



# *Newsletter*

*University of Peradeniya Alumni Association USA*

## **June 2025 Issue**

### **President's Message**

It is indeed a privilege for me to write a message for UPAA-USA's June 2025 newsletter. Our association was able to implement several projects to help our alma mater and its students over the past six months, including studentships, instrument donations, and mentoring programs. Some of our significant accomplishments of the year so far are summarized below:

- Provided 30 studentships (\$6,500) for UoP students representing 9 faculties.
- Donated equipment worth \$13,000 to UoP Physics Department, Electrical Engineering Department, and Physics Audio-Visual Unit. Also donated \$1,200 to the UoP Chemistry Department to purchase laboratory instruments.
- UPAA-USA EC Member Dr. Gamini Dharmasena donated a model underwater Robot developed by VideoRay – a Blue Halo Company, to the UoP Physics Department. He also delivered a presentation on underwater robots at the Vice Chancellor's Lecture series for Deans and Department Heads on 02.19.2025.
- Presentations made by UPAA-USA EC members to UoP undergraduate students as part of an Interdisciplinary Talk Series organized by the Physical Society.

A key event we have planned for this year is our alumni get-together and fundraiser scheduled for Saturday October 11, 2025, in Houston, Texas. I wish to cordially invite all UoP alumni in the US to attend this event, and meet your colleagues, rekindle old memories, observe and listen to drama skits and songs related to Pera, and enjoy the live music presented by Tune-1 band led by a Pera alumni. It would also be an opportunity for you to learn about our projects at Pera, provide financial support, and get actively involved in implementing them.

- Channa Bambaradeniya

## **2025/2026 Executive Committee**

### **President**

Channa Bambaradeniya

### **Vice-president**

Umar Maharoo

### **Secretary**

Dammi Rupasinghe

### **Assistant Secretary**

Dhananjaya Rajasinghe

### **Treasurer**

Dimuthu Jayawickrama

### **Assistant Treasurer**

Ravi Amunugama

### **Committee Members**

Parakarama Abeyratna

Jayantha Amarasekara

Upul Attanayake

Niranjala Cooray

Gamini Dharmasena

Ananda De Silva

Geewananda Gunawardana

Kamalini Ranasinghe

Ravi Ranatunga

Sudath Rannulu

Janith Senanayake

Udaya Silva

Sanka Tennakoon

Thinesh Selvaratnam

Charles Wijayawardhana

Sujith Wimalasooriya

Mahinda Yapa

### **Ex-Officio Members**

Sujeewa Perera

Yasmin Ranasinghe

Vincent Sandanayaka

## **Changing Scene...**



A group of alumni visiting the campus for a reunion noticed the new facade added to the science faculty building facing Galaha road. Some saw it as a reasonable attempt to mimic the entrances of nearby buildings, while others viewed it as a one-dimensional prop and afterthought. Who knows what Mr. D'Alvis had planned.

They also noted that the famous yellow blossoms that adorn the campus in March-April, Cat Claw (*Dolichandra unguis-cati* (L.) L.G.Lohmann), once limited to the 'Strike Tree', has now spread into the gardens next to 'wala' and the area adjoining Maha Oya going towards the Students Center. This is the bloom that adorns the poster on page 3.

Other trees with yellow blossoms in campus grounds are the Trumpet Tree (*Handroanthus serratifolius* (Vahl) S.O.Grose), Golden Shower Tree (*Cassia fistula* L), and Flame Tree (*Peltophorum pterocarpum*).





**JOIN US IN HOUSTON, TX**

**2025  
Peradeniya  
Alumni Get-together  
&  
Fundraiser**

**SATURDAY OCTOBER 11, 2025**

Appetizers & Dinner, Fun Entertainment, Live Band & Music

A fantastic 'thela' time to mingle

*\$125 adult, \$35 children, free for children under 6, Pera student \$75*

**Tickets at <https://www.upaa-usa.org/events/>**

**Hilton Garden Inn  
Houston-Pearland  
1201 Shadow Creek Pkwy  
Pearland, TX 77584**

***4 PM to Midnight***



**UNIVERSITY OF PERADENIYA  
ALUMNI ASSOCIATION USA  
[www.upaa-usa.org](http://www.upaa-usa.org)**

## Give Back to Your Alma Mater: Support Peradeniya University

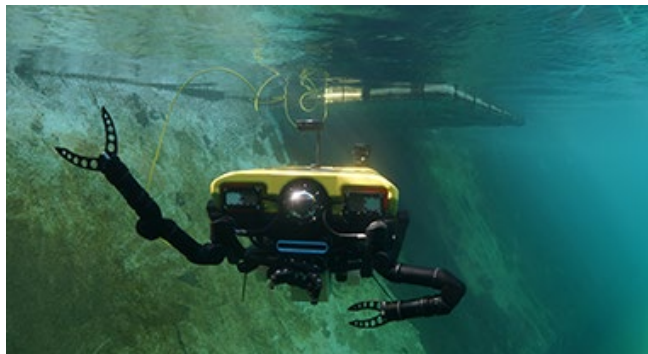
As proud Peradeniya University alumni, we have a unique chance to give back to the institution that shaped our lives and careers. Now, living in the USA, it's time to support our alma mater's continued success and contribute to its growth. We can make a meaningful impact in various ways by providing scholarships to deserving students, supplying essential equipment to departments, and addressing infrastructure and student welfare needs.

Donating through the UPAA-USA Alumni Association amplifies our impact while offering significant benefits. As an IRS-recognized 501(c)(3) charity, your cash donations or new or used items are tax-exempt, allowing your generosity to go further while providing valuable tax benefits.

Our close ties with department heads and the AAUP (Alumni Association of University of Peradeniya) ensure your contributions reach where they're needed most. We've already made a tangible difference: over the past three years, we've funded over 50 scholarships for deserving students across all departments, supported university welfare events, and donated crucial teaching materials and equipment to departments.

Now's the time for us to come together as a community of dedicated alumni who care about Peradeniya University's future. Your support can transform lives and enhance educational opportunities for current students. Join us in making a difference today and help shape the next generation of leaders and scholars. Your contribution will leave a lasting legacy for our beloved alma mater.

- Jayantha Amarasekara



A leading underwater robotic company, VideoRay, based in the US donated an underwater robot "Defender" to the Dept. of Physics exclusively for learning and teaching purposes. On behalf of VideoRay, the unit was delivered by VideoRay senior electronics engineer Dr. Gamini Dharmasena on Feb. 13th, 2025.



## Motivational Seminar Series Inspires University of Peradeniya Freshman Students

As part of the Interdisciplinary Talk Series organized by the University of Peradeniya (UoP) Physical Society, Dr. Damayanthi Ranwala, née Rupasinghe, a UoP alumna and member of the UPAA-USA, delivered an inspiring seminar titled “*Embrace Your Strengths and Potential for Personal and Professional Success*” on November 12, 2024.

Addressing the students in the Physical Society, Dr. Ranwala shared insights from her personal and professional journey, emphasizing the importance of recognizing and embracing one’s unique strengths. She discussed strategies to identify these strengths, nurture confidence, and use them as tools for creating positive change in both academic and personal life.

The talk met with great enthusiasm from students, who left the session motivated and more aware of their hidden potential. The seminar was organized and moderated by Dr. Kapila Wijayaratne of the Department of Physics. Other members of the UPAA-USA Executive Committee who delivered inspirational presentations include Dr. Gamini Dharmasena, Dr. Channa Bambaradeniya, and Ms. Udeni Kumudumalee.

### How to Reach UPAA USA

#### UPAA-USA Membership Form:

<https://forms.gle/kgbU5HMkWfvoe7gi9>

#### Contact Us Form

<https://forms.gle/mp2RhE81WLbthfHt5>

#### Project Support Request Form

<https://forms.gle/HUbuVbWgBwvsp6BF9>

#### To Contribute to UPAA USA Programs:

<https://www.upaa-usa.org/donations/>

## Mentoring Support Extended to University of Peradeniya

The University of Peradeniya Alumni Association in the USA (UPAA-USA), in partnership with the University of Peradeniya Science Alumni Association (UPSAA), successfully organized an informative seminar titled “Graduate Studies in the USA” on March 17, 2025.

This interactive session aimed to guide and encourage Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) students at the University of Peradeniya (UoP) to pursue graduate studies at top-tier U.S. institutions, including Clemson University, South Carolina, and other R-1 universities. These institutions, classified under the Carnegie Classification as “Doctoral Universities – Very High Research Activity,” are

known for their strong commitment to research excellence.

University of Peradeniya Alumni Association at USA (UPAA-USA) & University of Peradeniya Science Alumni Association (UPSAA) Organize

### Graduate Studies at the USA

**CLEMSON**  
UNIVERSITY

Open to all University of Peradeniya Undergraduate, Graduate Students and Faculty

- 1 Introduction to STEM graduate admissions at Clemson and other R-1 Universities in the USA
- 2 Introduction to graduate admissions at the Department of Bioengineering at Clemson

Key Speaker:  
**Dr. Delphine Dean**  
Professor & Chair  
&  
**Dr. Damayanthi Ranwala**  
Director of Research Development

Department of Bioengineering  
College of Engineering,  
Computing and Applied Sciences,  
Clemson University  
Clemson, South Carolina,  
USA

17<sup>th</sup> March  
From 8.00 pm –  
to 10.00 pm

Online (Zoom)  
Meeting ID:  
290 959 1803  
Passcode:  
@Phy6me10

Convener/ Local Contact:  
**Kapila Wijayaratne**  
(Representing UPSAA)  
Faculty of Science,  
University of Peradeniya.

The seminar was led by Dr. Delphine Dean, Chair of the Department of Bioengineering at Clemson University, and Dr. Damayanthi Ranwala, Director of Research Development. The speakers detailed the graduate admissions process, including application components, evaluation criteria, and available financial assistance.

Moderated by Dr. Kapila Wijayaratne of the UoP Faculty of Science, the seminar lasted over 90 minutes and included a dynamic Q&A session. It was attended by 85 students and faculty members, who overwhelmingly rated the session as both informative and valuable.

Drs. Dean and Ranwala also expressed their commitment to providing continued mentoring support to students at the University of Peradeniya.

## It is FREE: Tapping Corporate Funding

Employer funding can be a significant financial support for UPAA-USA. Many corporate employers provide generous matching funding and/or volunteer hours/credits for employees and in some cases for retirees. In addition, some employers donate to celebrate employee's and retiree's anniversaries. In 2024, we received \$2000 from Merck and Bristol Myers Squibb (BMS) through just two members. This includes donation matching and volunteer hours for UPAA. What is matching? Typically, this is dollar to dollar (1:1) match for a donation made by an employee. For example, if a member donates \$100 to UPAA then the member's employer gives \$100 to UPAA. As a result, UPAA receives \$200. How about volunteer hours? Basically, a member's volunteer commitment is honored by the employer with no cost to the member. If a member volunteers as committee member, or even outside the committee (e.g. mentor, organizing an event (cricket game or a chapter night) etc. can be regarded as volunteering. Employers typically donate a dollar amount to UPAA once the members provide the volunteer hours/credits. In 2024, we received \$1000 for volunteer hours!

How to maximize this effort?

Please reach out to your human resources to check if such a program exists and UPAA is qualified. The following link provides general information about corporate giving programs. <https://doublethedonation.com/matching-gifts/bristol-myers-squibb-company>. There may be internal programs which is not visible to the public therefore it is always better to find information internally. Reach out to fellow members and encourage them to do the same.

Increase the membership: LinkedIn <https://www.linkedin.com/school/university-of-peradeniya/people/> indicates there are ~ 2000 US based Peradeniya alumni.

Currently UPAA receives corporate donations from Merck and BMS. We are in the process to find out if UPAA is qualified for Glaxo Smith Kline (GSK) and Intel giving programs.

Please get involved.

- Dimuthu Jayawickrama

## Alumnus from a bygone era



*World renowned anthropologist Gananath Obeyesekera passed away on March 25<sup>th</sup> at the age of ninety-five. He graduated from the University of Ceylon, Peradeniya in 1955. He was chair of the Princeton University Anthropology department and a professor from 1980 until his retirement in 2000.*

We can only imagine what campus life would have been like when he entered the university still under construction seventy-three years ago, but judging by the names from that era, it must have been an intellectual hub enthused with fulfilling the dream of a free nation: to advance knowledge through research and disseminate that knowledge through teaching and learning.

Gananath made that dream a reality. He majored in English and joined the staff of the English Department, but his interest has been clearly in anthropology; he was into recording Sri Lankan folk songs from remote regions of the country even before his university days, many of which he could recite in later years. Accordingly, he switched his major to anthropology, did his Ph.D. at the University of Washington and taught at UC San Diego before joining Princeton.

He was a fascinating communicator, has published number of books, lectured widely, and used all modes of media available at the time, including films, to share his findings. One does not have to be an anthropologist to appreciate his endeavor to illustrate how our society came to be what it is today, including its quirks and wrinkles. The timeliest of it all would be his book 'Buddhism Transformed,' which describes how what the Buddha taught turned into the ensemble of practices, rituals, and beliefs what the Western scholars referred to as Buddhism.

A documentary, Gananath Obeyesekera: In search of Buddhist Conscience, was produced by Kathika Study Circle and released last year. His personal library was donated to the Peradeniya campus. Many of his talks can be found on YouTube, and they provide a glimpse into the thinking of this remarkable scholar who roamed the campus long before we did.

- Geewananda Gunawardana



## **Felicitation of UoP Undergraduate Students on a Fellowship to the US**

A team of four (4) undergraduate students from the UoP Science Faculty won the SSCCA Climate Tank Accelerator 2024 competition organized by the U.S. Department of State. A total of 2700 students from different universities across South Asia had participated in the competition in teams of four members.

A novel moss-based air filtration system developed by the UoP team (Climate, Inc.) to control urban air pollution enabled them to win this competition among 18 teams who represented Universities from Sri Lanka. The team members from UoP were awarded a fully funded two-week fellowship (February 14-28, 2025) to the United States. They participated in workshops related to environmental sustainability held in Nashville, TN and Washington DC. The UPAA-USA organized a felicitation dinner for the four UoP students on February 23rd in Elkridge, MD and awarded cash prizes in recognition of their unique accomplishment. The UoP team consisted of Asel Pandigama (Environmental Science), Sahan Wijethunga (Physics), Omali Alliyadde (Environmental Science), and Gagani Senanayake (Zoology).

- Channa Bambaradeniya



UPAA-USA President with the 4 UoP Undergrads on a City Tour in Washington, DC

### About the Newsletter:

The UPAA USA Executive Committee has decided to publish two issues of the Association's Newsletter per year, one in June and the other in December.

In addition to sharing the Associations' activities and related news, it is also expected to be an avenue for the Association Membership to express their opinions and share items of common interest as well as exhibit their talents and creativity. Let the communications committee know what you expect to see in the Newsletter. Community events, job openings, photography, things we did not know about the campus. You the members must decide how the Newsletter should look!

Contributions for the two issues must be sent to [secretary@upaa-usa.org](mailto:secretary@upaa-usa.org) by end of May and November, respectively.

#### Communications Committee

Geewananda Gunawardena  
Thushara Diyabalanage  
Pramuditha Perera  
Iffaaz Salahudeen  
Dhananjaya Rajasinghe



Equipment purchased using funds provided by UPAA-USA was received by the Chemistry Department. L-R: Sampath Alahakone (senior Lecturer), Champika Hettiarachchi (Professor/Head of Chemistry), HMN Bandara (Emeritus Professor), and Mahinda Paranavitharana (Senior Technical Officer).