

**UWI TODAY is pleased to share the address delivered by Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine at her induction ceremony as Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Campus Principal of The UWI St Augustine Campus. Highlights of the entire address were published in the print version of the issue.**

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Some paths choose us. Growing up, everyone said I should be a lawyer. But, I rebelled against that because I was determined to save the world, and Law seemed to be only about money. So, I signed up for Management. However, my head girl, Joanne Julien, persuaded me that Law is good for social reform and I should be a lawyer. I switched.

So, Law chose me.

I thought too that administration would stifle academic freedom and straitjacket me, not to mention health issues and living in two countries. I was content to be the “go to” background person – until, on my hospital bed in France, Cave Hill Law Dean [Professor Simeon] McIntosh rang and said – “Rose-Marie, I have made you my Deputy Dean.” He would not hear no.

Then, leadership chose me.

At each rung, it was my colleagues who urged me forward.

Blame former [UWI Cave Hill] Principal Eudine Barriteau, because she first told me some years ago, “Rose-Marie, you have to be the next principal of Cave Hill.” When she heard that people were asking me about the judiciary, she retorted, “No – we can’t afford you to be silenced as yet!”

I began to think I could, **should**, do this.

I have been fortunate to be able to marry my legal career with my passion, creative impulse and philosophy – even my love of nature. Law allowed me to speak up for those who could not. It allowed me to amplify their voices in the search for social justice, and help forge a Caribbean society of which we could be proud.

Incidentally, this is the first Law principal. There have been many Law politicians, but no principal.

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For me, just as law is a social engineer, scholarship serves to fuel advocacy and development, and advance humanity.

Many find it surprising that I do not focus on court work. Actually, I had planned to lecture only for three years, but academia provides the intellectual stimulation, challenge, and change that drives and sustains me.

People often call me an “activist”, change agent, but my impetus then, and now, was simply to be a disruptor of the *status quo* where it did not truly work for its purpose, or for the majority of our citizens. In truth, that has been a characteristic since early childhood.

It seems inevitable that I landed at The UWI, itself created with 33 medical students – the Caribbean change makers of their time.

## Childhood – The foundation that shaped me

The foundation that shaped me includes a family of eight children, strongminded, highly intellectual and argumentative. They taught me confidence (you had to fight to get a word in), and gave me an inquiring mind. An egalitarian ethos seemed natural with a mother – a brilliant black woman from Grenada – and a white-privileged father who broke all social ties to be with the love of his life (whom he met on the train). They came to Arima in the late 1950's, ostensibly to open the first sports and toy shop, but really to escape what we now term race discrimination. Every year, the Arima Tennis Club would invite him alone, Mr Jean-Marie Alphonse Antoine, and not his black wife.

This might have sown the seeds for my social activism and, some have said, rebellion.

Music, painting, poetry, reading, writing plays, calypsos, and even astronomy were the norm in my household, a space rich with robust and reflective discussions of the issues of the day. If, as has been said, my work is original and probing, it is no doubt because of this heritage.

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With six going to UWI, and three scholarship winners, my family was clearly drawn to the rigour and thrust of academia. At one time, three Antoinettes were lecturing at UWI St Augustine at the same time! One in mathematics, Dr Robin; one in English, Dr Jean; and me in Law! They must have thought we were a mafia.

The **intangibles** – values, fairness, character, intellect, service, and courage were valued more than material things and big jobs – special math more attractive than medicine, one sibling even becoming a nun. The hope to be the rich lawyer, me, chose legal academia instead!

The majestic Arima mountains and the hiking trails of the Asa Wright Nature Centre, perhaps gave me my tendency to aim high and believe anything is possible.

Incidentally, I was the first, if not the only person to be married at Asa Wright. We planted a powder puff tree and my husband was warned that if that tree ever died, well... kaput. For many years, he religiously visited that tree and it is still standing!

My teachers' proud boast – that Rose-Marie, prefect and head girl, always questions and fights for her classmates – was my poor mother's exasperation. She would say: "You tell Rose-Marie 'a' and she has to answer "b-c-d".

But then, I got 10 dollars and a medal for being born an independence baby – supposedly the reason for my fierce, independent spirit.

No surprise then, that when I was arrested trying to protect my protesting students at Cave Hill and my husband, then Prime Minister of St Lucia, was called – he famously said: “Rose-Marie can take care of herself.”

On that day, a student gave me a cup, saying, “You deserve a drink”, and UWI Vice-Chancellor [Rex] Nettleford wrote thanking me for “taking care of the children”.

That inquiring spirit has served me in good stead in both my legal and administrative career, where so often, things **do need** to be interrogated and to change, whether it be denying migrant children education, or questioning why persons must stay on remand for 15 to 20 years and more, or mindless bureaucracy.

Looking back, I see the trajectory of my life. Even the Santa Rosa Youth group that I was in, doing charitable work feeding families, repairing houses, and witnessing first-hand the often unseen and hidden poverty and inequity in our society, **helped fashion me.**

I also noticed that what I saw in the youth group was invisible to my Convent friends. Unawareness, a sense of denial or even apathy was, and **is**, typical for many.

So, my family and Arima formed me.

However, it was **The UWI that honed me** – first as a student, later as an academic and administrator.

## The belief that social justice is the key to development

The diverse strands of my work in several legal disciplines intersect. Many wonder why, with a PhD in Financial Law and specialisation in Labour Law, I have focused so much on rights, equity and justice. The reason is that very early on, I realised that the *sine qua non* of all the work I could possibly do as a lawyer and academic was rooted in social justice. Ultimately, the common denominator is wanting to improve lives.

As Nobel laureate Amartya Sen said: *Human rights are the key to development.*

More recently, billionaire business people like Bill Gates and Steve Jobs have also located social justice and rights as the core values that shape civilisation.

I intend to **place this** at the centre of what we do at The UWI St Augustine.

For me, the meaning of civil liberties, like equality, reside in economic and social rights enshrined in education, health, work, water, and the environment

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**This is no esoteric** stance. The negative effects of a failure to secure equity, decent work, and protect the vulnerable and marginalised in our societies, is visible. It impacts productivity, crime, the family and, ultimately, the economy.

Interestingly, human rights used to be a bad word. When I established the Discrimination Law course in the 90's, there was no legislation. I have seen it become mainstream. Indeed, since COVID - **everyone** is an expert in human rights.

**Reclaiming our identity and heralding our achievements – Make UWI visible**

My task in people empowerment involves harnessing our vast UWI talent, reclaiming the collective UWI Identity and magic, and proclaiming it to the world.

While our significant UWI contribution has not diminished, it has become *invisibilised*. Individual consultants flourish but UWI's **collective** voice and presence need to be stronger. The housewife must appreciate that the yam, or sanitiser she buys in the supermarket are innovations from **our** labs.

We are too often the quiet soldiers in not so quiet revolutions. My job is to ensure that we remain visible, that all stakeholders look to The UWI to do the important developmental work of the region and to nurture our staff to be able to be champions of change. This in itself, can increase our market value and bring tangible economic benefits.

The First steps are our *Newsday Sunday* series, "UWI on the Ground", launched last week featuring our top scientists, as well as our *Caribbean Beat* feature.

## Impactful opportunities in career for social reform – A Builder and Conduit

I have been fortunate to have engaged in pioneering consultancy work, whether it be harmonising CARICOM labour law, the catalyst for labour law reform in the region ushering in unfair dismissal, equality, safety and other laws; or in HIV, migrant justice, leading an international drafting team hired by the UK government to restore democracy to the Turks and Caicos Islands; or defending the juristic principles of the Caribbean offshore financial industry against the double standards of the onshore countries (25 years ago, but now back in the news because of unfair banking laws); my CARICOM CSME report; or, even more recently, **ganja** reform.

These jurisprudential innovations required creativity and daring to go against the status quo. For example, the Labour Code I drafted in Saint Lucia is still the only law with HIV protections, and in the Bahamas, preventing the exploitation of what I call "permanently temporary" workers.

Some of what I fought for in the early days, such as when CARICOM asked me to redefine the HIV rights approach for a broader non-discrimination agenda, is now accepted, but **many disagreed with me then.**

So, it has not been without **controversy**. You try effecting labour law reform in a task force with unions and employers, or marijuana reform in a town hall full of church people and Rastas. And it is debatable whether I got more blows for speaking out about too high lawyer fees in my address to the opening of the law term, or on mandatory vaccination.

**But speak we MUST.**

It is our duty – mine and the university’s – to inform debate on important socio-legal issues. As Martin Luther King said: “The ultimate tragedy is not the oppression and cruelty by the bad people, but the silence over that by the good people.”

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I am grateful to have had the opportunity to do such fascinating legal and social reform/developmental work throughout the region. It is a joyous feeling when one’s outputs do not sit on a shelf, but breathes life and effects real change – to laws and to lives. Later, this work launched me on the international plane, to the OAS and the UN and beyond.

But, **undoubtedly, none** of this could have been achieved without The UWI, which gave me the start and support.

As a young lecturer, in 1991, my Dean, [Nicholas] Liverpool and Principal Sir Keith Hunte took a chance on me and gave me the consultancy for the CARICOM Labour Project, which had stalled. I refused payment, but the rewards were 10-fold. This was the impetus for the diverse consultancies and body of work that have borne visible fruit, including an invitation to work at the ILO in Geneva.

You understand then, my **commitment** to harness the talent at St Augustine?

I cherish too my colleagues along the way, who have inspired, encouraged and supported me, even nominating me twice for the Vice-Chancellor's Award for Excellence. I treasure the soldiers, from NGOs and churches, governments, international organisations, and people from all walks of life, who walked many difficult paths with **me, demanding change**.

In my journey, students hold a special place. Not having children of my own, it has been a special joy and responsibility to care for our young people, help shape their lives positively, and be inspired by them.

## I am a Builder, Cultivator and Conduit

But my work is not yet finished, and being Principal gives me the opportunity to broaden its scope and identify the **inheritors** of that work. As an avid gardener, I want to grow and cultivate people and institutions. Let me be the conduit, the builder.

Some of that was my developmental focus as Dean [of the Faculty of Law], establishing the Human Rights Clinic, bidding for faculty donor projects, going in new directions like Oil & Gas Law, and the faculty's historic litigation on disability and remand. Colleagues were invited to lead on important issues like children's rights and indigenous peoples.



But, as Principal, there is a broader landscape and opportunity. If we walk with integrity, others will follow.

The UWI gives me inspiration and energises me. This is why I hope to re-establish our Senior Common Room. It was at the Cave Hill SCR that I formed bonds with colleagues in other disciplines which nurtured and broadened my work and led to interdisciplinary publications. Every university needs a thinking space to create synergies with colleagues

I am guided by my belief in our exceptional nature as Caribbean people, and an imperative to make a positive contribution to society. We are as intelligent, creative, talented and capable as anyone anywhere, and our abilities find their greatest expression in service. I am fortunate to be part of an institution that gives me the opportunity to work so closely in alignment with these values.

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So often, I have seen Caribbean academics and students shine at international fora and at the top universities. Some are in this audience today.

## UWI Centred in the Community

My philosophy has always been that a university, this campus, must be entrenched in its community **to have relevance**. We must be a vibrant, impactful, and revered social actor, with cutting-edge research.

We cannot retreat and become reactionary. We must be proactive, thought-leaders, and problem-solvers.

I want to expand The UWI from the classroom to the communities. Scholarship should be taken to the people. It is then that our research and our teaching will be grounded and transformative.

In this goal, we should partner, not just with governments and the private sector, but also NGOs.

We have already started. [In December] we went to Moruga [for an outreach project].

**The UWI can indeed touch people and change lives.** My most poignant memory from my [car] accident is hearing that remand prisoners/clients telephoned my sister, worried and actually crying. This represents the **power of the institution** and the hope we can bring.

## Equality and Marginalisation and Increased Access

In my frame of education for true development, I propose a more progressive approach to access, **expanding** to the under-served and forgotten. This includes not just the urban poor, but also the rural under-served. We have been insensitive to the socio-economic and socio-cultural constraints (even ethnic and gender) to accessing education, especially in our professions. Admissions can no longer be based **purely** on CAPE results.

This was the rationale for my Makandal Daaga scholarship, which gives social activists access to the “elitist” law school. We also provided quotas for law enforcement and persons with **disabilities**, but more needs to be done.

I have asked my colleagues to reconsider and refashion our approach to access to The UWI to encompass a broader vision that examines deep structural issues in the society. I want

them to consider other desirable attributes that we wish to inculcate in our graduates. This is not pathbreaking. The Rhodes and other scholarships emphasise not just academics, but leadership and extracurricular activities as well.

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## UWI's voice as a unifying force – promoting social consciousness

Importantly, the St Augustine Campus has a key role to play in healing our wounded society. I believe in its power as a unifying forcing invoking patriotic consciousness.

The **voice of The UWI St Augustine** must be neutral, confident, but respectful. It must be probing, but at the same time reassuring, because of the knowledge that within the institution resides competencies and talents that give hope for the future.

## Regional experience and 'All Campus'

I remain a regionalist. I am also a proud intercampus citizen, experiencing three campuses before returning to St Augustine as Dean of Law with an assignment to "build the new faculty".

The only Trini at Norman Manley Law School, I spent more time on artistic exploits than in the law classroom. I enjoyed art at the Edna Manley School, bringing Paul Keens-Douglas to Jamaica, and touring Jamaica with The UWI Singers under the esteemed Noel Dexter. The piece you heard the talented Natalia sing [at the induction ceremony], Psalm 27 (my favourite), is a composition of his.

## **For me, The UWI is the quintessential Caribbean citizen**

Vice-Chancellor Professor Sir Hilary Beckles's encouragement for students to embrace the UWI regional experience by doing a semester in a different campus, is not slight. This is how we will understand and trust each other enough to construct a genuine Caribbean community.

## **Unique place of St Augustine in The UWI and region**

The UWI itself is a great institution, but I dare say that the St Augustine Campus has some unique strengths which we will leverage – such as Seismic Research Centre and the Institute of International Relations Institute, for many years the only Engineering Faculty, the only Faculty of Agriculture, and other faculties. They can create synergies and work with a strong multidisciplinary focus. For example, they can provide a good vantage point to study our non-communicable disease epidemic with the nutrition experts in agriculture and the food security imperative.

St Augustine is also physically and psychologically close to two commercial and cultural Giants – Latin America and Guyana. I hope to be able to use my own already strong links due to my OAS work and in Guyana for the benefit of the campus. We are already working on programmes and collaborations.

## **Green agenda – multi-disciplinary directions**

This campus's vision is centred on the **huge issues of our time**.

Decades doing interdisciplinary research and education on climate change, including futuristic agriculture, the blue economy, renewables, and health deficits, have placed us at the forefront of this global threat.

Yet, at this moment of urgency, great research is **necessary but not sufficient**. We must do more.

It is an absolute imperative for us **to bring the science, not just to policymakers, but to the people**, to have real impact and help to save the planet and ourselves. The average citizen must identify with it, experience it, and **believe in it**. The apathy is frightening.

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We do not see the connections when a young boy from a poor family gets dengue because there are more mosquitoes or water-borne diseases from floods. We do not see the link when there are mudslides because they cut down all the trees, or even our weak immune systems due to poor nutrition caused by leached soil. The list goes on.

The interconnections with poverty are also too opaque. Climate justice, and a just transition must be included.

An **activist approach to** the science is required, empowering our Caribbean citizens to make the right choices. Thinking green must become a way of life.

This requires research from the ground up, involving the farmers clamouring for greener production like natural-based feed (one of our projects). It demands spearheading initiatives such as industry linkages and conceptualising tax incentives for green industry and lifestyles.

To set the example, I have started to green the campus and am working to finalise an agreement with Blue Waters to set up a recycling post.

The intersections between climate change and practically every other discipline are now only too obvious, whether it be the food we eat or don't eat, health, transport, education, homes, citizen insecurity, law, or sport.

This is why, relying on the many UWI experts in the field, as Pro-Vice-Chancellor, I spearheaded a multi-disciplinary, cross-campus postgraduate degree in Climate Studies.

I am convinced, more than ever, that our direction as scholars centred on solutions must be interdisciplinary and collaborative. This is as true for entrepreneurship and innovation as it is for climate studies, general science, law and even the arts, which now relies heavily on digitisation.

We must become **Renaissance thinkers** and problem-solvers, creating multi-skilled students.

## Continuity – revenue generation

Converting our intellectual efforts into monetary gain through a more entrepreneurial thrust, including social entrepreneurship, remains a key agenda for my tenure, as it has been for **at least three previous** administrative regimes. This campus has been a UWI leader in this area.

I value change, but it must be nuanced with continuity and constancy if we are to build. *Not “brukking down” for “brukking down” sake and legacy.*

We will approach the routine in more enterprising ways, converting into financial products, but a large slice will also be exciting innovations from our labs and from the imaginations of our scholars. Several of our innovative products are already patented and certified. We continue to source the right manufacturers and investment partners from the private

sector to leverage these exciting opportunities to commercialise, from lab to shelf, innovations like our patented sealants, roofing compounds, fingerprinting technology, etc.

Last month, after many years, we were **finally** able to fulfil the dream of our internationally renowned Cocoa Research Centre. We obtained funding and were awarded the contract for a cocoa factory. We are excited.

I also envision St Augustine as a thriving cultural centre of the arts, music, and film, with an entrepreneurial base, fitting for the land of calypso, chutney, steelpan **and radio soaps**.

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We will continue to incentivise and provide mentorship to entrepreneurs and start-ups from both staff and students, promoting this symbiotic relationship between academia and the private sector.

I am grateful for the already emerging initiatives and partnerships from giants in our private sector in the first few months of my tenure, such as the Sabga family, respected philanthropists, where plans are underway to establish an ANSA McAL UWI Entrepreneurship Fund.

We are also moving ahead with the planned UWI Global (offshore) School of Medicine, building on decades of recognised first-rate medical teaching and research.

We hope to attract tax incentives for alumni donors under a revamped alumni programme and endowment fund.

Creating an entrepreneurial culture requires the campus to be agile, leaving behind old ways which have sometimes failed us.

## STUDENTS

Meeting the needs of students and preparing them for this new and more complex world will remain a top priority. These are times when the very relevance of university education is being challenged. We need to recalibrate our programming to encourage active and n-the-job Learning. We must also address the new financial realities, whether through Hyflex or flexible programming and internships.

Returning to Trinidad and Tobago, I was shocked at the level of student poverty. I realise now that I met only higher income law students at Cave Hill. Having to personally come to the aid of so many students for rent, even groceries, cements my determination to address these challenges. During COVID, the survey of my law faculty revealed that 65 students had no computer or internet.

I disagree with those who say we do not have a duty to help facilitate access.

We must have sustainable fees for the campus, if we are to survive, but we must also protect our students by speaking more directly with banks and the private sector, increasing bursaries and promoting innovative bond arrangements in exchange for financial assistance and loan schemes.

### Closer Linkages with governments to better serve a national agenda

I hope to have closer linkages and communications with the government to better understand and serve the national agenda. Recall that Eric Williams, scholar and nation-builder, was a chancellor of this university and helped shaped The UWI ethos.

### Recolonising university education

Given what I have said about the brilliance and talent of Caribbean people, I lament often the trend, *peculiar* to this country, where so many of our young people refuse to come to UWI. This is tantamount to the **recolonisation** of our education. The unfortunate



implications include the increase of the brain drain, alienation from the society, pressure on the public purse, and undermined development.

It's no use playing the blame game, but it is a good example of the **potholed road** paved with good intentions.

I applaud the government for reducing the over 600 scholarships that allowed winners to go **anywhere** in the world to study (and they did). I have pledged to do something about it as well – not just advocacy, but a more vigorous attempt to do joint degrees with foreign universities to persuade this sector about the value of a UWI degree.

## Employee Engagement

Putting people first means understanding. I started my tenure with Principal Listening Sessions. It was an exhilarating and incredible learning experience to hear not just problems, but ideas for growth. Some we have begun to implement, like a childcare crèche and staff markets.

## Grand vision – pragmatic implementation – commitment to The UWI

Today I have outlined the conceptual framework and philosophy for my path forward. Like “de ole people”, I am a little **superstitious** about talking too much about detailed plans beforehand.

But soon, you will be judging me on the deliverables. We, The UWI, the region, have had plenty **grand visions**. What we sometimes fall short on is the implementation.

I have always been the most impatient person I know. But, there **really is** little time to do the things we really want to do and make the changes that we must make.

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As an unapologetic pragmatist, what I can promise you is that I/we will build one step at a time. Our dreams are nothing if not backed up by practical action and a sense of purpose.

My commitment to The UWI, which has given me so much and to which I have given my best, remains unwavering. As we celebrate our 75th year, together with generations of alumni, we are surging ahead, realigning our resources to meet the challenges in our mission to achieve socio-economic and ecological sustainability for our region, as we have always done, COVID being the latest example.

Just my luck I have come at a time of financial crisis.

However, I am confident that UWI St Augustine, can and will thrive. We will have to work very hard, show great resilience, and harness our creative dynamism, our Caribbean élan. It will not be easy, but as kaiso poet extraordinaire, Black Stalin told us “we can make it if we try”.

To the people of Trinidad & Tobago and the region, The UWI is your university. We are a Caribbean asset, and we are focused purposefully on the needs of Caribbean society.

## Thank You

In closing, I am forever grateful for the people in my life who have been the fuel in my sometimes sputtering engine, through thick and thin, over so many decades.

At a time like this, I remember my angels who guard me from above, Ann, Carnegie, my late brother Tom, and my parents, Bernadine and Jean-Marie.

I remember too my mentors and cheerleaders who cherish, fuel and uplift me – too many to mention all. My husband is a loving rock and fountain of wisdom. My sister Therese – and

her entire Dominican convent – pray for me every day. A wonderful family, great friends, some flew in. Thank you for making the trip, especially with these airplane prices!

I am thankful for the goodwill and support of so many colleagues and staff, demonstrated by the many messages and the cooperation received.

Every day, more and more are coming forward to volunteer as we create the change.

I am grateful for the faith placed in me to lead this campus. I will continue to work to keep and build that trust.

Thank you, Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, management teams, planning committee, Marketing, Registrars and teams, DFM, Security, procession colleagues. All of you here today, thank you for your support and this wonderful, uplifting ceremony.

I am not one for grandiose terms like legacy. When I leave this place, it will be enough for me to have you say, **“She was useful and got things done”**.