

## AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF IRANIAN STUDIES

The American Institute of Iranian Studies (AIIRs) is a consortium of U.S. universities and museums, which was founded in 1967 to establish and operate an overseas research center in Iran for the purpose of promoting postgraduate and faculty training, research, collaboration and exchange, and generally promoting the interdisciplinary study of Iranian civilization.

Following more than a decade of successful operation, the Center was obliged to suspend its activities in December 1979 following the rupture of diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Iran. After two decades of inadequate access to Iran, its academic community and its research collections, the Institute was invited in February 1998 by Iran's Cultural Ambassador to the U.N. to "pick up where it left off."

The Institute immediately embarked on a number of new programs. Its initiatives have been generously supported by the U. S. Department of State and the U.S. Department of Education; student and faculty demand for its services has been amply demonstrated by the number of applications for the programs it has so far been able to advertise.

In 1998 nine graduate students were sent to Tehran for an eight-week summer program of advanced language training and introduction to the Iranian academic community. Two past presidents of the Institute, representing the Institute's newly established Tehran Committee about modern language-teaching methods and planning future programs, and introduced the students to research institutes and scholars in their respective fields. At the same time they conducted discussions with representatives of higher education, research organizations and museums in various ministries, universities and other institutions, and negotiated a framework for the resumption of the Institute's earlier role. The students were reconvened at the Middle East Studies Association annual meeting in November 1998, and we continue to keep contact with them. Thirteen students were selected for the summer program in 1999, ten in 2000, and seven in 2001. In 1999 we launched two additional programs. In April 1999 the first junior faculty fellow arrived in Tehran. This is the position that will develop into ORC overseas director as our relations with the Iranian authorities continue to evolve. The second grantee in this program was selected and traveled to Iran in January 2001. The third program is designed to bring practicing professional Iranists back into active interaction and collaboration with their Iranian colleagues by means short-term (two to four week) fellowships. A number of senior fellows from various academic fields have since traveled to Iran to pursue collaborative work. Last year the summer student program was converted from a group project to an individual fellowship program. The most significant innovation lies in (a) our newly acquired ability to maintain a continuous rotating American academic presence in Iran, and to launch some of the activities normally associated with ORCs, and (b) in the fact that the junior faculty research fellow is now charged not only with maintaining contact with the Iranian authorities between the periodic visits of the project directors, but also with developing a comprehensive database of research resources and contacts in Iran.

By virtue of its history and membership the Institute is uniquely situated to play this role in the resuscitation of Iranian studies in the U.S., and the expansion of academic interaction between the two countries through the facilitation of training and research in Iran and productive dialogue with Iranian scholars.

AIIRs is requesting operational funds to apply toward the cost of maintaining adequate Center facilities in Iran, and some program funds to supplement funding anticipated from other sources. With this funding AIIRs will be able to accommodate and support its administrative personnel in Tehran, embark on programs to encourage research in Iranian Studies, and provide outstanding services to U.S.-based scholars conducting research in Iran.