



# NEWSLETTER

University of Peradeniya Alumni Association – USA

January 2026 Issue 1.1

## 2026/2027 Executive Committee

### President

Gamini Dharmasena

### Vice-president

Ananda DeSilva

### Secretary

Dammi Rupasinghe

### Assistant Secretary

TBA

### Treasurer

Mahinda Yapa

### Assistant Treasurer

Ravi Amunugama

### Committee Members

Channa Bambaradeniya

Charles Wijewardena

Dhananjaya Rajasinghe

Dulan Gunasekera

Geewananda Gunawardana

Janith Senanayake

Jayantha Amarasekara

Kamalini Ranasinghe

Manjari Dissanayake

Ravi Amunugama

Ravi Ranatunga

Rizana Maharoo

Sanka Tennakoon

Udaya Silva

Umar Maharoo

Upul Attanayake

### Ex-Officio Members

Sujeewa Perera

Yasmin Ranasinghe

Vincent Sandanayaka

## President's Message

Dear Pera Friends,

Happy New Year! As the newly elected president, I am thrilled to reach out to you through our first quarterly newsletter of the year. While we are only a few weeks into January, the momentum within our association is already palpable.

This newsletter is more than just an update; it is our commitment to transparency and connection. In the pages below, you will find highlights of how your donations are already at work, opportunities to mentor the next generation of holistic UOP graduates, and ways you can help us take our association to the next level.

I am honored to lead this vibrant community, and I look forward to everything we will achieve together in the months ahead. Thank you for being a vital part of the UOP story.

- Gamini Dharmasena

### How to reach UPAA-USA

Contact us via email: [contact@upaa-usa.org](mailto:contact@upaa-usa.org)

UPAA-USA Membership form: <https://forms.gle/kgbU5HMkWfvoe7gi9>

Project support request form: <https://forms.gle/HUbuvbWgBwvsp6BF9>

To contribute to UPAA-USA programs: <https://www.upaa-usa.org/donations/>

## Emergency Relief Fund

The recent unprecedented floods have left our beloved alma mater, the University of Peradeniya (UOP), facing significant challenges. In the wake of this crisis, the UPAA-USA has stepped up to lead the effort in helping UOP recover and thrive once again.

Thanks to the generosity of one hundred donors, we have raised **\$20,000**. We are even more excited to announce that we have secured a **\$5,000 corporate matching gift**, bringing our total Emergency Relief Fund collection to **\$25,000**.

Our Executive Committee is committed to making a meaningful and lasting difference. Rather than making minor contributions toward massive, ongoing needs, we are prioritizing **manageable, high-impact projects** that we can fund in full of transparency and accountability. This strategy ensures that stalled teaching programs can resume immediately, benefiting students who have been left stranded and frustrated. Our goal is **Tangible Results, Not Just Contributions**.

### Active Projects & Immediate Needs

We have identified three faculties with the most severe damage and are moving quickly to support them:

- **Faculty of Management (Approved):** We have approved **\$3,500** to replace flood-damaged smart boards and camera systems. These tools are critical for delivering lectures, and this funding will allow teaching to resume immediately.
- **Faculty of Veterinary Sciences (Evaluation Phase):** We are finalizing a **\$10,000** grant to replace essential medical equipment and teaching supplies. With operations currently stalled, this donation will be an immense help in restarting their curriculum.
- **Faculty of Agriculture (In Discussion):** We are awaiting a formal proposal to identify high-impact equipment and essential supplies. UPAA-USA aims to extend maximum help to the revival of the departmental educational programs.

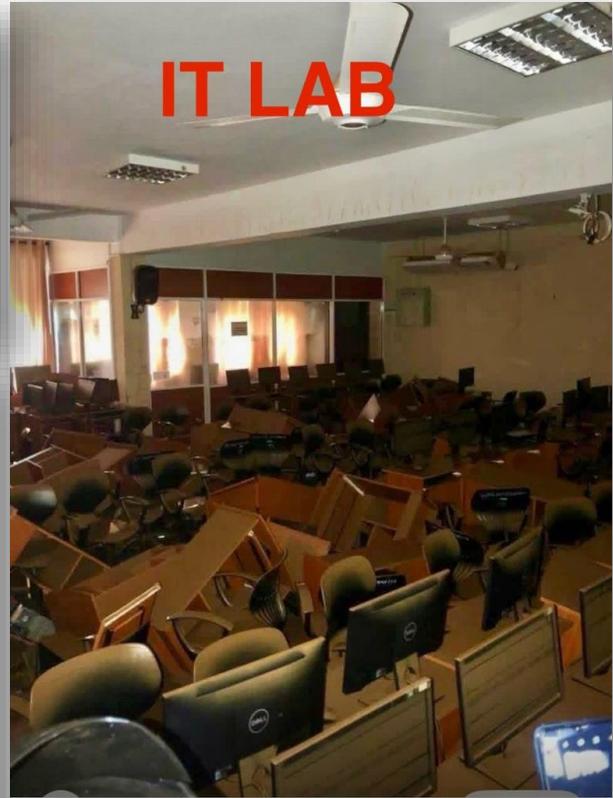
### We Need Your Voice and Your Support

While we are proud of our progress, we have only heard from about **15% of our 600+ members**.

If you have already donated, a big thank you for your leadership and generosity. If you have not contributed to the Emergency Relief Fund yet, **now is the time**. Every dollar counts toward reviving UoP's interrupted academic programs.

[Make a Donation at This Link](#)

- Gamini Dharmasena



## Back on Campus: UPAA-USA On the Ground at Peradeniya

There is no substitute for being there in person! UPAA-USA Secretary **Dammi Rupasinghe** returned to UoP on January 14th with a clear goal: flood recovery. Meeting with the Deans of Agriculture and Veterinary Science, she explored how our alumni network can provide the most vital assistance to help these faculties bounce back from recent natural disasters.

Dammi's visit was a whirlwind of activity, including two well-received talks at the Faculties of Science and Agriculture. Between sessions, she found time to soak in the campus atmosphere at the **Kiosk café**, chatting with students about their experiences and aspirations.

The momentum continued with EC member **Charles Wijewardena**, who also visited UoP during his recent travels. Charles sat down with the Dean of Management to discuss future collaborations and took a nostalgic trip to the Alumni Souvenir Shop. These visits underscore UPAA-USA's unwavering commitment to our Alma Mater—not just from afar, but right there on the ground where it matters most.

- Gamini Dharmasena

## Our Short Memories.

If we trace the history of our campus, from the debate on Aruppola vs Peradeniya as the site to the first batch of students moving in from Colombo, we cannot miss that the 1947 flood had played a key role. They had to rethink the site plan that was being considered and relocate the buildings to higher grounds away from the floodplain, thereby delaying the project by years to the disappointment of Sir Ivor. As evident now, to the credit of the planners' foresight none of the old buildings were touched by the 2025 flood. There was a pillar at Gatambe, next to the bridge over Mada Ela (7.27123684251781,



1947 flood in Kandy (source: Internet)

80.60535056805061), marking the high-water mark of the 1947 flood, which stood higher than a Yaka bus. The pillar may have given way to expansion, along with the memory of the destructive power of the river nearby. As Charles' video clip showed, it is a good thing that they marked the flood levels on the Management buildings. They should be made even more prominent and permanent, as a reminder of the disaster.

Again in 1974, seventy-four and not forty-seven, there was a flood that inundated the cricket grounds; water came all the way up to the tennis courts. Kids carried the boat belonging to the Zoology department and had fun in the newly formed lake. When Prof. Cruze came out, they were terrified, but he gave them the two oars, quite unlike his normal demeanor. Water reached within three feet of the Black Bridge deck but did not go over it as it did this time. The open-air theater was submerged, but other than that, no property damage occurred, except for a dirty gym floor. Rumor is that there was a similar flood in 1978; if anyone witnessed it, they should share their experience. Historical reports record frequent floods of lesser magnitude.

The undeniable fact is that the campus is located not only on a vibrant river valley, but also part of it lies in a floodplain. This is not an exact scientific evaluation, but if one were to consult a topographic map of Peradeniya, and use the cricket grounds as a reference point, it becomes evident that a number of new buildings are located in grounds that went under water during the 1974 flood: Management faculty, both wings of Sarasavi Madura, and several Agriculture and Veterinary faculty buildings located towards the river. Across the river, parts of Malalasekera Hall also lie below this contour. Someone with geographical knowhow among us could provide an accurate assessment.

So, the million-dollar question is, did the post '74 campus planners not realize that they were constructing on a known floodplain? They cannot plead ignorance; the premier geology faculty is there, and several graduates who were there during the 1974 flood are still associated with

the campus. We may never know, but knowing how things are done back home, we can only guess. Anyway, that is under water, we must look into the future.

We should not be lulled into comfort by thinking that 2025 flood was a once in thousand-year event. The reality is that at the rate of the global temperature rise, it is inevitable that weather extremes of this nature are going to be more frequent and severe. This poses the important question, what is the future of buildings in the floodplain? Ignoring the fact that this disaster could repeat is not only short-sighted, but it will also be a disservice.

Since wholesale relocation of a substantial number of buildings to higher ground is not an immediate option, the limited options available, the hard ones, must be carefully analyzed. In the short term, there must be an efficient and reliable flood warning system. If the upstream reservoirs contribute to the problem, their management must be systematized based on data, and not on an operator's whims. Depending on how much advance warning can be expected, pragmatic evacuation plans must be put in place to evacuate valuable assets to safe grounds.

Eventually, there is an unseen benefit. The recovery from this disaster offers an opportunity to address an inherent but ignored problem of our system. Our universities provide a decent education, but the country is plagued with unsolved problems. There are many reasons, but one glaring contributor to this gap is the lack of an interdisciplinary approach to solving countries' problems. We thrive in silos rewarded for finding discipline driven solutions rather than problem driven solutions. Ditwah's aftermath highlighted the lack of interaction between multiple agencies responsible for water, waterways, wetlands, and catchment areas, to name a few. It was glaringly visible that there has been a historical failure of interagency communications. The tragedy is that it is not limited to water management.

Since alumni all over the world are dedicated to helping the alma mater, they have an opportunity to encourage the authorities to take this aspect into consideration during the recovery and rebuilding phase. There are few questions to ask: Instead of leaving the three affected faculties to find their own solutions, should the entire campus be included in a comprehensive plan for recovery? For example, is it possible to consolidate available resources and have centralized facilities such as laboratories and high value instrumentation located on safer grounds with shared access? Would that reduce duplication of services and increase return on investments? More importantly, would it foster a culture of collaboration and communication between different disciplines conducive to solving nation's problems?

Whatever we do, we must not forget that not only is the campus in a romantic river valley, but it is also in a dangerous floodplain. They must prominently display the 2025 flood levels throughout the campus so that the risk will not be forgotten once the current residents leave.

- Geewananda Gunawardana

**UPAA-USA Get-together 2026: Save the Date**



## The Gift of Free Education: A Lasting Legacy

As alumni of the University of Peradeniya, we are proud to have benefited from the Sri Lankan government's visionary policy of free education. This gift has empowered generations of students to pursue their dreams without financial burdens, fostering a community of professionals who have made significant contributions to the nation. We are all here today, as students or professionals in the USA, because of the excellent free education we received.

### The Value of Our Education

But have you ever wondered how much this gift is worth? According to the Sri Lanka University Statistics 2023 report, the government spends approximately LKR 714,662 per student annually at the University of Peradeniya, with costs varying by faculty. Dental students, for instance, incur higher costs due to the university's dental school and hospital, with an estimated annual expenditure of LKR 1.2 million per student. Assuming an average annual expenditure of LKR 714,662 for a 4-year degree for all the faculties, the estimated total government spending would be:  $\text{LKR } 714,662/\text{year} \times 4 \text{ years} = \text{LKR } 2,858,648$



Dr. C. W. W. Kannangara - Father of free education in Sri Lanka (source: *dailymirror.lk*)

### The True Cost of Our Education

Now, if we consider both recurrent and capital expenditures, the costs are significantly higher. Based on 2022 numbers, the total expenditure (recurrent + capital) for a medical student is around LKR 1.3 million per year. If we assume an average annual expenditure of LKR 1 million (a rough estimate between arts and medical students), the estimated total government spending for a 4-year degree would be:

$\text{LKR } 1,000,000/\text{year} \times 4 \text{ years} = \text{LKR } 4,000,000$ , which is approximately **USD 13,143**.

### Giving Back to Our Alma Mater

This substantial investment in our education is a testament to the government's commitment to nurturing talent and shaping the future of our nation. As alumni, we are not only beneficiaries of this gift but also custodians of the values and knowledge we have acquired. We need to acknowledge the immense value of this gift and strive to make a meaningful impact in our respective fields. One way to give back to our alma mater is by collaborating with the University of Peradeniya Alumni Association – USA (UPAA-USA), a registered 501(c)3 non-profit organization. Your donations are tax-deductible to the maximum amount allowed by the IRS and can support:

**Scholarships:** Providing financial assistance to underrepresented students

**Modernizing Teaching Labs:** Equipping labs with modern equipment to enhance learning experiences

**Training Programs:** Offering expert training to students in various fields.

### **Take Advantage of New Tax Benefits**

Starting in 2026, your charitable donations up to \$2,000 for couples filing jointly can be directly deducted from your Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) without itemization. We invite you to visit the UPAA-USA website and learn about programs that we do for the University and students and how you could get involved, contribute, and make a difference.

### **A Debt of Gratitude**

As we celebrate our achievements, let us not forget the sacrifices made by the government and the people of Sri Lanka to provide us with this invaluable opportunity. Let us express our gratitude by working tirelessly towards the betterment of our nation and upholding the values of our alma mater.

- Jayantha Amarasekera

## Ideas To Invention (I-TO-I) Competition 2025

The University of Peradeniya Alumni Association in the United States of America (UPAA-USA) successfully concluded the inaugural Ideas To Invention (I-TO-I) Competition 2025. The competition was initiated by UPAA-USA Executive Committee member Prof. Upul Attanayake and supported by several members, including Mr. Charles Wijayawardhana. At the Faculty of Engineering, Prof. Vijitha Herath coordinated activities with assistance from Dr. Pramila Gamage and Dr. Tharindu Weerakoon.

Through generous alumni contributions, the top three teams received seed funding in the form of cash prizes: Rs. 150,000 (first place), Rs. 100,000 (second place), and Rs. 50,000 (third place). Additionally, four teams were sponsored to present their work at the 19<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Industrial and Information Systems (ICIIS), held January 16-17, 2026, at the University of Peradeniya.



Winners holding their certificates after the award ceremony

This competition was established with a vision to become an annual event, building a sustainable ecosystem of innovation that inspires students, strengthens the University, and contributes to Sri Lanka's economic and technological advancement. UPAA-USA extends sincere gratitude to all reviewers, donors, and well-wishers, and looks forward to their continued support in the years ahead.

- Upul Attanayake

## **Navigating Career Pathways: Academia, Industry, and Beyond**

UPAA-USA recorded a Career Development Webinar to support graduate students and early-career professionals in navigating career decisions in a changing job market. The moderated panel featured experienced professionals from academia and industry who shared practical insights on career planning, professional growth, and real-world expectations.

The session addressed career pathways, essential skills beyond technical expertise, mentorship, professional networks, and strategies for managing uncertainty. Recorded for reuse as a mentoring and professional development resource, the program reflects UPAA-USA's commitment to empowering students and alumni and strengthening connections between academia and industry. In 2026, UPAA-USA plans to expand dissemination across the U.S. alumni base and host live events to further support Pera alumni.

Moderator: Charles H. Wijayawardhana

Panelists

Dr. Ravi Ranatunga – R&D Leader, Proctor & Gamble

Dr. Kamal Seveviratne – University of Maryland

Dr. Roshan Gunasekara – Yale University

- Charles H. Wijayawardhana

## Guest Talk on Study and Research Opportunities in USA

UPAA-USA member Kamal Seneviratne delivered a guest talk at a session organized by the Career Guidance Unit of University of Peradeniya. This was a university-wide event, open to all the faculties of UoP. The session provided valuable insights into PhD programs, research funding opportunities, and academic and professional career pathways in the United States, specifically in the fields of Analytical Chemistry, Biochemistry, Pharmacology, and Neuroscience. This was an inspirational event for the next-generation scientists at UoP.

In addition to this event, right before the CGU event, Kamal was able to address the incoming new students at the Faculty of Science and their parents (around 400-500 people). This was organized by the Senior Professor Dr. Gamini Rajapakse of the Department of Chemistry. Again, the goal of this presentation was to inspire the incoming students.

- Kamal Seneviratne

**STUDY AND RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES  
IN USA IN THE FIELDS OF ANALYTICAL CHEMISTRY,  
BIOCHEMISTRY, PHARMACOLOGY, AND NEUROSCIENCE**

**Guest Talk**

Don't miss this exclusive opportunity to gain insider insights on navigating the US academic landscape. Learn about PhD programs, research funding, and career pathways from a distinguished expert bridging three top US institutions.

13th January 2026  
**12 PM - 1 PM**  
at Career Guidance Unit (CGU),  
University of Peradeniya

**REGISTER NOW**

<https://forms.gle/8UD4vTqkHweJPC7Q7>

**Herana Kamal Seneviratne (Ph.D.)**  
Assistant Professor  
University of Maryland, Baltimore County  
University of Maryland School of Medicine  
Assistant Professor (Affiliate), Johns Hopkins  
University School of Medicine  
Councilor, American Society for Pharmacology and  
Experimental Therapeutics  
Editorial Board Member, Drug Metabolism and  
Disposition Journal, Journal of Mass Spectrometry

 **CAREER GUIDANCE UNIT  
UNIVERSITY OF PERADENIYA**

## 2025 Annual Alumni Reunion

Our 2025 Annual Alumni Gathering and Fundraiser was successfully held on October 11<sup>th</sup> in Pearland, Texas, at the Hilton Garden Inn Reception Hall. The event was sold out one week prior to the scheduled date and attended by approximately 240 Pera alumni and other local Sri Lankan friends. The event started with a Meet and Greet ("Thela") session over appetizers and drinks that enabled alumni from 1960s to 2020s to mingle with friends and cherish their memories at Pera. The formal event commenced with the President's address highlighting UPAА-USA's accomplishments since its establishment, and a fund-raising presentation by the President-elect on project opportunities to help UoP. The entertainment sessions commenced with a mesmerizing traditional Sri Lankan welcome dance by three daughters of our alumni, followed with a comedy skit on life experiences at UoP. Our alum Suren Lewkebandara, a popular personality promoting Sri Lankan art and culture in Texas presented the leading role of 'Sinhabahu' drama which was a truly nostalgic performance! The participants also enjoyed a well-choreographed western dance by local alumni in Texas. Subsequently, the Tune-1 live band actively entertained the participants with popular Sri Lankan songs spanning several decades including a *baila* song session that sustained a packed dance floor till midnight. The Executive Committee members who attended the event (20) actively engaged with the participants to raise funds for studentship awards and equipment donations for Pera.

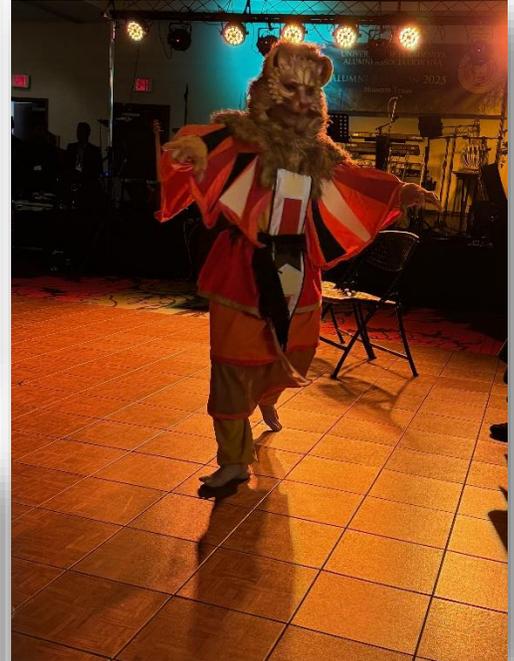
- Channa Bambaradeniya



EC Committee Group Photo



Tune 1 Band



Lewkebandara's Sihabahu Performance



The Dance Party

## Sri Lanka Inter-University Cricket Tournament

UPAA-USA collaborated with the Colombo University Faculty of Science Alumni Association (CUFSAA) to organize the second Sri Lanka Inter-University Softball Cricket Tournament which was successfully held on October 18<sup>th</sup>, at the Warminster Community Park in Warminster, PA. About forty players representing the Universities of Peradeniya, Colombo, and Moratuwa participated at this event that also attracted over one hundred Sri Lankan spectators. The University of Colombo team won the Champions Trophy, while the University of Peradeniya won the Masters Trophy. A highlight of this tournament was a women's cricket encounter between 'Unicorns' and 'Angels.' The opening pair of Unicorns remained unbeaten to win the match in a convincing manner!

- Channa Bambaradeniya



Group Photo



The Winners!



The Ladies' Team

## Visit from Vice Chancellor Professor Terence Madujith and University Leaders

Vice Chancellor Professor Terence Madujith, together with seven senior university leaders, visited the United States last September as part of an official tour. During their trip, the delegation made a special effort to meet with UPAA-USA members in the Greater Washington, D.C. area, creating a meaningful opportunity for connection, collaboration, and social engagement. Additionally, Professor Kapila Seneviratne, Chairman of the University Grants Commission (UGC), attended as a guest.

At the event, UPAA-USA leaders delivered an informative presentation highlighting our ongoing work, current initiatives, and long-term organizational goals. The university leaders also shared updates from campus and engaged in open conversations about future collaborations, emerging opportunities, and the challenges currently facing the university system.

This gathering greatly strengthened UPAA-USA's relationship with the University of Peradeniya leadership and opened new pathways for future partnerships and continued growth.

- Dhananjaya Rajasinghe



Few Pictures of the Event

**Contribute to our quarterly Newsletter:**

Make this a place to share Associations' activities and related news, express your opinions, share items of common interest as well as exhibit your talents and creativity!

Reach out to [secretary@upaa-usa.org](mailto:secretary@upaa-usa.org) **by end of March to contribute to our April issue.**

Communications Committee:

Geewananda Gunawardena

Dhananjaya Rajasinghe

Manjari Dissanayake