

PRESIDENT'S REPORT
AMERICAN INSTITUTE FOR SRI LANKAN STUDIES
October 2008 – September 2009

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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.

Above all, I would like to thank John Rogers for his work as AISLS' US Director and Ira Unamboowe for her work as AISLS' Sri Lanka Executive Director. Their initiative, sense of responsibility, and efforts enable the work of AISLS to proceed effectively and smoothly. I am also grateful to Jeanne Marecek for her role in helping provide oversight for the Colombo Center and for her counsel on many issues that have come up the past year.

The staff of our Colombo Center, Deepthi Gunaratne, M. de S. Weerasoriya, and Lorette Weeraratne also have continued to work creatively to make our services accessible in Sri Lanka. In the United States, Don Keller (administrative support) and Selma Omerefendic (accounting) continued in essential roles that allow AISLS to function smoothly and 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.

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, Robin Presta, and the other CAORC staff have continued to give AISLS important support. I would like to thank these institutions and individuals for their support of AISLS.

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

Jeffrey Samuels' term as secretary comes to a conclusion in October 2009 and I would like to thank him especially for his work on behalf of AISLS during his term.

Finally 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.

The results of the election for secretary will be announced at our Annual General Meeting on October 24, 2009.

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 a fellowship was granted to Frank Korom (Religious Studies/Anthropology, Boston University).

AISLS continued its 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 Kanchuka Dharmasiri (Comparative Literature, University of Massachusetts—Amherst), Natalie Quli (Buddhist Studies, Graduate Theological Union), and Cala Zubair (Linguistics, Georgetown University).

The program of small grants to support language instruction in Sri Lanka continued to generate considerable interest. Five awards were made during the year, four of them to graduate students. Our new procedures to identify language instructors and to assess the quality of the instruction provided have led to improvements in this program.

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

Workshops and Conferences

In the past year, AISLS has sponsored a number of conferences and workshops that in a variety of ways have sought to promote international connections in the study of Sri Lanka, including our continuing aim to promote scholarly inter-action between American scholars working on Sri Lanka and our colleagues in Sri Lanka; encouraging triangulated relations among American scholars, Sri Lankan scholars and those working in Europe; and promoting greater interaction between scholars working on Sri Lanka and those students and scholars concentrating on other regions of South Asia and also on Southeast Asia.

In October 2008, AISLS sponsored a one-day conference on “South Asia as Seen from the East: Lessons and Questions from J. Stephen Lansing’s *Perfect Order: Recognizing Complexity in Bali*.” This event was a preconference to the Annual Conference on South Asia in Madison. Specialists in the study of religion, history, visual culture and anthropology in Sri Lanka, India and Southeast Asia made brief presentations that engaged some of the theoretical, comparative and historical aspects of Lansing’s work. Lansing responded and participated in the broader discussion by videoconferencing from

Bali. While the focus was on Lansing's book, another purpose of the preconference was to show how exchange among specialists in the study of South Asia and Southeast Asia can suggest new possibilities for the investigation and interpretation of Sri Lanka and South Asia. This event was organized by Deborah Winslow and myself.

In March 2009, AISLS sponsored a forum at the annual meeting of the Association of Asian Studies, which was held in Chicago. The roundtable focused on Dennis McGilvray's book, *Crucible of Conflict: Tamil and Muslim Society on the East Coast of Sri Lanka*. About twenty scholars participated. I would like to thank Jeffrey Samuels for organizing this event.

In August 2009, the AISLS center in Colombo (the American Institute for Lankan Studies, or AILS) sponsored a one-day workshop on "The Farmer Company in Sri Lanka: The Ridi Bendi Ela Case Study", convened by Namika Raby. At this workshop Raby presented her research to a group of about thirty scholars and policy-makers. Participants then broke up into small groups to discuss the wider implications of her research. The workshop concluded with a general discussion prompted by the reports of each group's discussion. The workshop has revived interest among policy makers in developing participatory structures in irrigation management.

In September 2009, AILS organized a two-day workshop on "Perspectives on Sri Lanka's Historiography", convened by John Rogers. Twenty-three scholars participated, including eight persons based outside Sri Lanka. The nine papers presented at this workshop prompted very lively and constructive discussion. The workshop also provided an opportunity for scholars in different countries to learn about each other's work.

The historiography workshop in Colombo continued discussions and interactions that had begun in a preliminary workshop on the history of Sri Lanka in the early modern and colonial periods. This was held in London in January, 2009, which brought together Sri Lankan, European and American scholars. That workshop was also convened by John Rogers.

The focus on historiography is being continued by another preconference on "'Early Modernity' in Sri Lanka, South Asia, and Southeast Asia at the Annual Conference on South Asia in Madison this year and also organized by John Rogers.

In addition to holding workshops in Sri Lanka and making library resources available to Sri Lankan scholars, we encourage and facilitate visiting American scholars to give lectures at Sri Lankan universities.

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.

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

Colombo Center

The American Institute for Lankan Studies' (AILS-- AISLS' legal entity in Sri Lanka) Colombo Center 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 the new online catalog is now available at <http://catalog.crl.edu/search~S14/X>. 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 and students. Her most recent JSTOR workshops have been held at the Open University and at the International Centre for Ethnic Studies in Kandy. We plan to extend these outreach efforts in the coming year.

The 2008 issue of the Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities was shipped from Sri Lanka to the US and distributed to interested AISLS members in 2009.

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.

John Rogers, the US Executive Director, Jeanne Marecek, the Past President of AISLS, and myself all visited the Colombo Center in the past year.

Organizational Developments

Significant changes to the Companies Act in Sri Lanka have led to increased reporting requirements by the Colombo Center. AILS' procedures are periodically adjusted to ensure that the organization complies with relevant legislation and regulations from the Government of Sri Lanka.

We welcomed the Five Colleges Buddhist Studies Consortium to AISLS during the past year as an institutional member. This brings the total number of institutional members to sixteen. There are also 101 individual AISLS members. We are hopeful that the number of our institutional members will increase in the coming year.