



# NEWSLETTER

University of Peradeniya Alumni Association – USA

April 2026 Issue

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Dear Members,

We are pleased to bring you the second newsletter of the year. Here's what you'll find in this issue:

- **A Journey of Impact**

President's March visit to UOP

- **Memories of Peradeniya**

A call to preserve campus stories

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Donate lab equipment to support UOP

- Communications Committee

### 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/>

## **A Journey of Impact – My March Visit to UOP**

### ***Harnessing Our Collective Strength: President's Report from the Field***

In mid-March, I completed a very short but incredibly productive trip to our alma mater, the University of Peradeniya. My mission was clear: to witness firsthand the transformation your generosity is fueling. Despite the brief nature of the visit, what I saw left me with a profound sense of optimism for the next generation of UOP graduates.

At the Engineering Faculty, I met with Dr. Namal Bandaranayake, Director of the ETIC lab. It was inspiring to see students turning abstract ideas into prototypes with such enthusiasm. Thanks to our committed member donors, we were able to provide the necessary funds for these student-led projects, allowing them to purchase the critical components needed to bring their designs to life. My discussions with the Dean, Prof. Lilantha Samaranayake, focused on how UPAA-USA can continue to coordinate these efforts to improve student facilities.

The Science Faculty visit was equally moving. I had the honor of addressing the new members of the Physics Society of UOP, where we discussed the vital importance of engaging in activities beyond academics. We focused on how developing leadership skills and team building through these programs will be the key to their success as they transition into professional life after graduation. Thanks to your support, the UOP Physics Society has officially become an international chapter accredited by the American Physical Society.

I also had the pleasure of meeting with three exceptional student leaders: Sithum Perera (Hockey Captain), Anuradha Pathum (outgoing president of Arts Circle), and Rashmi Virajith (Electrical & Electronic Engineering Society). During this quarter, UPAA-USA sponsored events organized by these three leaders, and I am happy to report that this support has created immense enthusiasm among the student leaders and the peers they guide.

A major highlight of this short trip was a meeting with the Prime Minister. This high-level meeting was graciously arranged by a fellow UOP alumnus living in Sri Lanka, proving just how powerful our alumni network is. We discussed securing waivers for customs duties and taxes on the instruments we ship, ensuring that every donation from our US-based members goes directly toward empowering students.

Your contributions are not just donations; they are the catalysts for innovation and leadership at UOP. Together, we are shaping a brighter future for our home.

- Gamini Dharmasena



A few pictures from Gamini's visit

## Memories of Peradeniya

Several years ago, a plethora of articles appeared in newspapers and websites by pioneering alumni of University of Ceylon, Peradeniya reminiscing the glorious life in the fifties and sixties. In response, I wrote: “If those were the glorious years of this fabled institution, the seventies can be considered as the decade it lost its innocence. That sounds ominous but rest assured that we the seventies generation of students did enjoy campus life in our own way, just as our predecessors did, perhaps without the opulence.



Pera in the 70's (source: Facebook)

Change is inevitable, but often it is not noticeable, especially when it is gradual. In comparison to the previous two decades, the changes of the seventies were anything but gradual and were out there for everyone to see. The song writers, novelists, and movie makers need not worry, the campus life they romanticized continued unabated: The mist rolled down the Hantana range, trumpet flowers carpeted the grounds in April, and countless youthful heart strings got tangled as before. While the Mahaweli ran through the lush valley as it did for millennia, some transformative events took place in the backdrop and changed campus life for many years to come.”



Pera now (source: <https://eng.pdn.ac.lk>)

Mahaweli did run through the lush valley during Ditwah, and the aftermath is only beginning to emerge. A few years ago, walking along Galaha road, I noticed girls on the balcony of Hilda Obeyesekera Hall. When asked, a student waiting for the bus replied that it had been a girls' residence forever. Not so, I wrote “After the uprising in 1971, all students were given accommodation in campus residences. Hilda Obeyesekera hall, which had been a women's residence since 1952, was converted to a men's residence, and we were the fortunate first male occupants. Thanks to the legendary warden, Mrs.

Mathiyaparanam, it had been so well maintained and looked like a three-star hotel. Manicured courtyards, clean and fully functioning bathrooms complete with bathtubs, full length mirrors, and bidets. Meals were served at the table complete with cutlery; food was excellent and was plentiful; and the waiting staff was there to refill the glass or the cup.”

If the changes during the first three decades were such, we can only imagine how things may have transformed over the following half a century. Alas, not much has been written, and no compilation could be found except for bits and pieces in social media. UPAA is trying to fill this gap for prosperity, we are working on publishing a book on Memories of Peradeniya about campus life. As usual, old timers have done their part, and we invite those recent graduates to share their memories of the campus life. If they are too busy to write, they can share their stories over the phone, we will put them into writing. Please, do contact the Communication Committee, we must record your experiences and opinions for the benefit of those who follow us to the lush valley.

- Geewananda Gunawardana

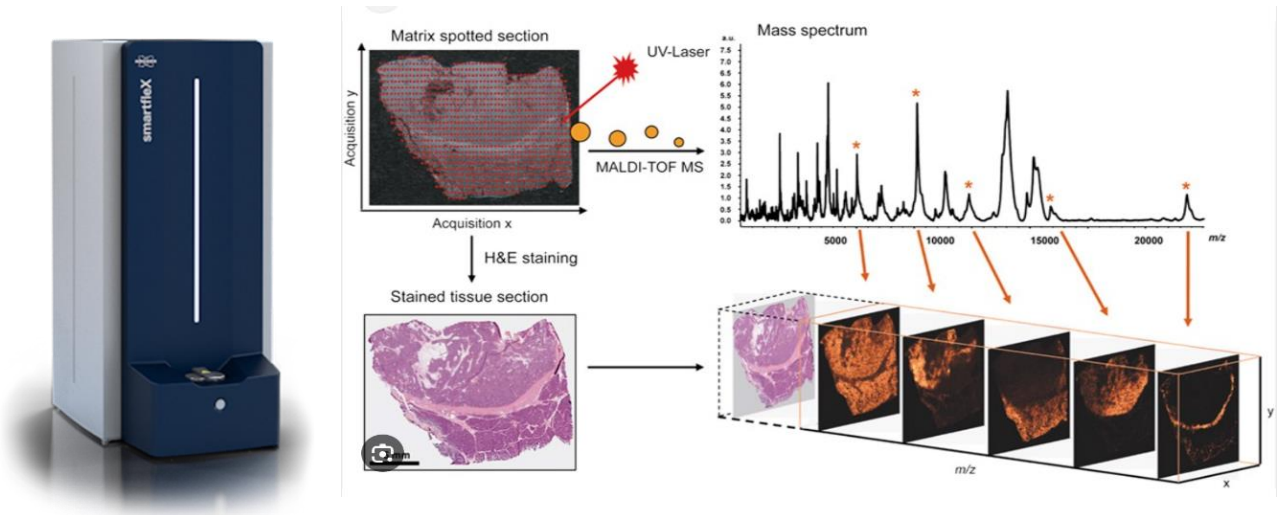
## Precision & Progress – The MALDI Mass Spectrometer

### *A New Era of Research: Bringing State-of-the-Art Technology to UOP*

We are thrilled to announce a monumental milestone for the Faculty of Science: the successful acquisition of a state-of-the-art MALDI Mass Spectrometer.

This high-level analytical instrument is officially en route to Sri Lanka via cargo shipping. We are tracking the vessel closely, and the estimated dock date in Colombo is May 15th. This high-level analytical instrument is a "game-changer" for research at the University of Peradeniya. During my visit, Dr. Kapila Wijeratne gave me a tour of the specialized facility that will house this equipment. Due to its sophisticated nature, the spectrometer will be maintained by dedicated faculty members within the Physics Department, though it will serve as a vital resource for multidisciplinary research across the university.

This achievement was made possible by the extraordinary generosity of two of our dedicated UPAA-USA members: Asoka Ranasinghe (74 SCI) and Yasmin Ranasinghe (74 SCI). By providing students with access to world-class technology, Asoka and Yasmin are helping bridge the gap between local education and global research standards. Even on a short trip, seeing the preparation for this equipment in person made it clear: your contributions are not just donations; they are the catalysts for innovation at Peradeniya. Thank you for proving that our collective reach extends far beyond borders.





Yasmin and Asoka at meetings

- Gamini Dharmasena

## UPAA-USA Secretary's Visit Strengthens Recovery Efforts and Mentorship Initiatives at UoP

UPAA-USA Secretary Damayanthi Ranwala (née Dammi Rupasinghe) visited the University of Peradeniya (UoP) on January 14 with a clear and timely mission: supporting flood recovery efforts while strengthening academic mentorship initiatives.

During her visit, she met with the Deans of the Faculties of Agriculture and Veterinary Science and witnessed firsthand the extent of the recent flood-related devastation. These discussions helped identify areas where alumni support could make an immediate impact. Notably, the visit initiated plans for a potential donation of a laminar flow unit from UPAA-USA to the Department of Soil Science in the Faculty of Agriculture, addressing a critical need in rebuilding research capacity and supporting student academic programs.

In parallel, Dammi actively engaged with the university community through a series of academic and mentoring sessions. She delivered well-received talks at the Faculties of Science and Agriculture and connected informally with students, gaining insight into their experiences and aspirations.

A key highlight of her visit was her continued collaboration with the Physical Society/SPS International Chapter and the Physics Alumni Association of UoP. As a returning guest speaker, she conducted her third session titled *"Building a Competitive STEM Graduate Application: Part 1 – Evidence-Based Strategies for International Students"* on January 14, 2026. The session drew 66 participants—exceeding expectations—and provided practical, research-driven guidance to students at various stages of their academic journeys. She also delivered a talk themed *"Personal and Professional Success"* to undergraduate students of the Faculty of Agriculture, attended by approximately 50 students.

On March 25, 2026, Dammi led a panel discussion with two current graduate students in the United States, Disara Roshini and Hasith Perera, from the Department of Physics and Astronomy at Clemson University. The session, themed *"Building a Competitive STEM*



Dammi at UoP delivering a talk

*Graduate Application: Part 2 – Discussion with Current Graduate Students,*” invited UoP students to submit questions in advance. These questions were carefully reviewed and addressed during an interactive discussion. This segment created a valuable platform for open dialogue, offering firsthand insights into the application process, academic life, and challenges of studying abroad, while directly responding to student concerns. The session engaged over 37 undergraduate and graduate students from within and beyond the Faculty of Science who are considering pursuing graduate studies abroad. Special appreciation is extended to Hasith and Disara for their valuable contributions to organizing and enriching these sessions.

These initiatives collectively represent a flagship effort of the UPAA-USA mentorship program. The outcomes of this visit mark meaningful progress toward establishing a structured mentorship platform and strengthening alumni engagement to support future scholars at UoP.

- Dammi Rupasinghe

# Donation of the PCR Machine to Department of Zoology, University of Peradeniya

UPAA-USA donated a new PCR machine worth of \$10,000 to the Department of Zoology, in memory of late Dr. Sumana Wijekoon – former Head of the Department. This instrument will facilitate practical training of undergraduate and post-graduate students studying Zoology, Molecular Biology, Botany and Biomedical Sciences at the Faculty of Science. The PCR machine has applications related to clinical diagnostics, forensic sciences, molecular biology, environmental monitoring and food safety.



## Empowering Futures: Our New PCR Machine

Utilization of the Donated PCR Machine at the  
Department of Zoology  
University of Peradeniya



### Uses:

The donated PCR machine is used for undergraduate and postgraduate practical training and research activities

### How the PCR machine is used:

- DNA amplification for practical sessions
- Student research projects
- Demonstration of molecular techniques
- Skill development in modern laboratory methods

### Students benefits

- ▶ Hands-on training
- Research exposure
- Preparation for higher studies
- Improved employability

*This PCR machine was generously donated by the University of Peradeniya Alumni Association - USA (UPAA-USA) to the Department of Zoology in loving memory of late Dr. Sumana Wijekoon, former Head of the Department. We gratefully acknowledge this meaningful contribution, which supports molecular biology education and research across the University of Peradeniya.*

*The PCR machine is installed and maintained at the Department of Zoology, Faculty of Science, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka*

*Thank you for your support!*

**Special Thanks**  
**Dr. Channa Bambaradeniya, President (UPAA-USA)**  
**Dr. Dimuthu Jayawickrama, Treasurer (UPAA-USA)**  
B.A.P.C. Premathilake, Technical Officer, Department of Zoology

- Channa Bambaradeniya

## UPAA-USA Studentship Awards

UPAA-USA donated \$5,400 to the Alumni Association of University of Peradeniya (AAUP) to provide studentship awards to 27 students (3 per faculty selected from nine faculties). The students were selected on a need basis by the AAUP in collaboration with the faculty administrators. This donation was made possible with the funds raised from alumni at the UPAA-USA Annual Alumni Gathering event held in Houston, Texas in October 2025.

- Channa Bambaradeniya

## Turning "Surplus" into Success: Support UOP Labs

As scientists and engineers, many of us work in environments where technology moves fast. We often see labs being decommissioned, departments upgrading their equipment, or surplus instruments being cleared out to make room for the new.

At our workplaces, these items are often labeled as "obsolete" or "surplus." **But at the University of Peradeniya, this equipment is gold.**

### The Opportunity

We are reaching out to ask you to keep an eye out for used labware, electronic test equipment, and other scientific instruments at your place of work. What might be destined for a warehouse or a giveaway program in the U.S. could provide a UOP student with the hands-on experience they need to become a world-class professional.

### Don't Be Afraid to Ask!

Many of us hesitate, assuming the process to acquire surplus items is too complicated or that the company won't allow it. However, many organizations have "Corporate Social Responsibility" (CSR) programs or simply want to see their equipment used for a good cause rather than ending up in a landfill.

**You never know until you ask.** Often, all it takes is a quick conversation with your lab manager or facilities department to get the ball rolling.

### Why It's Easy for Your Company:

- **Tax Benefits:** UPAA-USA is a registered **501(c)(3) non-profit**. In many cases, companies can claim a tax deduction for the fair market value of the donated equipment. We will provide all the necessary donation receipts and documentation for their tax records.

- **Zero Logistics Stress:** Your company doesn't need to worry about the shipping. **UPAA-USA will cover all shipping costs and manage the entire logistics chain**, from your workplace door all the way to the faculty at UOP.

#### How You Can Help:

1. **Survey Your Workplace:** Look for surplus glassware, meters, power supplies, or specialized lab tools.
2. **Inquire Locally:** Ask if the company has a policy for donating decommissioned equipment to educational non-profits.
3. **Reach Out to Us:** Before you secure anything, please contact the EC. We can provide the necessary documentation to show that UPAA-USA is a registered entity and help coordinate the logistics of getting these items to Sri Lanka.

Our alma mater gave us the foundation for our careers. Let us work together to ensure the next generation of UOP engineers and scientists has the tools they need to succeed.

- Gamini Dharmasena

#### 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 [newsletter@upaa-usa.org](mailto:newsletter@upaa-usa.org) by end of June to contribute to our July issue.

Communications Committee:

Manjari Dissanayake

Dhananjaya Rajasinghe

Geewananda Gunawardena