

ASLE Strategic Plan (2014)

Introduction

The ASLE strategic planning process was designed to help guide ASLE's leaders and to provide continuity in the association. ASLE's Managing Director, President, and Vice President will review this document regularly and keep the membership informed of progress. ASLE's Executive Council (EC) is charged in the original Plan to review the document at each of its annual meetings, noting which tasks have been completed, and to make any necessary revisions to the document. In addition, the Plan will undergo a more comprehensive review and revision every five years to reflect the changing needs, challenges, and priorities of the association.

The ASLE EC and program officers brainstormed and drafted the backbone of a strategic plan at the officers' retreat in February 2008 in Boise, Idaho. The discussions centered on the strategic strengths of ASLE and its potential to contribute to both the larger academic community and the general communities our members call home. The Plan was drafted and circulated among ASLE's leadership and membership for revision. The document was finalized in 2009 and the Strategic Plan was launched at the biennial meeting in Victoria, B.C.

The 2009 ASLE Strategic Plan contained four sections. The first section, "About ASLE," provided background on the organization's purpose, strengths, and membership. The second section, "Financial Overview," provided a brief financial summary. The sections "Goals" and "Tasks toward the Goals" then offered 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.

The 2009 Strategic Plan was reviewed by the ASLE Executive Council prior to the 2014 officers retreat in Keene, New Hampshire. The discussion at the retreat began with a summary of the progress made toward meeting specific goals. Since the ASLE Strategic Plan was approved in 2009, ASLE has strengthened the organizational structure of the association, enhanced the disciplinary and demographic diversity of our membership, and reaffirmed the values of equity, inclusion, and accessibility in our association. To these ends we have:

- developed three pilot grant projects: Translation Grants, Subvention Grants, and Community Grants
- endorsed interest groups as a grassroots initiative to facilitate ASLE members who wish to organize around disciplinary, geographic or institutional interests and to support pedagogy, scholarship, and mentoring within these particular areas
- drafted ASLE Accessibility Guidelines to better assure conference accessibility, and provide guidance for chairs, presenters, and session organizers at the biennial conference and other ASLE affiliated events
- developed International and Professional Affiliate Guidelines designed for those interested in initiating an international branch of ASLE in our ongoing efforts to facilitate scholarly exchange with other professional organizations around the world
- changed the election cycle to address the opportunities and challenges that come with a growing membership and staging a large conference every two years
- reviewed and revised our mission statement and goals
- updated the content management system (CMS) to improve our process of managing and updating the web site, better represent the critical and creative scope of the environmental humanities, communicate more effectively with both internal and external audiences, and utilize state-of-the-art web design to generate, present and archive content

- In our continuing efforts to better serve our nonacademic members and independent scholars, including writers not affiliated with colleges or universities, we include on our web site “Member Perspectives” and “Member Profiles,” and we continue to solicit anecdotal stories about research, teaching, and publishing. We are also cultivating web features with independent writers and artists

In our review of the Plan, we discussed strategies to include teachers and scholars from the humanities and sciences in the work of ASLE; we discussed the needs of our graduate student members, especially as we reconstruct our digital presence and strategy; we endorsed further collaboration with the ASLE Creative Caucus to promote environmental writing and the arts; and we committed ourselves to seeking new ways to share our intellectual work, and the work of our association, in the civic sphere.

The 2014 Strategic Plan was further revised during the summer and fall of 2014. Sections of the 2014 Plan, including updates to the “About ASLE” section, were drafted for the new web site and are included below. The 2014 Plan includes 1) an updated mission statement for the association drafted by the President and members of the Executive Council; 2) a revised list of ways ASLE supports its mission; 3) updates to Section 1 to reflect changes in the membership and organization, including our pilot grants, projects and programs, finances; 4) the goals we have achieved, including the new election cycle and the continuing work of the digital strategies committee building a new web site; and 5) and an updated list of goals and tasks that will need to be accomplished to realize the goals.

2014 Strategic Plan

Mission Statement

The mission of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) is to inspire and promote the work of scholars, educators, students, and writers in the environmental humanities and arts.

Furthering the Mission

ASLE seeks to further the above mission by:

- supporting teaching and learning in the fields of environmental literature, ecocriticism, environmental studies, literature, and science, and broadly in the humanities and the arts
- fostering member collaboration and public dialogue through conferences, networks, publications, and other forums
- generating collaborative research in the humanities, arts, social sciences, and sciences
- promoting equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility on behalf of the membership
- facilitating the public dissemination of member projects and expertise
- maintaining and championing ecologically sustainable and socially just practices

Section I. About ASLE

ASLE was founded in 1992 by a group of scholars and writers interested in exploring the meanings of the natural environment and the complexities of human relationships with each other and with the more-than-human world, and to deepening the impact of these explorations both within and beyond the classroom. While ecocritical teaching and scholarship developed in literary and cultural studies, our members include writers and educators who also work in interdisciplinary fields such as ecology, conservation biology, environmental history, environmental philosophy, and environmental law.

For more than twenty years ASLE has supported the intellectual work of its members around the world. The formation of ASLE-Japan in 1994 signaled an international orientation that continues in our many active affiliates in countries around the world today. Over 1400 members from more than 40 countries represent a wide range of institutions, fields, and interests and connect with one another to organize lectures, readings, and conference panels and to collaborate on projects and initiatives. Because ASLE defines the environmental humanities as global in scope, our members are actively facilitating intellectual exchange and collaboration with colleagues and professional organizations around the world.

Since 1993, ASLE's biennial conference [[link to biennial conference page](#)] routinely features creative panels and plenary speakers. Several of ASLE's honorary members—including Homero and Betty Aridjis, Wendell Berry, Linda Hogan, Mary Oliver, Ruth Ozeki, Scott Russell Sanders, and Gary Snyder—are creative writers. In addition, we sponsor symposia [[link to symposia page](#)] in our non-conference years, provide member and community grants, and make book and paper awards during biennial conference years. The work of members is featured in the peer-reviewed

academic journal *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* published quarterly through Oxford University Press. Each issue of *ISLE* publishes poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction alongside scholarly articles. The association's longstanding commitment to supporting artists and scholars remains one of its greatest strengths.

Today ASLE is a vibrant international community of scholars and teachers working across the humanities and arts. ASLE members also engage in their local, regional, and international communities through the humanities and collaborate with individuals and institutions through public programming and outreach.

Membership

Since ASLE's founding in 1992 by a handful of teachers, writers, and scholars, the organization's membership has grown to approximately 1400 individual members representing all regions of the United States and 43 other countries. In addition, ASLE's journal, *ISLE*, has subscribers in hundreds of libraries around the world and has been made freely available in a number of developing countries through a program with our publisher, Oxford University Press. Membership numbers have held relatively steady at this level for a number of years, with some fluctuation between conference and non-conference years. While a majority of 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, scientists, undergraduates, and retirees. ASLE also has nine international affiliated groups, each with its own leadership and membership.

Organizational Strengths

ASLE is the primary professional organization in the fields of ecocriticism, literature and environment, and the environmental humanities in the United States. ASLE's members include educators, students, scientists, and independent scholars from around the world.

We encourage and seek 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.

Publications

ASLE has published *ASLE News* as an online e-newsletter four times a year since 2010. In conjunction with Oxford University Press, ASLE also publishes the journal *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*. *ISLE* became a quarterly publication in 2009, when our partnership with OUP began. *ISLE* is currently available as both an online and print publication.

Conferences

The organization conducts a biennial conference that draws participants and speakers from around the globe. In 2013, ASLE held its tenth biennial conference in Lawrence,

Kansas. Previous biennial conferences were held in Bloomington, Indiana; Victoria, British Columbia, Spartanburg, South Carolina; Eugene, Oregon; Boston, Massachusetts; Flagstaff, Arizona; Kalamazoo, Michigan; Missoula, Montana, and Fort Collins, Colorado. Conferences feature prominent speakers, and several plenary sessions.

Affiliated Organizations

ASLE's affiliations with other professional organizations take two forms. First, ASLE has formal "professional affiliate" status with several professional societies, granting or receiving standing sessions at the conferences of these other organizations. 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."

Professional Affiliates: ASLE has formal affiliate status with the following professional organizations: American Literature Association (ALA); American Studies Association (ASA-Environmental Studies Caucus); Association for the Study of American Indian Literatures (ASAIL); Disciplinary Associations Network for Sustainability (DANS); International Association for Environmental Philosophy (IAEP); The Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture Since 1900; Modern Language Association (MLA); Midwest MLA (M/MLA); Northeast MLA (NEMLA); Pacific MLA (PAMLA); Rocky Mountain MLA (RMMLA); Science Fiction Research Association (SFRA); Society for Early Americanists (SEA); Society for Literature, Science, and the Arts (SLSA); Society for the Study of American Women Writers (SSAWW); South Atlantic Modern Language Association (SAMLMA); and The Thoreau Society. 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); ASLEC-ANZ (Australia/New Zealand); ASLE-India; ASLE-Japan; ASLE-Korea; ASLE-Taiwan; ASLE-UKI (UK/Ireland); EASLCE (Europe); and OSLE-India.

Awards and Grants

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 papers (2) in ecocriticism and environmental creative writing (any genre) by a graduate student presented at the biennial conference; the best book-length works (2) of scholarly ecocriticism and creative writing (any genre) on an environmental theme published since the previous biennial conference.

In 2013, ASLE launched an International Membership Grants Initiative. The Initiative was established to provide up to 50 ASLE membership grants to literature and environment scholars outside the US and Canada. The grants are designed to help a more diverse, international community of scholars gain access to educational and scholarly opportunities in our field, as well as to advance educational and professional opportunities beyond the US and Canada.

In 2013-14, drawing on the resources from the 2008-09 ASLE development campaign, we initiated three pilot grant projects: Translation Grants, Book/Article/Media Project Subvention Grants, and Community Grants. The Translation Grants were established in order to support work in ecocriticism from international scholars and to expand exchanges across cultures and continents and will offer \$3,000 in support in the form of \$1000 grants. The Subvention Grants were created to support innovative projects in ecocriticism and the environmental humanities and will award up to \$4000 in support in the form of several grants. The Community Grants seek to

support projects that will help build connections between the environmental humanities and place-based environmental organizations working outside the academy. There is up to \$5,000 of funding available. We are currently reviewing the grant application materials and process prior to the second round of grant funding in 2015.

Web Site and Digital Strategy

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 Online 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.

In 2013 ASLE formed a Digital Strategies Committee that developed a proposal for updating the web site, and in the spring of 2014 began work with Bixler Communications Group to update the content management system (CMS) to improve our process of managing and updating the web site. Our new web site represents the critical and creative scope of the environmental humanities, communicates more effectively with both internal and external audiences, and utilizes state-of-the-art web design to generate, present and archive content. The new ASLE web site was launched in the fall of 2014.

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 Liaisons and Working Group address issues and programming of concern to graduate students. Recently, ASLE’s leadership has also addressed the environmental sustainability of the organization.

Section II. Financial Overview

At the end of 2013, ASLE’s net assets stood at approximately \$260,000; these assets are divided into three categories: \$89,000 is invested in TIAA-CREF accounts, \$71,000 in FDIC-insured short-term CDs and \$100,000 is in the form of liquid assets in a checking account. The ASLE budget is cyclical, due to the biennial conference we have held since 1995, and so we have implemented a two-year budgeting process in 2013 to account for these fluctuations. Presently, in non-conference years the budgetary expenses of the organization have been approximately \$60,000. In conference years, that number swells to nearly \$200,000, given the expenses associated with such a large event.

Section III. Goals

This section lists the strategic goals of ASLE. The list below remains consistent with the goals in the 2009 Plan:

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.

Section IV. Tasks Toward the Goals

This section lists the tasks that will have to be accomplished in order to achieve the above goals. These tasks have been updated, where necessary, to reflect the work of the association between 2009 and 2014:

Goal 1: Continue to support and develop ISLE

Task 1: 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 the transition to Oxford University Press, and any other relevant issues that arise over time. (In process.)

Task 2: Publicize *ISLE* and actively recruit submissions to the journal from prominent scholars and writers.

Goal 2: Increase the disciplinary and demographic diversity of our membership and cultivate equity, inclusion, and accessibility in our association.

Task 1: Continue expanding 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 LASA).

Task 2: Raise funds 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/AA officers to help identify additional ways to increase the demographic diversity of our membership.

Goal 3: Better serve our graduate and undergraduate 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: Seek to raise funds to expand graduate student biennial conference travel awards.

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: Assist graduate student members with preparation for employment beyond academic teaching and research.

Task 6: Seek funding for a grant program for students to travel to archives and other research sites.

Task 7: Include columns in *ASLE News* to make visible specific opportunities for both MA and PhD students.

Goal 4: Better serve our international members

Task 1: Explore new ways 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: Fund and sustain our awards in scholarship and creative writing

Task 1: Discuss among the members of the Executive Council whether the current award structure (and its corresponding endowment) best serves our membership and other strategic goals.

Goal 6: Fund and sustain our Research Grant, Translation Grant, Community Grant, and International Membership Grant

Task 1: Review 2014 Grant timelines and process and establish a member of the ASLE leadership as the primary person responsible for oversight of the grant process.

Task 2: Discuss a fund drive to increase donations and create a source of funding for ASLE grants.

Goal 7: Continue 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: Make visible innovative pedagogy in the environmental humanities on the web site featuring both undergraduate and graduate students.

Task 4: Invite ASLE members to develop pedagogically-oriented seminars, to be organized by the ASLE member, to “teach the teachers.” Establish an application process, funding guidelines, and a source of funding to foster these programs.

Goal 8: Improve the environmental sustainability of the organization

Task 1: Consider concrete steps to minimize the environmental impact of the biennial conference and make clear 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.

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

Task 1: Explore the feasibility of creating standing committees so that more members will be able to contribute to the organization.

Task 2: Review all current elected and appointed positions in the organization and write formal job descriptions for each.

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: Explore and create opportunities for the leaders of ASLE to assume a more public role by participating more frequently in professional and civic venues.

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 out the content and keep current ASLE's new web site and develop a press packet for journalists and other members of the media.

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

Task 1: Seek funding for grants to conduct 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: Seek funding 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.