



THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES  
ST. AUGUSTINE CAMPUS, TRINIDAD & TOBAGO, WEST INDIES

**OFFICE OF THE CAMPUS PRINCIPAL**

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**Address by the Pro Vice-Chancellor and Campus Principal  
Matriculation Ceremony 2016  
Sport and Physical Education Centre (SPEC), UWI St. Augustine Campus  
Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> September, 2016 | 2.30pm**

**Salutations**

- Thank you Chair, Campus Registrar, Mr. Richard Saunders.

*I hope you don't mind if I veer away from tradition a bit to first acknowledge this splendid Matriculating Class of 2016, the reason we are here this afternoon. It's wonderful to have so many of you with us.*

[PAUSE]

- Vice-Chancellor of The University of the West Indies, Professor Sir Hilary Beckles
- Minister of State, Ministry of Education, The Honourable Dr. Lovell Francis
- Other Members of the Platform Party
- Members of the Diplomatic Corps
- Directors and Heads of Departments
- Heads of Tertiary Level Institutions
- Members of Staff
- Members of the Media
- Other distinguished guests

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Good afternoon. It is my pleasure to welcome you to the 2016 Matriculation Ceremony of the St. Augustine Campus of The University of the West Indies.

This rite of passage formally recognises you as members of our academic community here at The University of the West Indies. Over the last two weeks, similar ceremonies have been held at our sister campuses across the Caribbean and at several other universities globally. You should know that, apart from the Graduation Ceremony, this is the only time during your tenure as students that you will witness a full academic procession in all its grandeur. That alone speaks to the importance that we attach to Matriculation.

There is often a tendency to take our local institutions and our personal achievements for granted, but think about it. In the Caribbean, only about 8.8% of the total eligible population are able to matriculate into The UWI. By successfully rising to the academic challenges in a highly competitive arena, you have won a place at The University of the West Indies.

I congratulate you on this first step. I also take this opportunity to warn you that life will no longer be as you knew it. It will be exciting, it will be challenging, it may even be frightening, but ultimately it will be better. When you are faced with those inevitable challenges, just remember that it takes quite a bit of pressure to make a diamond and UWI is about making diamonds in the Caribbean populace.

You are the very first cohort of students that I am privileged to welcome as Pro Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the St. Augustine Campus. Allow me to tell you a bit about the institution that is welcoming you.

It has been pointed out on many an occasion that more than 2,000 miles of ocean separate Belize in the west from Guyana in the east, with our islands dotting in-between. There is another truth universally touted that, other than cricket, The University of the West Indies is the main unifier of these several territories. And bearing in mind the now constant discord and divisiveness that surround the West Indies Cricket team, I would argue that The UWI now reigns supreme in that regard.

Our University began 68 years ago in Mona, Jamaica, as a College of the University of London. Its first 33 students went there to study medicine. For some, it took three days of travel by boat – on the Alcoa Clipper – to get there. In 1960, the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture here in Trinidad and Tobago was converted into the St. Augustine Campus. Two years later, it achieved full university status. Then, in 1963, the Cave Hill Campus in Barbados was established. It would only be in 2008 that our fourth Campus – the Open Campus – would be launched.

That was another time. In a sense a more innocent time when our young academics saw a world of possibilities as former British colonies became independent, one by

one. We are a far cry from those heady early days. Yet the words of Sir Errol Barrow, Caribbean Statesman and the first Prime Minister of Barbados, still apply.

Sir Errol, who was speaking on February 6, 1968 at a Graduation ceremony at the Cave Hill Campus said:

*“A university institution cannot survive unless it has as its constant goal service to the communities that support and sustain its activities ... the citizens of the region should be encouraged to regard the University as their most important asset... that the efficient growth of this University is almost their only path to prosperity”.*

The University of the West Indies now serves 17 countries and accommodates just over 49,000 students. This year we will host 13 ceremonies, to graduate approximately 9,000 students from across the Caribbean and much further afield.

We are undeniably the region’s premier educational institution and one of only two regional universities worldwide – the other being the University of the South Pacific.

Through our four campuses, we offer a range of undergraduate, masters’ and doctoral programmes in Humanities and Education, Science and Technology, Food and Agriculture, Engineering, Law, Medical Sciences, and Social Sciences. We deliberately place a strong emphasis on Caribbean issues and are generally acknowledged as the ‘go to’ place for anyone with an interest in Caribbean society.

So that is who we are. But why do we do what we do? Why are you even here? Let's explore that basic question.

In 1930 Eleanor Roosevelt – who was famous in her own right and not just as the wife of a President of the United States – asked the question ‘*what is the purpose of education*’.

It is our belief that education, at the very least, is meant to ensure that every citizen possesses basic physical and mental survival skills. In addition, its most commonly acknowledged purpose is to maintain society by providing the educational means to empower individuals for the job market and thus achieve, at minimum, a decent standard of living and to nurture ‘good citizenship.’ Furthermore, education is meant for personal development. But, most significantly, and given today's worrying economic state, education must ensure that society is maintained and developed through the forging of new concepts, methods and products that improve upon its current state while ensuring that the existence of future societies (our descendants) is not compromised. This is the standard definition of “sustainable development”. It requires the nurturing of the creative and innovative talents and skills of our citizens.

This University of the West Indies will, during your student tenure, do all that is possible to ensure that our academic delivery is in keeping with the education agenda

just described. By doing so we would have satisfied our mandate of service to support regional growth and development of the communities that sustain our activities.

But you also have to play your part, as students and then as graduates, to work towards the economic growth and social development of the Caribbean. Recall that I mentioned our role in nurturing your creative and innovative talents and skills. This is absolutely required for you to successfully rise to the challenge of a job market that does not currently make the most of your qualifications, in a scenario where regional nations are not, by and large, significant net earners of foreign exchange. I challenge you to make your contribution to society by working to change this abysmal state of affairs. Do as your counterparts in other lands have done and apply those creative and innovative talents and skills to devise products, processes, systems and methods that the world has never seen before. Move then to create your own companies, medium or small, to sell these new entities or, as an employee of an already established firm, to improve the value of its existing products, processes, systems and methods so as to improve its international competitiveness. You need to start thinking about this as of now. Fulfil your mandate as future leaders of the Caribbean.

Those students of 1948 could only have imagined a world of such lightening change as ours, where smart phones, tablets, wifi and ‘mifi’ are the norm and social

interaction embraces everything from face-to-face contact to the virtual reality we have created on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and Snapchat. You have opportunities to connect and create a whole new Caribbean experience. And, while the challenges of the last century are not precisely yours, we still need dedicated and committed regionalists to solve those problems of the 21st century. After all, for most of you, this region will be your home for life and for most of your descendants.

I implore you to be Caribbean patriots. As Caribbean citizens, our patriotism must go beyond our individual island nations and encompass the wider Caribbean, and not just the English speaking territory. Consider the fact that the entire English speaking Caribbean comprises just about 5 million people, a population that is less than many of the world's largest cities. Whether we are from the English, Dutch, French or Spanish Caribbean, historically our beginnings were similar and, regardless of language, our issues remain the same. So we must work together. While you are here, take the opportunity to learn a new language, study abroad, or simply make friends with someone from another country.

Ask any of our graduates and they will tell you that apart from the knowledge you will gain here about the world and yourself, you will also develop lasting friendships and relationships that will redound to your benefit long after you've left this campus. The student with whom you're hanging out today may be the diplomat with whom

you have to negotiate tomorrow; or the research partner with whom you will develop a ground-breaking new cure or the next new patent.

You will find that you learn as much outside of the lecture hall as you do within it. Indeed, your fondest memories will be from the varied experiences you will enjoy with others – even the book-beating! At all cost, don't be afraid, don't be shy and avoid insularity.

While I've already hinted at our quality standards, I want to take some time here to talk about our campus' candidacy for institutional reaccreditation, which we've just begun. This is a painstaking but essential process. On February 5, 2011, this Campus was institutionally accredited for a five-year period by the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago.

In its 2014 mid-term review, the Accreditation Council's evaluation team referred to the St. Augustine Campus as a 'high quality institution' – in spite of the impact of the global economic crisis. So in programme accreditation, too, The UWI has set the standard. Your St. Augustine Campus has led the way in both programme and institutional accreditation, and we remain committed to strengthening the culture of quality through continuous improvement, responsiveness to the need for change, improved accountability, and by becoming more learning-centred. We invite you to be part of that process. Get familiar with our strategic plan, particularly our mission,

vision and core values, and the key attributes of our graduates and employees; and use them as a guide in terms of what you should expect from others and what is expected of you.

Perhaps you're wondering "why should you care about institutional accreditation?"

While it is a legal requirement, the benefits we gain are significant. They include institutional strengthening in terms of governance, administration, teaching, facilities, and research. Accreditation points to the enhancement of the education system in Trinidad and Tobago, in particular, that will educate and train our future work force. Accreditation strengthens public confidence in the continuing excellence of The UWI and its graduates. You will be very glad about that in three to five years when it's time to job hunt!

There's a Greek Proverb that says, "*A society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in.*"

When you repeat the Academic Vow, when your Matriculant representative – robed in the scarlet gown of a UWI undergraduate – signs the Register on your behalf, remember the words of that proverb.

You are the trees that we – your lecturers, guides and mentors – will cultivate and nurture over the next few years. The shade you eventually cast will take our

Caribbean region ever higher – perhaps even to a place where no man has ever gone before! We may not be here to enjoy it, but we take pride and pleasure in making it happen. This we see as our duty, indeed this is the timeless duty of humankind. You will have to do the same for those who come after you.

I wish you well and look forward to hearing great things of you. Thank you.