

Naresh Jagnanan - *The Faculty of Social Sciences (A.M.)*

Wakenaam (pronounced Wake-en-am) is a small island in Guyana's Essequibo River, home to roughly 4,000 people and served by a single secondary school. Its Dutch name translates as "waiting for a name." Naresh Jagnanan calls it home and it is where his love of learning first took root, where he watched his father tend the family farm while his mother ensured that he and his three sisters had everything they needed, particularly for their education.

"I remember growing up with the understanding that school was important, and that ... an opportunity is something you should never take for granted."

That mindset carried him from Essequibo Islands Secondary School, where he graduated as the top 2021 Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) Business Education student in the Caribbean, to Queen's College in Georgetown, where he emerged as the region's top 2023 Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE) Business Studies student and the Most Outstanding Candidate Overall.

While teachers back home credit his success to discipline and focus, Naresh believes a little exam-room luck and a lot of adrenaline deserve some recognition as well.

"There is something about the combination of a rapidly approaching deadline, a racing heart and the thought that I might actually be in trouble that suddenly makes me extremely productive."

Naresh chose to pursue a double major in Economics and Political Science at The UWI St Augustine Campus because he wanted a university experience that was truly Caribbean. While his original goal was simply to earn a degree, UWI became much more than that. He continued to thrive academically, earning a place on the Dean's Honour Roll for five consecutive semesters, but he also learned the importance of asking for help, stepping outside his comfort zone, that achievement is only one measure of a meaningful life, don't always leave things until the last minute, and that leadership is really about service

"(Leadership) is not simply about being the person at the front; it is also about noticing when someone needs help and being willing to step forward."

Canada Hall became a home away from home, introducing him to friendships from across the region, a love of hiking and exploring Trinidad, and opportunities to help other students. Those experiences culminated with his election as International Affairs Committee Chairperson of the Guild of Students for 2025/2026.

Among his favourite university memories are watching the sunrise from the top of the Engineering building studying all night, and witnessing the annual early-morning flag-raising ceremony outside the Old Administration Building. Together, those moments reflect the sentiment captured in his favourite quote from Saturn by Sleeping at Last:

"How rare and beautiful it truly is that we exist."

Today, this "island boy" works at the Ministry of Finance in Guyana while considering postgraduate offers from the University of Oxford, the London School of Economics and Political Science, and Imperial College London. He hopes to contribute to positive change in Guyana and across the wider Caribbean, particularly by supporting young people.

"I know what it feels like to have someone invest in your potential, and I want to be that person for someone else."

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