve director.

In addition to myself as president, the AISLS executive committee over the past year was Jonathan Spencer (vice president), Jeffrey Samuels (treasurer), Caitrin Lynch (treasurer), Jeanne Marecek (past president) and Bambi Chapin (member at large). I would like to thank all executive committee members for volunteering their service.

I would also like to thank all of the members of the Board of Directors, both elected representatives and institutional representatives for volunteering their service, but especially to Daniel Bass, Bambi Chapin, Arjun Gunaratne and Deborah Winslow whose terms as elected members of the Board of Directors are coming to an end.

We will announce the new elected members of the board this year at our Annual General Meeting on October 18 at the Madison Conference.

The 2008 annual general meeting promises to be a happy event since we will use it as an occasion to honor some of the senior members of our community—James Brow, John Ross Carter, and James Gair—and publicly express our respect and gratitude to them for

all that they have done over the years on behalf of Sri Lankan Studies in the United States.

Awards and Grants

AISLS continued its established fellowship competition for scholars who already have the Ph.D. or equivalent. Tenures can range between two and nine months. Because of restrictions set by the funder, the US State Department, only US citizens are eligible. This year fellowships were granted to Nalin Jayasena (English Literature, Miami University of Ohio), Jody Miller (Criminology/Sociology, University of Missouri—St. Louis) and Patrick Peebles (History, University of Missouri—Kansas City).

AISLS inaugurated a new dissertation planning grants program, designed to enable graduate students to spend six to eight weeks in Sri Lanka to improve their dissertation proposals. Awardees were Kevin Fingerman (Energy & Resources, University of California—Berkeley), Annelies Goger (Geography, University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill), Kaori Hatsumi (Anthropology, Columbia University), and Romesh Silva (Demography, University of California—Berkeley).

The program of small grants to support language instruction in Sri Lanka continued to generate considerable interest. Seven awards were made during the year, six of them to graduate students. We have put new procedures in place to identify language instructors and to assess the quality of the instruction provided.

AISLS continues to offer its graduate student members support to attend scholarly conferences in North America through its Travel Stipend Program. Two such awards were made in the past year.

Workshops and Conferences

In March 2008, AISLS sponsored a symposium at the annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies. Neloufer de Mel, from the University of Colombo, led a panel discussion on her newly-published book, *Militarizing Sri Lanka*. About twenty scholars participated. I would like to thank Bambi Chapin for organizing this event.

Beyond the support it lends through its Travel Stipend program for graduate students, AISLS continues to encourage scholarly participation at various conference settings including the Annual South Asia Conference at Madison, the Tamil Studies Conference in Toronto, and the South Asia Studies Association conference. In “unofficial” ways, AISLS also has aided the identification of Sri Lankan scholars to be invited to other academic meetings in the United States, such as the invitation this year to Professor Premakumar De Silva to attend the annual meetings of the American Academy of Religion.

Information about scholarly conferences relevant to the study of Sri Lanka is also disseminated through the listserv that AISLS maintains.

For a four-year period beginning in April 2004, a grant to AISLS from the Ford Foundation supported programs to support and enhance research training in Sri Lankan universities. As the final project, AISLS convened a small group of leading academic staff from the University of Colombo and the University of Peradeniya for a one-day workshop in March 2008. Many of these individuals had carried out training projects funded by the AILS. Participants sought to assess the AISLS efforts and to provide additional context and background that would help AISLS better understand the needs of the Sri Lankan universities. The day was organized into sessions on the following topics: 1) facilitating mastery of quantitative skills for social science research; 2) facilitating training in research methods in the social sciences; 3) facilitating students' mastery of English; 4) training students in the library use and in the use of electronic databases; 5) how (and whether) to encourage talented students to pursue academic careers; 6) preparing students adequately for scientific and technical jobs. Many thanks to Jeanne Marecek, Cindy Caron, and Ira Unamboowe for organizing this event.

At the end of August 2008, the AISLS center in Colombo (the American Institute for Lankan Studies, or AILS) sponsored a conference on decorative arts, convened by Ayesha Abdur-Rahman. Presenters included one scholar from the Netherlands, one from Belgium, and two from Britain, as well as Ms. Abdur Rahman and several Sri Lankans. The workshop served to publicize the AISLS digital library on decorative arts, which is being compiled by Abdur-Rahman with the co-operation of the Department of National Museums. In early 2009, the digital library will be available on the Internet through the Digital Library of International Research.

In August 2008, I carried out two workshops with junior faculty in the Humanities at the University of Peradeniya. The intent of these workshops was to establish new connections between AISLS and younger academics at Peradeniya and to explore ways of encouraging the internationalization of scholarship in the Humanities in Sri Lankan universities. The workshops were lively and promising and I hope that we will be able to build on these initial steps with future collective activities. While in Sri Lanka, I also met individually or in small groups with younger academics from the University of Colombo, the University of Kelaniya, and the University of the Visual & Performing Arts

Colombo Center

Under the leadership of Ira Unamboowe, assisted by Deepthi Gunaratne and M. de S. Weerasooriya, AILS has served an increasing number of US-based, Sri Lankan, and third-country scholars. All books in the library have been re-catalogued according to the Library of Congress system, and a new online catalog will be available before the end of 2008. The collection includes recent academic books on Sri Lanka published in Europe and the United States, many of which are not available in other libraries in Sri Lanka.

The library also offers access to JSTOR and some other electronic resources. Ira Unamboowe has been especially energetic in outreach regarding our facilities in JSTOR, traveling to different universities in Sri Lanka to provide an introduction to scholarly access that JSTOR affords scholars. We plan to extend these outreach efforts in the coming year with the preparation of a brochure about JSTOR resources and which will be available in Tamil and Sinhala as well as English.

The 2006 and 2007 issues of the Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities were shipped from Sri Lanka to the US and distributed to interested AISLS members in September 2008; these issues had been shipped previously but were lost in the postal service.

The center staff also tries to meet requests from members for specific publications. These are supplied on an at-cost basis.

The center staff also continues to offer general advice and support for AISLS members visiting Sri Lanka.

Organizational Developments

Significant changes to the Companies Act in Sri Lanka have led to increased reporting requirements by the Colombo Center. Over the past year, procedures were put in place to ensure that AILS (the American Institute for Lankan Studies, AISLS' legal entity in Sri Lanka) complies with this legislation.

AISLS continues to receive its core funding from the US Department of Education and from the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), US Department of State. The ECA funds are a subgrant from the Council of American Overseas Research Centers (CAORC). Mary Ellen Lane and the other CAORC staff have continued to give AISLS important support.

We welcomed Johns Hopkins University and Colgate University to the AISLS during the past year as institutional members. This brings the total number of institutional members to sixteen. There are also eighty individual AISLS members. We are hopeful that the number of our institutional members will continue to increase in the coming year.