

# ASLE Strategic Plan 2009

## Mission Statement:

The mission of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) is to promote the understanding of nature and culture for a sustainable world by fostering a community of scholars, teachers, and writers who study the relationships among literature, culture, and the physical environment.

## Supporting the Mission:

ASLE seeks to support the above mission by:

- supporting academic research, teaching, and creative work in environmental literature, arts, and humanities;
  - fostering an active and energetic community through conferences, networks, publications, and other forums;
  - reaching across national, disciplinary, and cultural boundaries to enhance diversity and inclusiveness; and
  - maintaining and advocating ecologically sustainable practices.
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## Introduction

ASLE has thrived since its inception in 1992. Now in its seventeenth year, the organization's membership includes a range of professionals, students, and devotees of environmental literature and related cultural expressions.

While ASLE offers a vital home for dialog concerning literature and environment, it has never had a formal plan to direct its commitments, goals, and projects. At the ASLE officers' retreat in February 2008 in Boise, Idaho, the Executive Council and other officers brainstormed and drafted the backbone of a strategic plan. Our discussions centered on ASLE's strengths and its potential to contribute to both our larger academic community and the general communities that we each call home. We then drafted the following plan and circulated the document among ASLE's leadership and membership, making revisions to reflect the feedback we received. In 2009, we finalized this document and launched the Strategic Plan at our biennial meeting in Victoria, B.C.

This document contains three sections. The first section, "About ASLE," provides background on the organization's purpose, strengths, and membership. Through this section, we hope to remind both current and future members of the organization's origins, successes, and foundational mission. The second section, "Financial Overview," provides a brief financial

summary. The following sections, “Goals” and “Tasks toward the Goals,” offer a strategy for the organization’s direction in the years ahead by listing (in the third section) specific goals for the organization to pursue and (in the fourth section) suggested tasks for reaching these goals.

Our intent is for this document to help guide ASLE’s future leaders. ASLE’s Executive Council will consider this document at each of its annual meetings, noting which tasks have been completed and making any necessary revisions as priorities shift. ASLE’s Managing Director, President, and Vice President will review this document regularly and keep the membership informed of progress. The document should be revised every five years to reflect ASLE’s changing needs, challenges, and priorities.

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## **Section I. About ASLE**

The Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) was founded in 1992 at a special session of the Western Literature Association conference in Reno, Nevada. Its purpose is to promote the exchange of ideas and information about literature and other cultural representations that consider human relationships with the natural world. The name of the organization is meant to be as inclusive as possible, encompassing any text that illuminates the ways humans perceive and interact with the nonhuman environment.

ASLE encourages and seeks to facilitate both traditional and innovative scholarly approaches to environmental literature, ecocritical approaches to all cultural representations of nature, and interdisciplinary environmental research, including discussions among literary scholars and environmental historians, economists, journalists, philosophers, psychologists, art historians, scientists, and scholars in other relevant disciplines.

In addition to encouraging new writing about nature and environment, we foster contact between scholars and environmentally-engaged artists, including writers, photographers, painters, musicians, and filmmakers. We also promote the incorporation of environmental concerns and awareness into pedagogical theory and practice.

ASLE is registered with the U.S. government as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

### **Membership**

Since ASLE’s founding in 1992 by a handful of teachers and scholars, the organization’s membership has grown to approximately 1200 individual members representing 49 of the United States and 32 other countries. In addition, ASLE’s journal, ISLE, has about 300 library subscribers. Membership numbers have held relatively steady at this level for the past five years, with some fluctuation between conference and non-conference years. While most members are teachers or students at colleges or universities, ASLE’s membership also includes secondary school teachers, creative writers, independent scholars, environmental activists, naturalists,

artists, filmmakers, undergraduates, and retirees. ASLE also has nine international affiliated groups, each with its own leadership and membership: ASLE-Japan (180 members); EASLCE (Europe; 80 members in non-conference years, 200 members in conference years); ASLE-Korea (200 members); ASLE-Australia/New Zealand (58 members); ASLE-Taiwan (new in 2008; 50 inaugural members); ALECC (Canada; about 125 subscribers); ASLE-UK (70 members); and ASLE-India and OSLE-India (approximately 200 members each).

### **Organizational Strengths**

ASLE is the primary professional organization in the field of literature and environment in the United States. ASLE's members include educators, students, scientists, and independent scholars. Currently, we have approximately 1300 members, including international members representing thirty-two countries.

### **Publications**

ASLE publishes *ASLE News* (an online member newsletter) four times a year. In conjunction with Oxford University Press, ASLE also publishes the journal *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*. As of 2009, ISLE is a quarterly publication.

### **Conferences**

The organization conducts a biennial conference that draws participants and speakers from around the globe. In 2009, ASLE held its eighth biennial conference in Victoria, British Columbia. Previous biennial conferences were held in Spartanburg, South Carolina; Eugene, Oregon; Boston, Massachusetts; Flagstaff, Arizona; Kalamazoo, Michigan; Missoula, Montana, and Fort Collins, Colorado. Conferences feature prominent speakers, several plenary sessions, and both field and volunteer opportunities. Conference attendees have the opportunity to make their conference travel "carbon neutral."

### **Affiliated Organizations**

ASLE's affiliations with other professional organizations take two forms. First, ASLE has formal "affiliate" status with several professional societies, granting the organization standing sessions at the conferences of these other groups. Second, scholars in countries other than the United States have formed their own professional groups devoted, like ASLE, to the study of literature and environment. These organizations represent ASLE's "international affiliates."

Affiliate status: ASLE has formal affiliate status with the following professional organizations: American Literature Association (ALA); American Studies Association (ASA-Environmental Studies Caucus); Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC); Disciplinary Associations Network for Sustainability (DANS); International Association for Environmental Philosophy (IAEP); Modern Language Association (MLA); Midwest MLA (M/MLA); Northeast MLA (NEMLA); Pacific MLA (PAMLA); Rocky Mountain MLA (RMMLA); Society for Early Americanists (SEA); Society for Literature, Science, and the Arts (SALSA); and Society for the Study of American Women Writers (SSAWW). ASLE encourages and sponsors lectures, discussions, and panels at the scholarly conferences of these organizations.

**International affiliates:** ASLE has several international affiliates, including: ALECC (Canada); ASLE-ANZ (Australia/New Zealand); ASLE-India; ASLE-Japan; ASLE-Korea; ASLE-Taiwan; ASLE-UK; EASLCE (Europe); and OSLE-India.

### **Awards**

ASLE offers financial assistance and sponsorship of several smaller symposia in non-conference years, and offers funding assistance to approximately twenty graduate student attendees at each biennial conference. In 2007, ASLE established book and graduate student paper awards in the areas of ecocriticism and environmental creative writing. The awards recognize the best scholarly paper in ecocriticism by a graduate student presented at the biennial conference; the best work of environmental creative writing (any genre) by a graduate student presented at the biennial conference; the best book-length monograph of scholarly ecocriticism published since the previous biennial conference; and the best book-length work of creative writing (any genre) on an environmental theme published since the previous biennial conference.

### **Web Site**

In 2008, ASLE re-designed its web site, making it more “user friendly” and expanding its capabilities. The web site features access to Calls for Papers, Job Listings, Calls for Manuscripts, and Fellowship Opportunities, as well as several additional ASLE publications, including the On-line Bibliography and the Graduate Student Handbook. The web site also offers access to three discussion lists created by ASLE and its members to promote a daily or weekly exchange of ideas and information on topics and issues in the field of literature and environment.

### **Projects and Programs**

ASLE's officers and project coordinators oversee several programs for the benefit of members. The Diversity Caucus has served to ensure that diversity issues are addressed through programming and activities; the Mentoring Program provides mentoring, professional advice, and conference programming to graduate student members; and the Graduate Student Working Group addresses issues and programming of concern to graduate students. Recently, ASLE's leadership has also started to address the environmental sustainability of the organization.

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## **Section II. Financial Overview**

At the beginning of 2008, ASLE's net assets stood at approximately \$91,000, with \$48,000 in FDIC insured CDs at varying rates and approximately \$43,000 in liquid assets. The ASLE budget is cyclical, due to the biennial conference we have held since 1995, and it was impacted in late 2004 by the hiring of a part-time managing director. Presently, in non-conference years the budgetary expenses of the organization have been approximately \$50,000. In conference years, that number swells to well over \$100,000, given the expenses associated with such a large event.

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## **Section III. Goals**

This section lists the strategic goals of ASLE at this time.

1. Continue to support and develop *ISLE*.
  2. Increase the disciplinary and demographic diversity of our membership.
  3. Better serve our graduate student members.
  4. Better serve our international members.
  5. Better serve our nonacademic members and independent scholars.
  6. Endow and sustain our awards in scholarship and creative writing.
  7. Develop new ways to foster innovative pedagogy.
  8. Improve the environmental sustainability of the organization.
  9. Review the effectiveness of ASLE's organizational structure.
  10. Explore how innovative conferences and symposia can help us fulfill our mission.
  11. Increase the visibility of the organization within and outside of academia.
  12. Improve public discourse about the environment through community-based, K-12, and undergraduate programs.
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## **Section IV. Tasks Toward the Goals**

This section lists the tasks that will have to be accomplished in order to achieve the above goals.

### **Goal 1: Continue to support and develop *ISLE*.**

*Task 1:* Finalize the contract with Oxford University Press for the production, marketing, and distribution of *ISLE*.

*Task 2:* Assist *ISLE*'s editorial staff as it moves the production of *ISLE* from Reno to the Oxford University Press offices.

*Task 3:* Establish a sub-committee to assist the *ISLE* Editor and Book Review Editor in assessing and making any changes to the journal that the contract with Oxford University Press requires or invites.

*Task 4:* Invite regular conversation between the Executive Council and the *ISLE* Editor and Book Review Editor regarding their vision for the journal, members' needs in terms of the journal (see

the responses to question 32 of the ASLE Survey), the transition to Oxford University Press, and any other relevant issues that arise over time.

*Task 5:* Better publicize *ISLE* and actively recruit submissions to the journal from prominent scholars and writers.

*Task 6:* Establish an endowment to fund graduate student support and faculty course releases for *ISLE*.

**Goal 2: Increase the disciplinary and demographic diversity of our membership.**

*Task 1:* Expand the number of professional organizations that are ASLE affiliates to include organizations that focus on topics other than literature/creative writing and organizations that specifically support racially and culturally diverse scholarship (such as MELUS and ASAIL).

*Task 2:* Establish an endowment to help low-income individuals to join ASLE more easily, through such means as membership incentives, lower introductory rates (or free initial memberships), and financial assistance for biennial conference attendance.

*Task 3:* Encourage members to organize an off-year symposium specifically on diversity.

*Task 4:* Have the Executive Council consider making a formal commitment to inviting conference speakers who represent various disciplines, minority cultures, and perspectives. Alter the Conference Proposal Guidelines accordingly.

*Task 5:* Consult with campus EO/AE officers to help identify additional ways to increase the demographic diversity of our membership.

*Task 6:* Create a Task Force to explore whether and how ASLE should actively seek to recruit undergraduate students as members.

**Goal 3: Better serve our graduate student members.**

*Task 1:* Work with the Mentoring Program Coordinator to consider ways in which ASLE might develop and extend that program.

*Task 2:* Work with the Graduate Student Liaisons to ensure regular correspondence with graduate student members through email, *ASLE News*, and the ASLE listserv.

*Task 3:* Establish an endowment to fund the graduate student biennial conference travel awards. The initial fund will be \$31,500.

*Task 4:* Assist graduate students with various aspects of professionalization, including developing courses, learning to write for publication, and locating and submitting their work to appropriate journals, including *ISLE*.

*Task 5:* Devote a portion of the web site to posting reading lists for preliminary exams.

*Task 6:* Explore the possibility of sponsoring a conference specifically for graduate students and/or devoting an issue of ISLE to graduate student work.

*Task 7:* Endow a scholarship for a student to study with his or her favorite scholar at a different institution for a semester.

*Task 8:* Endow a grant program for students to travel to archives and other research sites.

*Task 9:* Include a column in *ASLE News* about the work being done in particular grad programs.

#### **Goal 4: Better serve our international members.**

*Task 1:* Establish an endowment to help international members attend the biennial ASLE conference.

*Task 2:* Create an international exchange program for teachers and scholars of literature and environment.

#### **Goal 5: Better serve our nonacademic members and independent scholars.**

*Task 1:* Create a “Member News” section in *ASLE News* for anecdotal stories about research, teaching, publishing, and the like. This could include such items as who published what, who is working where, who won a Fulbright, etc. This would also help better serve graduate student members.

*Task 2:* Devote a portion of each *ASLE News* to a Q&A with an independent writer or artist, asking the same five questions each time, e.g., 1. How did the natural world become important to your work? (or, What landscapes are important to your work?) 2. What three books (or three writers) have most influenced your work? . . . 5. What are you working on now?

#### **Goal 6: Endow and sustain our awards in scholarship and creative writing.**

*Task 1:* Establish an endowment to fund the existing awards, which are granted biennially. The initial fund will be \$15,000.

*Task 2:* Discuss among the Executive Council whether the current award structure (and its corresponding endowment) best serves our membership and other strategic goals.

#### **Goal 7: Develop new ways to foster innovative pedagogy.**

*Task 1:* Formalize a process by which ASLE features sessions or seminars on pedagogy at each biennial conference.

*Task 2:* Discuss with the *ISLE* Editor the possibility of featuring pedagogical essays in the journal.

*Task 3:* Invite ASLE members who have engaged in innovative pedagogy to develop small pedagogically-oriented seminars, to be organized by the ASLE member, to “teach the teachers.” Establish an application process, funding guidelines, and an endowment to foster these programs.

### **Goal 8: Improve the environmental sustainability of the organization.**

*Task 1:* Revise the Conference Proposal Guidelines to reflect the fact that ASLE wants to minimize the environmental impact of its biennial conference and that we expect conference organizers and on-site hosts to plan accordingly.

*Task 2:* Establish a sub-committee of the Executive Council to review the organization’s environmental impact, suggest ways to minimize it, and offer suggestions for future reductions.

*Task 3:* Commit to making the non-conference aspects of the organization “carbon-neutral” by 2012.

*Task 4:* Have the Executive Council consider whether ASLE should commit to offering at least one volunteer opportunity at each biennial conference for conference attendees to help improve the physical environment of the local area.

### **Goal 9: Review the effectiveness of ASLE’s organizational structure.**

*Task 1:* Institute on-line voting through the web site.

*Task 2:* Explore the feasibility of creating standing committees so that more members will be able to contribute to the organization.

*Task 3:* Create a sub-committee of the Executive Council to review the way in which the Managing Director uses her time currently; evaluate the needs of the organization in terms of the role played by the Managing Director; and suggest to the Executive Council any necessary changes to the duties and terms of the Managing Director’s role.

### **Goal 10: Explore how innovative conferences and symposia can help us fulfill our mission.**

*Task 1:* Have a sub-committee of the Executive Council explore how other organizations are developing sustainable conference practices and innovative programming. Consider adopting these innovative practices.

*Task 2:* Invite submissions from the membership on ways in which ASLE might make its conference more innovative in terms of programming, activities, and process.

*Task 3:* Consider having at least one plenary speaker at each biennial conference address the audience via video conference.

**Goal 11: Increase the visibility of the organization within and outside of academia.**

*Task 1:* Advertise in academic journals whose readers would benefit from learning about ASLE.

*Task 2:* Work with a public relations firm devoted to non-profits to determine whether and how ASLE should advertise to general audiences.

*Task 3:* Invite members who give community presentations to explain ASLE, its mission, and its organization to their public audiences.

*Task 4:* Continue to build ASLE's web presence.

**Goal 12: Improve public discourse about the environment through community-based, K-12, and undergraduate programs.**

*Task 1:* Establish an endowed grant program to help fund public presentations, regional seminars, or lecture series run by ASLE members in their communities for members of the public, K-12 teachers, and undergraduates.

*Task 2:* Investigate ways to partner with like-minded organizations to improve public discourse about the environment.

*Task 3:* Explore additional ways to promote the study of literature and environment on the undergraduate level, such as publicizing undergraduate institutions that have recently acquired an ecocriticism-based class or publishing undergraduate work in *ASLE News* or *ISLE*.

*Task 4:* Establish an endowment to help undergraduate students attend the biennial conference.

*Task 5:* Invite ASLE members to submit suggestions regarding how ASLE might improve public discourse about the environment