



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

**Pro Vice-Chancellor Professor Brian Copeland**

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**Address by the Campus Principal**

**Engineering in the Diversification of the Economy**

**Department of Mechanical & Manufacturing Engineering's Open Day,  
Conference and Exhibition**

**Professor Brian Copeland, Principal and Pro Vice-Chancellor, St. Augustine Campus**

We are in a bind – as a people, as a country, as a region. A once-flourishing economy is in tatters – not entirely unexpectedly, since experts have long told us that oil and gas is a diminishing resource. For decades we have been warned against placing our golden eggs in one basket; that we need to diversify our economy away from its heavy dependence on the petroleum industry.

That need has eventually reached critical proportions. You are as much aware as I am that, in terms of global trade for petroleum products, over-production in the last three years has forced the price of oil and gas downwards. It now fluctuates around \$50 per barrel, on a good day.

There is no knight on a white horse charging to our rescue. We have to look inwards, to our own resources, for our saviours. Here in this audience and on this Campus are your knights; their innovations and expertise will be the change-makers that will come to our rescue.

Allow me to once again share the mission of the St. Augustine Campus. We are committed to creating an innovative and entrepreneurial university, one that continues to be a vital partner to

Industry and to Governments in Caribbean development. I can talk until the cows come home but, as you will see for yourselves today, our students and graduates are ready, able, and available to further the process of building and engaging a sustainable wealth generation engine.

The St. Augustine Campus has been preparing our students to meet the needs of today's world; we invite Industry and Government to help us in this process by giving us the opportunity first to work on and solve your critical problems and issues.

In the United States, some 4% of GDP is used to fund research and development in the innovation pipeline. In Trinidad and Tobago, 0.04% is used in this manner. When we use the products and solutions created here, in this country and this region, to generate wealth, then we can truly say we are throwing off the chains of dependency and deprivation.

While the Department of Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering is today showcasing equipment designed and built by students to improve the work efficiency of farmers and manufacturers, ours is not an overnight success.

In consultation with stakeholders in manufacturing, we have set up MSc Degree programmes in Production and Manufacturing Engineering, with the primary focus of making companies more competitive.

In the last 10 years, students have designed and constructed equipment to process a wide range of crops like cassava, sweet potato, dasheen, breadfruit, pigeon peas, coconuts, and a basket of others. Think how these could transform our agriculture sector. Consider how critical agriculture is to the well-being of our citizens and our economy! The Faculties of Food and Agriculture and Engineering have teamed up to build several pieces of equipment for the cocoa production industry. Indeed, the cocoa pod splitter may just be a first in the world and its commercial potential is enormous, given the international demand for chocolate.

Apart from agriculture and agro-processing, the Faculty of Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering will showcase equipment solutions in motion and dynamics; automotive, medical, robotic, and environmental engineering; solar and other renewable energy sources, to name just a few areas. Just recently, at the Research Symposium held by the Faculty of Science and Technology, a PhD student in Microbiology presented the results of his research that – when it makes its way through the pipeline to commercial application – will significantly impact the ongoing battle against many mosquito-borne diseases.

Ladies and Gentlemen, The University of the West Indies can be a major catalyst in economic diversification through our teaching and outreach programmes.

We have the means to transform Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean but, unless Industry and Governments in the Region have the will to work with us to forge a strong partnership, we do not have the power to do so. I urge you to put aside an apparently innate scepticism of local resources, human and manmade, and embrace the change that comes from within.

I wish you all a constructive and eye-opening day.

Thank you.