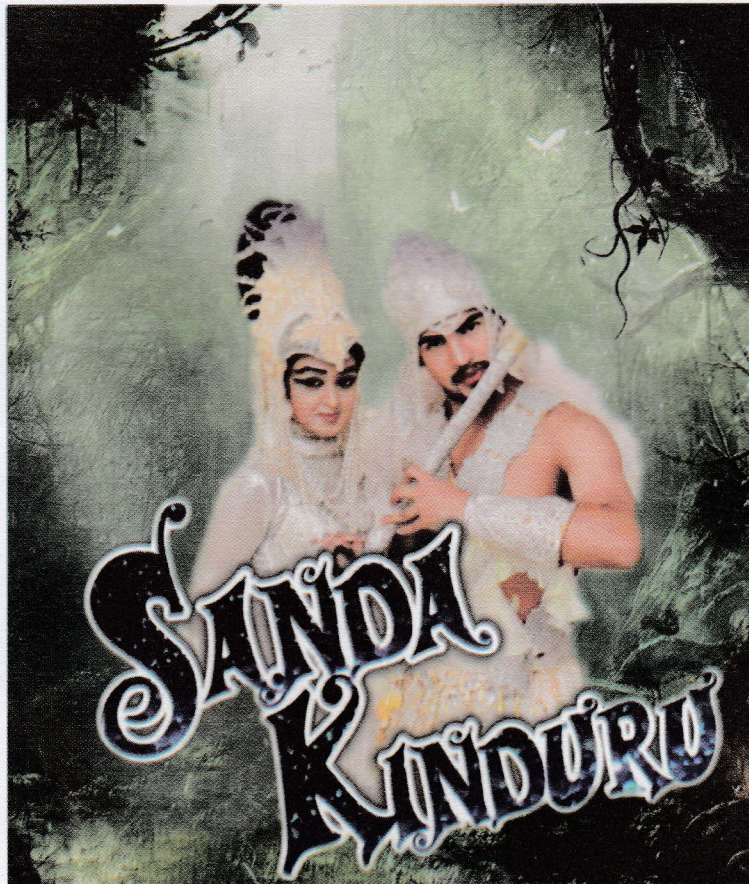


## The SIBA Initiative: “Such Stuff As Dreams Are Made On”

As I sat around the conference table at Sri Lanka International Buddhist Academy (SIBA) that mild October afternoon in 2014, I was attentive, of course, albeit just a bit dazed. I was dazed partially because I was part of a delegation of officials from Northern Kentucky University (NKU) on a whirlwind tour of institutions throughout Sri Lanka, seeking potential academic project collaborators. We were on the road immediately after about twenty-four hours of overseas travel. However, my dazed state probably had to do more with the fact that members of our delegation, together with like representatives from SIBA were discussing the sciences: not my area of interest or expertise. Mine was theatre. Immediately following the formal session, Ms. Buddhi Ariyaratne, then a lecturer in SIBA's Department of English and Modern Languages, approached me with an idea that ignited raging fires throughout my heart, mind, and imagination: using theatre

techniques and Shakespeare plays (specifically *Hamlet*) to help English as a Second Language (ESL) students to use English more confidently, and to gain more confidence in themselves. Now, I was alert! This was a brilliant, unprecedented idea that spoke to a perfect storm of my core passions. The audacious absurdity of the concept was an alluring bonus.

We began the first phase of what I dubbed “The SIBA Initiative” in early 2015. I



recruited NKU playwriting student, Ms. Alexx Rouse, to assist me with my portion of the project. Over the months following the initial conversation with Ms. Ariyaratne, there were mad flurries of emails and phone calls between the three of us as we attempted

the virtually impossible task of coordinating schedules. More daunting than schedule coordination was the herculean task of adapting Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, arguably his most complex piece, to the skillset of early ESL students, and to the two-week