

## Collaborative Efforts

### Iraqi Virtual Science Library

<https://www.ivsl.org/>

While spending five months in Iraq serving as special advisor for nonproliferation to the Coalition Provisional Authority, Alex Dehgan, a 2003–05 AAAS Fellow at the U.S. Department of State, witnessed the devastating loss of vast amounts of scientific resources from Iraqi libraries and academic institutions due to looting and destruction. One of his many contributions during his time there included helping rebuild the Iraqi Natural History Museum in Baghdad. The rebuilding was successful thanks in part to 40 boxes of ecology and evolution / conservation biology journals and texts, donated by individual scientists in the U.S., that covered the nearly 15-year period of sanctions against Iraq.

After he returned to the U.S., Alex spoke of his experiences at a meeting of the Washington Science Policy Alliance. After the talk, Susan Cumberledge, a 2004–05 AAAS Fellow at the Department of Defense (DoD) Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA), approached Alex and suggested he expand his efforts through online journals. Fortunately, the state of the Iraqi Internet infrastructure had improved since Alex's return so pursuing this new idea was possible. "You can't do science in a vacuum," says Susan. "You need to have access to what other scientists are doing. I couldn't function as a scientist without access to journals."

Alex and Susan joined with other AAAS Fellows from DoD and the State Department and enlisted more than 20 public, private and government agency partners. Their collaboration resulted in the creation of an online resource for Iraqi scientists, students and researchers, which soon became known as the Iraqi Virtual Science Library or IVSL (<https://www.ivsl.org/>). Working together, the Fellows obtained funding from DTRA and later the State Department, some of which was provided to the National Academy of Sciences to purchase journal rights and subscriptions, as well as



to the Defense Technical Information Center for technical support. Sun Microsystems has provided servers, software and IT training to the Iraqis, with the ultimate goal of transitioning IVSL into a sustainable Iraqi-sponsored resource.

DJ Patil, a 2004–05 AAAS Fellow at DoD, was tasked with designing and maintaining the site’s infrastructure, as well as providing technical assistance to the Iraqis, while Susan took the role of liaison to the Iraqi universities and government officials. Also central to the IVSL team were Ranjiv Khush, a 2004–05 AAAS Fellow at the State Department; Ben Perman, a 2004–05 AAAS Fellow at DoD; Kwabena Yiadom, a 2004–05 AAAS Fellow at DoD; and former AAAS Fellow Barrett Ripin, who now serves as senior science diplomacy officer at the State Department.

The IVSL launched officially in May 2006. It provides free access to nearly 20,000 full-text scientific journal titles, as well as a large collection of on-line educational materials. The user base represents nearly 80 percent of Iraq’s scientists and university students. According to Alex, “This collaboration has proved science is not a separate entity. It’s integral to our foreign policy.”



*Alex Dehgan*