



MATRICULATION AND WELCOME CEREMONY 2023

Signing in



**It's
Grad Season!**
Look for **UWI Today**
next month in the pages of
the **Sunday Guardian** for our
Graduation 2023 special issue.



Shravan Maharaj, the top matriculant of UWI St Augustine's 2023/2024 academic year, signs the Matriculant Register as Campus Registrar Dr Dawn-Marie De Four-Gill and Senior Administrative Assistant (Student Affairs) Mr Garth Jones look on. Held on September 28 at The UWI Sport and Physical Education Centre (SPEC), the Matriculation and Welcome Ceremony is a decades-long tradition where new students are recognised by the campus community. The ceremony includes signing the university register, reciting the academic vow, and witnessing their first academic procession, all intended to capture the significance of this new chapter of their educational and developmental journey. PHOTO: LIFE VIDEO PRODUCTIONS



THE UWI



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Class of 2023
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FROM THE PRINCIPAL

A New Relationship with the Natural World

Semester I of the 2023/2024 academic year is well underway, and I am pleased to see the campus is alive and vital as it has ever been, filled with students, staff, and visitors. Our campus grounds – the massive green spaces and the architecture, are among UWI St Augustine’s greatest assets. It gives me enormous pleasure to see the campus community, especially the students, enjoying them again after the long closure caused by the pandemic.

It has been well over a year since the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions were ended, not that long ago. Yet, for an ordeal that lasted so long and had such a detrimental effect on society, the pandemic seems to have rapidly faded from the public consciousness. Understandably so, most people do not want to dwell on traumatic experiences.

However, the pandemic was also a great epiphany. It forced many of us to question the frailty of existence, the way we conducted our lives and the orientation of our society. Is there a better way? Remember the much parroted phrase “the new normal”? It would appear, unfortunately, that what’s old is new again, at least in terms of how we view our environment and focus on sustainability.

THE FOREFRONT OF SUSTAINABILITY

The University of the West Indies, as the premier institution of higher education in the Caribbean, has been at the forefront of not only climate science and the science of biodiversity, but is also internationally renowned for research and expertise in food and agriculture, and other fields that deal with humanity’s relationship (and impact) on the natural world.

As Campus Principal, I have made both sustainability and food security priority areas of focus for the St Augustine campus. This includes initiatives piloted from the Office of the Campus Principal as well as supporting the work of our faculties, departments, and special units.

I have directed the campus administration to move away from single-use plastics at campus events and replace them with bio-degradable items. The campus is also in the process of looking at replacing outgoing air conditioning units with more fuel efficient and environmentally-friendly technologies. Recycling and other green options are also on the table.

Presently, the campus is exploring the means to fund these green solutions, since in the long run they will be both cost-effective and far more sustainable.

In addition, the campus’s Environmental Committee has been asked to assist with these initiatives, as well as to



Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine speaking at the 2023 Matriculation and Welcome Ceremony. PHOTO: LIFE VIDEO PRODUCTIONS

inculcate a culture of sustainability and conservation on campus.

UWI’s academics are at the forefront of research and even international policy on climate and related matters. Most recently, John Agard, Emeritus Professor of Tropical Island Ecology, one of the university’s most revered climate scientists, and Professor Pathmanathan Umaharan, one of the main architects of Trinidad and Tobago’s new “cocoa revolution” (itself committed to reducing the carbon footprint and enhancing sustainability), received the Order of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (ORTT), the republic’s highest national award, for their work and positive contributions. Clement Imbert, Emeritus Professor of Materials and Manufacturing Engineering, a highly

revered engineer and member of the campus community, also received the ORTT for his invaluable work in the development of the steelpan and the discipline of engineering.

UWI ST AUGUSTINE’S CAMPUS COMMITMENT

This issue of UWI TODAY highlights just two of the several environmental/green initiatives from the campus. Our Faculty of Engineering recently hosted a Hydrogen Symposium in partnership with the University of Trinidad and Tobago and featuring energy experts from the private sector. The symposium focused on “green hydrogen” and the use of hydrogen as a sustainable alternative to traditional energy sources.

This month, the campus community was also very pleased to see the return of the techAGRI Expo, the Faculty of Food and Agriculture’s signature event. TechAGRI serves many purposes. It is a business event that brings together farmers, manufacturers, and agri-entrepreneurs. It is an exhibition of the products, services, and technologies available in the sector. The expo is also aimed at advocacy to expose people to the opportunities available in agriculture, and inspire them to take part in this crucial industry. After the long pandemic hiatus, it is a happy occasion to see techAGRI’s return.

This October is also the official month of the establishment of The UWI. October 4, 1948 marks the establishment of this university 75 years ago. October 12 is Founder’s Day, which marks the creation of the St Augustine campus in 1960 when the West Indies Federation formally handed over the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture (ICTA) to the University College of the West Indies (UCWI) at Queen’s Hall in Port of Spain.

The university has dedicated the entire year to commemorative activities both on this campus and the other regional campuses. This year is a year of Caribbean celebration for The UWI and, we all hope, the entire community of islands that the university has served for seven and a half decades.

The UWI will continue to do so, for the next 75 years and beyond, driven by the ideal that the only “normal” is progress.

Rose-Marie Antoine

Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine
Campus Principal

POW! Former West Indies Captain and batsman Daren Ganga lets it rip on September 30 at The UWI 75th Anniversary Cross Campus T20 Cricket Tournament. St Augustine and Global Campus teams took part in simultaneous matches at the campus’s Sir Frank Worrell Cricket Grounds and The UWI SPEC South Field. The event was one of several held throughout this year to commemorate the establishment of The University of the West Indies in 1948.

Players included not only well-known cricketers such as under-19 captain Shalini Samaroo, and Anisa Mohammed, but also athletes such as Jehue Gordon, sprinter Michelle Lee-Alves, and national gymnast Thema Williams. UWI St Augustine Deputy Principal Professor Indar Ramnarine also played for the home team.

PHOTO: ROBERT TAYLOR



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<https://uwi.edu/75/>

■ CAMPUS NEWS

From leading a new cocoa revolution that has put Trinidad and Tobago once more on the map as the home of fine cocoa, to playing a pivotal role in the evolution of the national instrument, to being one of the most respected climate scientists in the region, three professors from the St Augustine campus have been awarded the Order of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (ORTT).

Professor Pathmanathan Umaharan, Director of the Cocoa Research Centre; Professor Clement Imbert, Emeritus Professor of Materials and Manufacturing Engineering; and Professor John Agard, Emeritus Professor of Tropical Island Ecology, all received the highest national award alongside other members of the university community recognised for their invaluable contributions to society. They received their awards on September 24 at the Republic Day celebrations hosted by the Office of the President of Trinidad and Tobago.

“We are incredibly proud of all our awardees from The UWI; we are certainly leading the way,” stated UWI St Augustine Campus Principal Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine. “The nation’s highest awards were all given to UWI professors, and this speaks to the value of education at the institution. Such a significant achievement must be lauded as The UWI is not only well represented in all the ORTT awardees, but also, at all levels. Our faculty, staff, and honorary graduates are all to be commended for making the nation’s honourable list.”

Recognising The UWI operates globally

Speaking on the achievement, Professor Agard, ORTT for environment/climate change and biodiversity protection, said he was “delighted to receive the ORTT because it is a recognition of the work I have done around the world”. His research is acclaimed both regionally and internationally, spanning realms such as natural resource management, water quality, and marine and terrestrial ecology, and extending to the profound impacts of climate change on both natural ecosystems and human systems.

He was the co-chair of a group of distinguished scientists, appointed by the UN Secretary-General, to draft the second quadrennial *Global Sustainable Development Report* in 2023. He was a lead author and editor on several UN Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change Assessments, and the Coordinating Lead Author on the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES).

“This award,” he said, “recognises that The UWI operates globally, not only in Trinidad and Tobago. UWI has a global campus.”

Professor Umaharan (ORTT for science/agricultural development), who as Director of the CRC orchestrated the transformative elevation of the Cocoa Research Unit to a fully realised, standalone campus centre, said he felt “elated, honoured and humbled at the same time receiving the highest national award of Trinidad and Tobago”.

He added, “In many ways, it motivates me to do even more to support the cocoa industry that has become so dear to my heart.”

Professor Umaharan’s endeavours have not only charted new frontiers in cocoa research but also earned The UWI the prestigious accolade of the world’s leading cocoa research institution, a recognition bestowed by the European Union. The CRC has not only become an asset to cocoa farmers, researchers, manufacturers, and sellers, they also produce and sell their own cocoa products. This year, they broke ground on a new cocoa factory.

In his career, Professor Imbert (ORTT for innovation, steelpan technology, education and culture and the arts) played a crucial role in obtaining accreditation for the local engineering fraternity as well as significant contributions to the evolution of the steelpan. He is a co-founder of The UWI Steelpan Development Centre and was an integral member of the team that developed the revolutionary G-Pan. He has been pivotal in propelling innovations within the realm of musical engineering.

Several national award winners are current and former staff



Order of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago awardees (from left) Professor Clement Imbert, Professor Pathmanathan Umaharan, and Professor John Agard.
PHOTO: ANISTO ALVES, COURTESY GUARDIAN MEDIA LTD.

Three UWI professors recognised with Highest National Award for their contributions to T&T

ORTT, Chaconia Gold and more for the university community

The other members of The UWI community that received national awards include:

- **Dr Bruce Paddington**, lecturer (retired) and founder and co-owner of Banyan Productions TT - Chaconia Medal, Gold, for media/film industry.
- **Sieunarine Persad Coosal**, Executive Director of Coosal’s Construction Company and a UWI Honorary Graduate 2021 - Chaconia Medal, Gold, for entrepreneurship/philanthropy.
- **Professor Surujpal Teelucksingh**, medical doctor and professor - Chaconia Medal, Silver, in the sphere of medicine.
- **Wayne Gerrard Bertrand (posthumously)**, Former Coordinator of the Petroleum Geoscience Unit at the Faculty of Engineering - Hummingbird Medal, Gold, for energy and education.

- **Richard Escalante**, former employee of the Department of Political Science in the Faculty of Social Sciences - Humming Bird Medal, Gold, in the sphere of education.

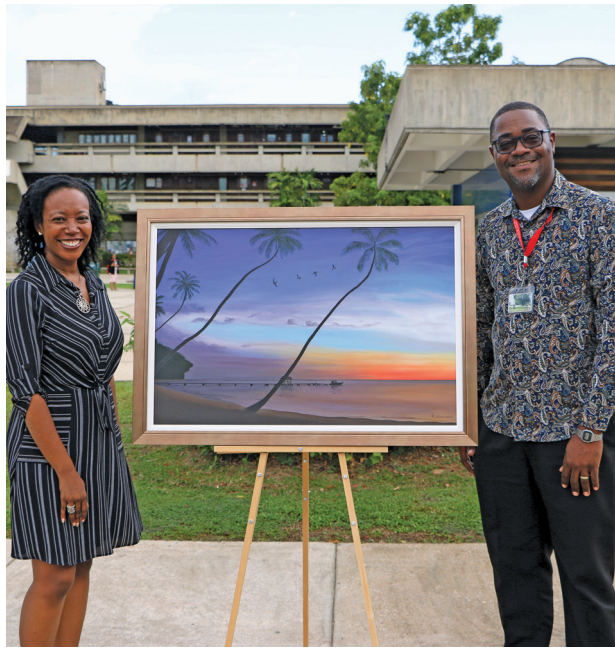
- **Leslie Reuben Hoyte**, former employee of the UWI Open Campus - Public Service Medal of Merit, Gold, in the spheres of public service/sport and physical education.

“The UWI,” a statement from the university said, “is proud to note that among the National Award recipients are several current and former members of staff.”

Professor Antoine stated, “The stellar achievements of our scientists are a testament to our commitment to the pursuit of knowledge and scientific understanding, and reaffirms that our quest for impactful research has never wavered.”

Their work, she said, “acts as an inspiration to present and future generations of scholars, researchers, and leaders at The UWI who play a pivotal role in advancing our nation’s progress, enriching our society, and fortifying the foundations of our nation.”

■ CAMPUS NEWS



Mr Johann Bennett (right), and his winning painting, *Rooted, Ready, Rising - Pelicans in Flight at Pigeon Point Sunset*. Pictured as well is Dr Marsha Pearce, Coordinator of the Visual Arts Programme at The UWI's Department of Creative and Festival Arts (DCFA) and lead judge of the 75th Anniversary Staff Art Competition. PHOTO: ANEEL KARIM

DLCCS'S JOHANN BENNETT WINS UWI 75th Anniversary Staff Art Competition

"I just love to paint," says Johann Bennett, an administrative staffer at UWI St Augustine's Department of Literary, Cultural and Communication Studies in the Faculty of Humanities and Education.

That love of painting and the many years that he's spent honing his skill is reflected on his canvas, most recently in his piece *Rooted, Ready, Rising - Pelicans in Flight at Pigeon Point Sunset*. The painting has won him The UWI 75th Anniversary Staff Art Competition.

Johann and the other finalists, Sian Ramdass and Lawrence Theodore, received their prizes at a ceremony on September 28 at the JFK Quadrangle. The competition was held to commemorate The UWI's 75 years as a Caribbean institution of higher education.

Johann's painting, *Rooted, Ready and Rising* (also the university's 75th anniversary theme), depicts the popular Tobago beach at sunset "with four pelicans rising in flight across the beautiful sky" as well as a fifth secret pelican, the artist's note states. The pelican adorns The UWI's coat of arms and is often used to represent the university.

"The four pelicans in flight symbolise the four campuses [St Augustine, Cave Hill, Mona, and the Open Campus] rising to higher heights," Johann explains, "and the fifth pelican on the boat represents the Five Islands campus, which is rooted and ready, and will soon rise in flight to the heights of the others."

A statement from the art competition's panel of judges said, "Johann Bennett's painting demonstrates robust creativity and originality."

It added, "the work resonates with our institutional sensibility and communicates through a deft handling of acrylic on canvas, The UWI's 75th anniversary positioning statement: Rooted, Ready, Rising."

Apart from his UWI piece, another of his paintings, *Brian Charles Lara - Taking Evasive Action*, was selected this past September by the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago Rotunda Art Gallery Committee to be exhibited for an Independence Day and Republic Day showing.

When asked about what drives and inspires him, Johann has many answers. He is driven to support his family (he has a wife and children). He is inspired by the process of painting, and studying the work of the masters.

"But my greatest inspiration," he says, "comes from my spiritual beliefs. This is my greatest inspiration, my purpose in Almighty Yahweh and the kingdom of heaven on Earth."

■ **For more information** on UWI St Augustine's 75th anniversary activities, visit the homepage at <https://sta.uwi.edu/>. For The UWI's anniversary events and activities taking place throughout the Caribbean, visit <https://uwi.edu/75/>



Former WI Women's Cricket Team all-rounder Stacy-Ann King gets the job done with the bat for the UWI WCCI team.

UWI T20 ALL STARS, UWI WOMEN'S CCI WIN the University's 75th anniversary Cricket Fest

This October, cricket returned to the St Augustine campus, and UWI teams showed their skill. The UWI T20 All Stars won the men's exhibition, and the UWI Women's Cricket Club Invitational (WCCI) won the women's at the UWI-75 Cricket Fest.

UWI-75 Cricket Fest, held on October 7 at the St Augustine campus, was one of several activities hosted by the university this year to celebrate the establishment of The UWI in 1948. The exhibition matches took place at UWI St Augustine's iconic Sir Frank Worrell Cricket Ground at the Sports and Physical Education Centre (SPEC).

UWI WCCI won by four wickets against Phoenix Women's Club in the women's final. The home team finished with 120 runs for 6 wickets in 18.6 overs. After the match, UWI WCCI's

Shalini Samaroo received the Special Bowling Award, Phoenix's Britney Cooper the Special Fielding Award, and UWI WCCI's Stacy-Ann King received both the Biggest Six and Player of the Match awards.

On the men's side, UWI T20 All Stars bested UWI Men's Invitational by 56 runs. The T20 All Stars won with a convincing victory of 233 runs for 5 wickets in 20 overs. UWI T20 All Stars' Tion Webster was named Player of the Match, while UWI Men's Invitational's Sion Hackett received the Biggest Six Award, Kareem Khan took the Special Bowling Award, and T20 All Stars' Samuel Felix claimed the Special Fielding Award.

UWI-75 Cricket Fest was hosted by the St Augustine Academy of Sport and sponsored by UNICOM.

UWI-75 Cricket Fest, held on October 7 at the St Augustine campus, was one of several activities hosted by the university this year to celebrate the establishment of The UWI in 1948.



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■ UWI IN SOCIETY

Some years ago, I had the privilege of working with an energy sector expert on a monthly bi-weekly column. He was not only an international consultant on developing a national energy strategy, he was someone who deeply understood the historical significance of the sector to the development of Trinidad and Tobago. He hoped it could be used today as a model for another massive developmental push.

“We don’t need another plan,” he said. “T&T is a graveyard of uncompleted plans, some of them quite good. We need a shared national vision, a shared story that can power our intentionality towards change.”

His words came back to me this past September, listening to speakers discuss the legacy of the man at the heart of T&T’s extraordinary growth as the young republic unshackled itself from its colonial overlords.

“Eric Williams,” said UWI Chancellor Mr Robert Bermudez, “had a very clear vision of what we should do and what he intended to do with post-Independence Trinidad and Tobago.”

He was speaking on September 30 at a panel discussion titled “*Reflections on the Legacy of Eric Williams: Business and Development*”, hosted by UWI St Augustine and held at the Dr Eric Williams Memorial Library in Port of Spain. It was held as part of The University of the West Indies’ 75th anniversary commemorative activities taking place this year.

BRINGING THE UNIVERSITY TO THE PEOPLE

The discussion was a look at the works of the late leader, who served as the first Prime Minister from 1962 to 1981, and is considered the father of the nation by many, both to assess his impact, and also perhaps more importantly, to find in the example he set, the solutions to help T&T navigate our most perilous era since Independence.

The lecture was the first event held at the library that was established earlier this year through an agreement between UWI St Augustine and the government. The campus plans to move the over 7000 items that make up the Eric Williams collection currently housed at the Alma Jordan Library on campus to the new location.

“We want to bring the university to the people,” explained Campus Principal Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine, “... we want to go out to other towns, Arima, San Fernando, Sangre Grande etc. We want to go to rural areas.”

She added, “and how much closer to the people is the University of Woodford Square, at the heart of the city, in this historic building?”

Calling Dr Williams “an academic exemplar”, she said “we are also here this evening because it is important for a nation to pause, reflect, review, reassess, and self-assess, and to me, a university that is grounded in community must be central to that process.”

A CLEAR VIEW OF WHERE WE NEEDED TO GO

There was a surprising aura of urgency over the proceedings for what was essentially a historical examination of a leader who passed away over four decades ago. Almost all of the panellists dedicated a portion of their presentations to the urgent issues of today.

AMCHAM CEO Nirad Tewarie spoke of “new threats” such as crime and intolerance. Former parliamentarian and head of the South Trinidad Chamber of Commerce Diane Seukeran warned of the dangers of climate change and food security. Mr Bermudez cautioned that T&T faces the risk of society “breaking up into factions”.

As Dr Aakeil Murray, history lecturer at UWI St Augustine, said, “In some areas of both education and business, we are yet to achieve a degree of success fitting a 21st century developing nation.”

The panellists looked at the late leader’s policies in developing the business sector, his relationship with the business community, and how business, as well as heavy industry, contributed to the overall development of the republic. They spoke as well about his policies for education.

PRAGMATIST AND ECONOMIC NATIONALIST

Professor Bridget Brereton, Emerita Professor of

Unlocking Williams’s Legacy to create a new one

BY JOEL HENRY

“Eric Williams, had a very clear vision of what we should do and what he intended to do with post-Independence Trinidad and Tobago.”

– UWI CHANCELLOR MR ROBERT BERMUDEZ –

History at The UWI, gave a succinct analysis of Dr Williams’s relationship to business. She said that, despite his most famous work, *Capitalism and Slavery*, employing a Marxist analysis, he was not a socialist.

He “advocated instead a middle way between socialist control of the economy and unfettered liberal capitalism”, she explained.

“I think,” Professor Brereton told the audience of leading political figures, scholars, and business people at the memorial library, “that Eric Williams was above all a pragmatist who went in for ideological flexibility. But he was an economic nationalist.”

Dr Williams’s existential adversary was colonialism, not just as the empire itself, or its local agents, but the economic system, and culture it imposed upon colonised people. As sociologist Dr David Muhammad pointed out, his famous “*Massa Day Done*” speech in 1961 was a repudiation of colonialism as an idea.

He quoted Williams, “Massa is not a racial term. It’s a symbol of a bygone age. Massa day is a social phenomenon and denotes a political awakening.”

The ambitious movement away from agriculture to oil and gas, petrochemicals, and heavy industry can be seen as the ultimate symbol of the repudiation of “Massa”.

“For the historian,” said Brereton, “the sugar plantation and the master, old or new, was the great symbol of colonial oppression and enslavement/indenture.”

The development of the Pt Lisas industrial estate and the monetisation of natural gas are two of the most important accomplishments of T&T under the leadership of Eric Williams. They were both major contributors to and symbols of a breathtaking industrialisation and modernisation project that many of us take for granted today.

AN IMPOVERISHED, COLONIAL SOCIETY

Ms Marina Salandy-Brown, founder of the Bocas Lit Fest, described the colonial, pre-industrial period as one of “cruel poverty”.

Chancellor Bermudez said, “Trinidad was a backward place.... The conditions of work in agriculture, whether it be cocoa, sugar or whatever else, were appalling. People lived

in houses that were not painted. There were no toilets, no running water. The objective of a job on a cocoa plantation was to get enough food so that your children would not starve.”

However, even though the movement away from agriculture to industry was a major contributor to national development, the need for local food production has become an increasing concern.

As Mr Gregory Aboud, President of the Downtown Owners and Merchants Association (DOMA) said, quoting economist Lloyd Best to great applause, “No society can achieve greatness without a strong, vibrant, and productive agricultural sector.”

Mr Aboud, although complimentary of Dr Williams’s legacy, was also critical. He questioned the application of the social services implemented by the late leader.

“Free education, free healthcare,” he said, were “noble objectives, but we have stumbled because we have not been able to deliver them” properly.

“That’s because the management model cannot serve us in delivery. It can serve us in euphemisms. It can serve us in good intentions. It can serve us in caring for each other, but it cannot deliver the product,” he said.

However, overall the assessment of Eric Williams’s legacy was extremely positive, especially for those who experienced that early post-Independence period.

“There’s nothing that anyone can say to really capture what it was like to be a child at that time,” said Ms Salandy-Brown. “To be one of the people that was able to help design the flag, and to write the national helm, and decide what the national emblems were. It was very empowering.”

Ms Seukeran was even more forceful in her views.

“What an enigma. What an extraordinary man, was Eric Williams. He was a macho man. Very much so. A man who knew what he wanted, and set out to achieve it,” she said.

Perhaps, more than anything else, the ultimate lesson of Dr Williams’s time in power is the ability to envision a better society and the internal stuff to make it happen.

Mrs Seukeran is confident we can:

“We have everything that Williams gave us. We have the wherewithal. We have the will.”

■ ENERGY

As students, academics, and private sector representatives settled themselves in the lecture theatre for the Faculty of Engineering's inaugural Hydrogen Symposium, they, quite unexpectedly, were called on to be warriors during the day's presentations. This was the message that Philip Julien, Chairman, Kenesjay Green Ltd put to the assembled audience during his remarks.

Urging them to be "hydrogen warriors", he said, "we are looking for people to join us in this journey as we defy the odds and create possibilities out of the impossible."

Julien explained that the symposium, held on September 21 at the St Augustine campus, was the hub where academia and the private sector would conceptualise solutions to combatting the looming effects of climate change.

He stressed that the world was facing a climate crisis: "Those of us in the industry who know the numbers are alarmed."

He explained that his company came to UWI and UTT aiming to bring "the best of academia to bear against the toughest challenges that our energy sector faces in creating a sustainable energy future".

Hydrogen, a sustainable answer

The symposium highlighted how hydrogen could be the sustainable answer to replacing fossil fuels. During his address, Professor Prakash Persad, President of the University of Trinidad and Tobago, noted that hydrogen is already well established in industry, but there is potential for it in many other areas.

Green, blue and grey hydrogen can be found in Trinidad and Tobago. Prof Persad emphasised the importance of having a multi-disciplinary team to research the topic, and noted that he was pleased to see UTT and UWI collaborating.

The focus on renewable energy is particularly timely as small island states are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of the changing climate. During his keynote address, Dr Devon Gardner, Head of Technical Programmes at the Caribbean Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency noted that Caribbean economies are very climate sensitive. He outlined the areas that would be affected by unchecked climate change including agriculture, fisheries, and tourism

'We will stay and we will fight'

According to Julien, many believe "there is no future, that we are slowly dimming the lights on humanity's future". He went on, "many of us in this room are here to say we are taking a stand. We will not go quietly into the night. We will stay, and we will fight, and that fight is for the future, a sustainable future through sensible energy utilisation".

Hydrogen, he explained, is a clean, alternative fuel.

The day's presentations touched on the various ways hydrogen can be implemented to reduce dependence on fossil fuels in areas like the steel industry, the chemical industry, refineries, shipping, transportation, heating and power generation.

"All of these things that we currently depend on from a fossil fuel base can theoretically be substituted, replenished, and enhanced with a fossil-free source of energy called hydrogen," Julien said.

Green Hydrogen

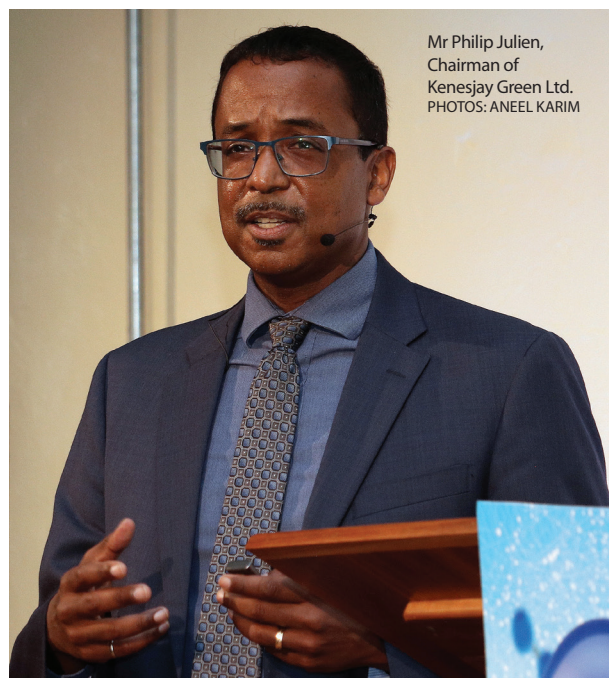
The symposium spotlighted the growing importance of green hydrogen, which is created by sending a stream of electricity through water. The result is hydrogen and oxygen. Many of the discussions centred on using renewable energy to drive the process.

During his presentation, Dr Gardner illustrated how renewable resources in several Eastern Caribbean islands could provide the needed fossil-free resources.

Fighting for a Sustainable Future

Hydrogen Symposium explores Caribbean potential for fossil-free energy resource

BY DIXIE-ANN BELLE



Mr Philip Julien,
Chairman of
Kenesjay Green Ltd.
PHOTOS: ANEEL KARIM

He emphasised the potential of off-shore wind, and mentioned plans to have two flagship projects to this end in Antigua and Barbuda, and Saint Kitts and Nevis. He noted that, with the proper incentives, several islands in the region also have the potential to provide another fossil-free resource: geothermal energy.

Dr Gardner said the main goal is to transform the economies of these countries. "We will be able to diversify to less climate dependent economies, and that is where the future of the Caribbean lies."

Remembering the legacy of Ken Julien

The symposium also took the time to honour Professor Kenneth Julien, father of Philip Julien, and one of the original leaders and "hydrogen warriors" of the local energy sector. Prof Julien, UWI St Augustine's first T&T-born engineering lecturer with a PhD, was in the audience as they announced the implementation of the Professor Kenneth S Julien Endowment Fund.

The conference presenters illuminated the legacy of Prof Julien and his contemporaries in the sector, as well as the importance of the Caribbean region taking proactive steps to reduce dependence on fossil fuels and of adopting renewable energy sources instead of waiting for others to solve the problem.

"Nobody is coming to save us. We have to save ourselves as a species, as humanity, as a people," said Philip Julien.

"One of you might not only change the world," he told the audience members. "You might just save it too."

Students from Presentation College Chaguanas were also recognised for an electrolysis process they created to produce hydrogen as part of a global robotics challenge.

In his welcome address, Professor Bhesheem Ramlal, UWI St Augustine's newly appointed Dean of the Faculty of Engineering, shared the predominant sentiment of the day, both for the greater adoption of hydrogen as an energy source and for the existential threat of climate change.

"We need to think about what we can do to address the challenges before us."



Professor Kenneth Julien (left) with Professor Bhesheem Ramlal, the newly appointed Dean of UWI St Augustine's Faculty of Engineering.

■ FACULTY OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE **TECHAGRI EXPO 2023**

From September 22 to 24, The UWI’s Faculty of Food and Agriculture (FFA) welcomed at least 3,000 visitors to its doorsteps for this year’s techAGRI Expo, an event that highlighted a number of emerging agrotechnologies and agri-entrepreneurs.

Themed “Empowering Youth Entrepreneurship through Agricultural Technology,” this year’s expo was a collaboration with the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service.

It was also the first to be held since 2019. TechAGRI was put on pause for three years (2020 to 2022) because of the pandemic.

Reflecting on the event, Professor Mark Wuddivira, Dean of the Faculty of Food and Agriculture, told UWI TODAY that the faculty and Youth Ministry wanted to send a “clear message” that young people are leading the transformation of food and agriculture for the future.

He explained, “From 2022 to September of this year, we trained 100 young people between the ages of 16 and 35 on shade house production and management. Some of the participants in the project managed a display of the technology at the expo.

“These climate smart technologies are important in circumventing some of these climate issues, and we are pleased to have young people being trained in this area.”

A shade house is a structure enclosed by nets to allow sunlight, moisture, and air to pass through the gaps. As the shade house programme’s first cohort wrapped up their studies in September, some were offered the opportunity to intern at farms across the country to apply their newfound skills.

In September, the faculty and Youth Ministry launched the programme’s second edition with another 100 participants. There is also an ongoing aquaculture project which has 100 participants.



Precision agriculture and sustainability

Speaking on the expo in general, Dean Wuddivira said many displays focused on how precision agriculture has been incorporated into different aquaponics models to give them a greater degree of sustainability.

During UWI TODAY’s visit to the event on September 23, Fruitful Bough Group Ltd was one of the booths displaying its technologies which they offered to clients to help them achieve climate smart precision agriculture.

The company’s Director of Business Development and Technology, Josiah Noel, told UWI TODAY they offer technologies that provide “predictive, productive, and reactive analytics” to stakeholders across the agriculture value chain.

Noel said, “We offer technology to monitor the actual, real-time conditions of the soil when crops are growing – the climatic conditions and the water quality, for example.”

He continued, “we then bring all the data points together to do data analytics to suggest remedial actions that growers must take to improve their growing conditions.

“We also have post-harvest solutions that monitor the air quality where the goods are stored, so we can predict at what rate goods are spoiling.”

The company also offers automated irrigation systems,

TECHAGRI EXPO

drones, and robots, which can be used to control weeds and even apply fertilisers.

This being the company’s first time participating in the expo, their mission was to increase visibility for their services and show the wider public that the country already has the advanced technologies needed to build climate resilience in agriculture.

Prof Wuddivira said the company’s services are a sign of the modernisation of the country’s agriculture sector at all levels.





FROM LEFT: Lecturer in Agri-Environmental Disaster Risk Resilience at UWI St Augustine Dr Ronald Roopnarine, Senator Avinash Singh (Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land, and Fisheries), FFA Dean Professor Mark Wuddivira, Youth Development and National Service Minister Mr Foster Cummings, Agricultural Development Bank Acting CEO Mrs Wendy Samsundar-Beharry (Platinum Sponsor of TechAGRI 2023), Mayor of Arima Mr Balliram Maharaj, and UWI St Augustine Deputy Principal Professor Indar Ramnarine. PHOTO: ANEEL KARIM

RI Putting young people AT THE FOREFRONT

BY TYRELL GITTENS

FFA support for CARICOM

With efforts geared towards increasing youth participation and promoting sustainable agriculture methods, the Dean of FFA said the faculty's agenda continues to be supporting CARICOM in achieving their goal of reducing 25 percent of the region's food imports by 2025.

He said, "The faculty has been really blessed with young, vibrant, and forward-thinking members. Because of this, we have been engaged in a number of projects

that not only affect one country in the Caribbean, but a number of countries across the region.

"Remember, the CARICOM Heads of Governments have their goals to reduce food imports and the faculty is focused on accelerating the achievement of this goal."

Prof Wuddivira noted that when he visited all of the expo's booths on September 24, there were many FFA graduates with either their own agribusinesses or leading roles in existing companies.

Founder of AgriNation Agricultural Consultancy,

Hamza Ali, was one of those graduates.

In 2017, Ali graduated with a double major in Agricultural Technology, and Environmental and Natural Resource Management. He earned his masters' degree in Tropical Animal Science and Production in 2019.

Ali's business creates "digital knowledge products" to help broaden people's perspectives on agriculture, and provides services to home and commercial gardeners.

He told UWI TODAY, "The techAGRI Expo is a great venue for getting your name out there and marketing yourself as a competent entity within the agriculture sector. We've had great flow at the expo, and a lot of people who are interested in home gardening expressing their interest in using my services."

Ali added that many visitors to his booth were interested in learning more about his new book titled, *Gardening at Home Series for Tropical Growing – Volume One*.

On September 24, he conducted a workshop on home gardening as part of a series of workshops on many different topics during the expo.

Food security partnership with regional universities

With techAGRI 2023 completed, Dean Wuddivira said planning has already started for the next one.

Outside of major events like the expo, he said the faculty continues to focus on the role it plays in shaping the future of food and agriculture in the region.

"The Ministry of Youth Development and National Service has indicated a number of other youth initiatives in which they will be engaging us," he explained.

"We have also taken the lead in working with the Consortium of CARICOM Universities involved in Agricultural Education and Research (CUCAER), with universities around the region – like the University of Guyana, University of the Bahamas, University of Trinidad and Tobago, and Antom De Kom University of Suriname – to see how we can collaborate on meaningful initiatives to advance regional food security."

Dean Wuddivira said, "The faculty is committed to doing things that are impactful and important to the general public."

For Wuddivira, the FFA's efforts to transform the region's agri-food landscape is rooted in an understanding that environmental sustainability is closely linked with sustainable practices in farming and food production.



Apiculturist and executive member of the Association of Caribbean Beekeepers' Organisations Mohammed Hallim interacts with members of the public at the 2023 expo.

Tyrell Gittens is a conservationist, environmentalist and geographer dedicated to the sustainable development of T&T and the advancement of environmental education.

SCIENCE

Natural History Tours expose young people to T&T's rich ecosystem of life and the science associated with it

BY DR LA DAANA KANHAI



A young person observes a specimen under the stereomicroscope in the Department of Life Sciences's Land Arthropod Collection Room.

Imagine waking up before 6am during the July/August vacation, catching a bus at your primary school in Rio Claro and journeying to the Faculty of Science and Technology at The UWI St Augustine for the very first time for a Natural History Tour.

Once there, your group is mesmerised by the collections that present a mere snapshot of Trinidad and Tobago's rich biodiversity. Your group is captivated by stories about majestic sea turtles that nest on the shores of our islands, the beautiful butterflies that inhabit the forests, and the numerous marine organisms that take refuge in our precious coral reefs.

This was the experience of one of several groups of children that visited the Department of Life Sciences over the course of five days in the months of July and August 2023.

Natural History Tours 2023, hosted in collaboration with NIHERST, was an event geared towards children between the ages of 6 and 13. Its purpose was to spark interest in local biodiversity in Trinidad and Tobago.

On tour days, groups were taken to the The UWI Zoology Museum, the Land Arthropod Collection, the Coastal and Marine Exhibit, the Butterfly Habitat, and the Natural Science Conference Room, where there was a display by the National Herbarium of Trinidad and Tobago and the Diabetes Association of Trinidad and Tobago. At every location, there

were interactive group discussions about our local biodiversity.

The tours also included hands-on learning activities designed for attendees to engage in specimen preservation and preparation, observe specimens under the stereo microscope, interact with live marine organisms, use equipment such as binoculars to observe organisms in the field, and experience a walk through a butterfly habitat.

MAMMALS, REPTILES, AMPHIBIANS, BIRDS, AND FISH

Visitors had the opportunity to observe the skeletons and preserved specimens of mammals, reptiles, amphibians, birds, and fish. Some of the iconic specimens they viewed included the Banwari remains (oldest known human fossils in Trinidad and Tobago), the Butterfly and Moth Collection, the pilot whale skeleton (marine mammal stranded on the east coast of Trinidad), sea turtle shells, live butterflies in a simulated forest habitat and, and a local flora display.

"The series of stops bundled together under the Natural History Tours recognise the educational value of these resources developed and maintained by the Department of Life Sciences," stated Dr Brian Cockburn, Dean of the Faculty of Science and Technology.

"The resources have been routinely used by researchers from

around the globe, so it is a welcome pleasure to share them with a young generation, and to stoke the sense of wonder and passion for science. We look forward to sustaining and expanding this initiative."

The event was planned and executed by a multidisciplinary team that included technicians (Rajindra Mahabir, Anton Manoo, Vijai Ramdhan, Judy Ramsoondar), lecturers (La Daana Kanhai, Zaheer Hosein), associate professionals (Jacob Whiby, Sarah Mathura), postgraduate students (Ato Mendoza, Cyran Benjamin, Andrew Dhanoo), recent graduates (Raeis Mohammed, Krysten Paul, Jo-Marie Westmaas, Andrew Mohammed), current undergraduate students (Zion Thomas, Alisha Mohammed, Wesley Goorachan), office staff (Cherelle Wilkinson-Sirjhu, Leisha Joseph), and several volunteers (Dan Jaggernauth and others).

Professor Judith Gobin, Head of the Department of Life Sciences, commented, "This is the first time we have had this age group of students visit the department. Based on the feedback received from the students, their teachers and their parents, this was truly an adventure not to be missed."

She added, "We have no doubt that we will be seeing some of these very youngsters here at the Department of Life Sciences and UWI within the next 12 to 13 years. We have succeeded in stirring up their excitement and enthusiasm for science!"

Dr La Daana Kanhai is a scientist and lecturer in the Department of Life Sciences within the Faculty of Science and Technology at UWI St Augustine.

CAMPUS NEWS

In their first year, many UWI students face new challenges. Many might not realise that some students have added worries because of visible or invisible disabilities. They face obstacles like inaccessibility and the misconceptions of others.

Amanda Wellington-Peters, Student Services Assistant at the Student Life and Development Department (SLDD) within the Division of Student Services and Development (DSSD), has an affinity for these struggles. Her daughter developed a disability and passed away in recent years. For her, helping students live on their own terms is a personal aspiration.

"I am open to listen to them and to give them the best advice that is possible when they come to access these services," she says.

Twenty-two new students are currently registered for the academic year with SLDD. Besides those with physical disabilities, some have conditions like bipolar disorder, schizophrenia or ADHD. SLDD support includes loans of special aids and devices like laptops, tape recorders, and customised software. Students also receive assistance with classroom and exam accommodations. Depending on the disability, some can take exams separately. Accessible parking spots are available, and Wellington-Peters coordinates a special shuttle service.

The students also foster community with a WhatsApp group. "They aid one another well in transitioning through the time here," says Wellington-Peters.

For Shania Samaroo, a Criminology and Criminal Justice student, these services made a difference. She has Spinocerebellar Ataxia, which restricts movement and affects her balance. Describing the support she received as outstanding, she outlines using the separate room and having an amanuensis (someone to take dictation) for exams. SLDD advocated for more accessible

A Campus without Barriers: Striving toward a UWI for Everyone

BY DIXIE - ANN BELLE

classroom locations, and Shania used the shuttle and special parking.

Support like this is essential to students who sometimes feel disregarded as they navigate their academic journeys.

Besides academic and physical challenges, students often encounter stigma and stereotyping.

"Even though my disability is strictly physical," says Shania, "I have met persons who have alluded to and treated me as though I had a cognitive impairment disability."

She notes that sometimes students with disabilities have to ask for examination accommodations, or they receive information about them at the last minute.

Mrs Wellington-Peters says that some lecturers act as if students are being entitled when they require accommodations.

All this can take its toll. When necessary, SLDD refers students to the DSSD's Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPS). They also provide a room for them to relax and study, and they urge them to persevere.

"We really try to encourage them to pursue their education because it's a great accomplishment just reaching this far," says Wellington-Peters.

She describes the satisfaction of remembering students walking into her office for the first time and seeing them graduate years later.

"I don't think there's anything better."

Shania will graduate in October 2023. She feels more can be done for UWI students with disabilities to help them assert their independence and achieve their goals. "UWI will benefit if its lecturers, tutors, and staff undergo disability sensitisation workshops."

Mrs Wellington-Peters hopes that disability services will eventually expand and provide training opportunities for staff.

Shania encourages students to utilise available services and seek help from supportive lecturers and tutors.

She adds, "Be aware that you do encounter ableists and persons who are inconsiderate, and I hope that you find the strength and the courage to not be discouraged by them. You run your own race, and someday soon, there will be the justice that you rightfully deserve!"

Dixie-Ann Belle is a freelance writer, editor, and proofreader.

■ OUR PEOPLE

“People outside of the field never thought that I was going to be doing anything terribly important,” Professor Dr Terence Seemungal recalls.

His research would go on to change the way that chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) would be examined by hyper fixating on the phenomenon of exacerbation. COPD refers to a “group of diseases that cause airflow blockages and breathing-related problems”, as defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Having joined the project in 1995 to investigate causation of the disease, particularly, the study of viruses, Professor Seemungal set about gathering his samples.

A year later, disaster struck. A particularly warm 1996 English summer coupled with the “involuntary warming” of the refrigerator housing the samples, he joked wryly, resulted in unusable data. All the samples were lost. Nevertheless, the young researcher was resilient and delivered on his work.

That commitment - as a researcher, educator, and academic administrator - has served him well throughout the decades of his professional career. This year, after serving eight years as Dean of the Faculty of Medical Sciences, Prof Seemungal retired.

When asked about taking up the role as dean, he mused, “Some people say you get bored with administrative things but administration is all about people and medicine is all about people.”

Appointed in 2015, the post rounded out two decades of service to The UWI, beginning in 2003. Prof Seemungal started as a senior lecturer when he returned from England, and in those 20 years, he has worn many hats and transferred his skills throughout his career.

AN INVALUABLE CONTRIBUTION TO THE STUDY OF LUNG HEALTH

“It takes a special kind of courage to uproot oneself and go elsewhere,” Prof Seemungal muses on his life journey.

When he left for England in 1993, he remembers feeling angry - simply because he loved his country and his home life and did not want to have to leave them to pursue his doctorate.

Moreover, his reception into the medical space in England was cold and laced with distrust. More familiar with Dwight Yorke than with graduates of The University of the West Indies, the ambitious young man would have to prove his abilities, irrespective of his honours degrees in Mathematics, and Chemistry and Medicine.

“Medicine is a funny thing,” he explains, “people don’t trust you just like that, and you can’t expect it because you’re dealing with people’s lives.”

However, despite these challenges, he was focused on his studies. And that focus would propel him to the forefront of lung disease research.

“When I got into the field,” he noted, “the general view was that people [with COPD] had periodic worsening of the symptoms called exacerbations, but these things didn’t mean much.”

The loss of his samples lengthened the process of his research. This would cause a further financial strain for Seemungal, a self-funded researcher. With no preliminary results to show the value of the research and secure funding grants, he combed the database. With a sharp eye, he discovered a relationship between the number of exacerbations a person experiences and their quality of life. This was groundbreaking.

Thanks to the astuteness of his supervisor, Professor Jadwiga Wedzicha, the importance of Seemungal’s breakthrough to the field was realised as the paper was written. Professor Wedzicha asserted that this research gave, “for the first time, a way of measuring disease burden in COPD”.

A pioneer in COPD research, Professor Wedzicha guided Seemungal in the research process.

“She would be prepared to discuss anything about COPD with me whether day or night,” he remarks.

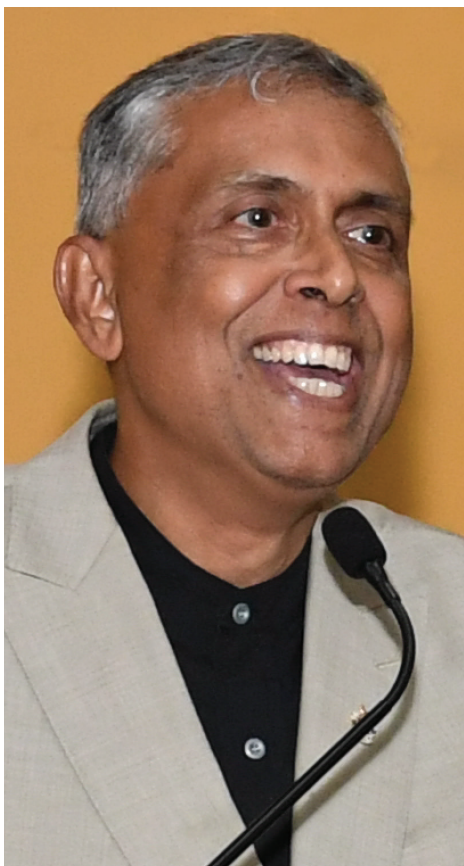


Medicine is about putting people first, Professor Seemungal believes. That includes patients, staff, and students, like those in this file photo and the many he has taught over the years. PHOTOS: DEXTER SUPERVILLE, COURTESY THE FACULTY OF MEDICAL SCIENCES.

Making Room to Breathe

Professor Dr Terence Seemungal – educator, academic administrator, and groundbreaking researcher in the area of lung disease—retires as Dean of the Faculty of Medical Sciences

BY KANISHA VINCENT



INSPIRED BY FAMILY

His research did not stop there. With 126 publications to date and over 15,000 citations, Professor Seemungal’s contribution to COPD research has been incredible.

Along the way, he learned well the lesson of building relationships and putting people first in medical situations. This approach would form the cornerstone of his practice: on the wards with patient care, in the classroom with his students, and administratively with his staff as Dean of the Faculty of Medicine.

Beyond the campus, Prof Seemungal has held positions such as Honorary Consultant Physician, Founding President of the Thoracic Society of Trinidad and Tobago, President of the Medical Board of Trinidad and Tobago, and what he sees as his greatest career achievement, creating the Caribbean Centre for Health Systems Research and Development (CCHSRD).

Speaking briefly of his home life, Professor Seemungal reminisced on the serenity of growing up in the ‘60s and ‘70s, and attending school at Trinity College, Moka, which first introduced him to his interest in chemistry and mathematics.

However, regardless of the field, his drive was inspired by his uncle, Dr Chandra Madhosingh, whose desire to reach the top of his profession provided the impetus for Professor Seemungal’s pursuit of a PhD in Medicine.

He also is bolstered by the support of his wife, Mrs Jacinta Seemungal, with whom he has been married even before he attended medical school.

As outgoing dean, Professor Seemungal still seeks to serve the community and give back to society. After all, his career started with a desire to eliminate at least one disease.

“I wanted to just take it out,” he said.

Who knows what he will do next?

INTERNATIONALISATION

UWI St Augustine students Fana Wiggins (left) and Khadija Khan having a very informative (and enjoyable) time in Rome.



When in Rome

UWI students take part in 'life-changing' developmental experience at the Student Leader Global Summit in Italy

BY AMY LI BAKSH



IASAS

International Association of
Student Affairs and Services



Amanda Best-Noel, Manager
Guild Administrative Office

In July of 2023, two young Trini university students made the nine-hour trip, first from Trinidad to Amsterdam and then to Italy, for the Student Leader Global Summit hosted by the International Association of Student Affairs and Services (IASAS) in Rome. For both Fana Wiggins and Khadija Khan, it was their first time visiting Europe, and the experience had a lasting impact.

"It was really a life-changing experience," says Khadija, who had never been on such a lengthy plane ride before.

Alongside 38 other Student Leaders from all over the globe, the two UWI students (and members of The UWI St Augustine Guild of Students) had a unique opportunity to hold discussions and work together in groups tackling one of the most critical issues of our time: sustainability, and the role of universities in creating a more sustainable future.

"I was able to connect with IASAS understanding the global work they do in student services, and insisted that our Guild members apply," says Amanda Best-Noel, Manager of the Guild Administrative Office. "The Student Leader Summit brings together 40 student leaders globally, and I am delighted that our students were first-time selectors. We went through the application coaching process, fundraising and trip preparation together."

For Ms Best-Noel, who works with student leaders to help provide Guild members with advice and support to develop and execute projects during their time at The UWI, this was an opportunity to create space for the two students to develop their own leadership skills.

FROM STUDENT GOVERNMENT TO SUSTAINABILITY AGENTS

Fana, the former Guild Representative for the Faculty of Engineering, and Khadija, the former Representative for the Faculty of Social Sciences, have both been interested in issues surrounding community development and outreach from a young age. As Guild reps, they were able to get the experience of advocating for the students in their faculties, and helping to maintain lines of communication between students and staff for a more streamlined education experience.

These skills served them well at the IASAS Summit, where they were charged with creating projects alongside their fellow student leaders to be presented to experts and professionals, with the goal of contributing to the organisation's 2030 agenda goals to build a "fairer and more peaceful existence".

"I always had an interest in understanding how different groups in different cultural and geographical locations



Students and members of the IASAS at the 2023 Student Leader Global Summit.

perceived things when it comes to global issues," says Fana.

This interest came in handy when analysing different schools of thought and ways to come up with sustainable solutions. "A part of the training was us identifying an issue and coming up with a solution or analysing the problem", taking into consideration the context of each student's home territories as well, she explains.

As each group presented on their selected topic on helping a community with its relevant issues, many valuable conversations were had.

"We talked about water sanitation, and period poverty, and gender equality," says Khadija, whose group focused on the issue of reproductive and menstrual education.

Her hope is that she will be able to bring those ideas back to The UWI and work with organisations on campus already putting together plans for free "period banks", where menstruating persons would be able to have access to period products more readily on campus.

ENCOURAGING STUDENTS TO TAKE PART IN OUTREACH PROJECTS

Coming out of the summit, the students were buzzing with ideas on how to implement these solutions locally, as well as what they had learned about the culturally diverse global community that they had shared this process alongside.

As both students look towards completing their third year at The UWI, they are hopeful that sharing their positive experience at the summit encourages younger students to apply for these types of events and to get more involved with outreach projects that can improve the world around them.

"I really encourage other students to go out for these experiences and apply," says Khadija. "Even if you think you might not get through, you probably will.... You'd be surprised how they accept you with open arms, because they see you as an intellectual just like everyone else."

While the process of applying, and getting to the summit was not easy, and there were financial costs and work involved, the students feel that the experience made their hard work worth it.

"Certainly, the benefits of these experiences outweigh the challenges," says Ms Best-Noel. "The Guild Administrative Office is available to support students interested in leadership development."

Fana states "the growth you experience from being a part of these opportunities, the network you are able to build, the exchange of knowledge with these other students—that's something I want to pass on and encourage other students to be a part of."

As for Ms Best-Noel, her advice to students looking to apply for similar events or getting involved in outreach projects is, "go for it!"

■ OUR ICONS

My earliest recollection of Denis Solomon goes back 71 years to 1952 when I entered Queen's Royal College. Denis was one of the winners of an Open Island Scholarship in 1951 and he came to school to visit the masters who had been his teachers. When he came into our classroom, we stood and cheered. Our paths would cross again and become intertwined in the late 1960s when he joined the staff of The University of the West Indies.

As colleagues over the next 25 years or so, we collaborated on a few projects that have produced lasting impacts on our university, our field of scholarship, and our region. I refer in particular to our initiative to create a Department of Language and Linguistics at the St Augustine Campus of The UWI. The second collective effort was the founding, together with a cluster of like-minded scholars both within our region and beyond it, of the Society for Caribbean Linguistics in the early 1970s. The third initiative was our engagement with scholars across this region, including Haiti, Martinique, and Guadeloupe to develop a common writing system for the French-Lexicon Creoles of our region.

Working with Denis was not easy. He had a formidable intellect driven by innate intelligence, relentless logic, voracious reading, confidence in the quality of his academic formation, and a commitment to being as right as it was possible to be given available data. He thrived on combative debate. As long as your resistance was based on pertinent data and positions that he considered worthy, he respected you. Woe betide you if you folded or if your resources for response faded in the face of his onslaught. The scope of the references on which he could draw was formidable and enhanced by the range of languages and literatures that he commanded.

He wrote two important treatises on Trinidadian

His first degree at Cambridge in Modern and Mediaeval Languages provided him a broad platform for developing fluent native-speaker proficiency in English, French, Spanish, and Italian with a working knowledge of Russian as well. His pursuit of Linguistics added French Creole and he applied the array of related knowledge to the analysis of the grammar of Trinidadian English-Lexicon Creole. He wrote two important treatises on Trinidadian. The first was his master's thesis at Columbia University entitled "The System of Predication in the Speech of Trinidad: A Quantitative Study of Decreolization", and the second was his PhD dissertation "Syntax and Semantics in Caribbean Creole". These works eventually led to his 1993 publication entitled "The Speech of Trinidad – A Reference Grammar".

Denis decided to pursue a PhD later than one would have expected. The truth was that large numbers of people including staff members and students would address him as "Dr Solomon" and he grew tired of correcting them that it should be "Mr Solomon"! So, one day, he scooted into my office and announced "Lawrence, I've decided to register for the PhD. People keep calling me Dr Solomon. I might as well do it and done. And you have to supervise me, eh!"

The man even chose his own supervisor! How could I resist? It was an easy job. I just had to make sure he stayed on track.

Denis was pivotal in the development at St Augustine of the Postgraduate Diploma in Interpreting Techniques, a programme of significant importance for our region given our geographical location and our socio-political engagements. In all his teaching, he set the bar high and made demands of his students of similar order to those that he made of his colleagues and collaborators.

His scholarly mind was not confined in its activity to his university work. He was a political activist at a crucial time in our socio-political evolution. His membership in the Tapia House movement in the fateful years around 1970 drew him into formal participation in our political life. Even after his formal engagement, his newspaper columns invited sober reflection on important themes with a light touch of humour, enough to make the sting of his views palatable.

He was a political activist at a crucial time

For me, one of the most memorable was his column of February 21, 2005, when he subjected our National Anthem to a piercing analysis under the heading "Our Empty National Anthem"! Grammar and literary merit were found wanting.

I always marvelled at how much Denis got done! He kept pace with work on campus, devoted hours to repairing and refitting his boat, spun off into wood craft of a more general nature, engaged in serious political reflection and writing.... His weekends seemed elastic! And if you weren't careful, he would draw you into the boat refitting activity with an inducement of a good Sunday lime. The lime would include toting wood, sanding and varnishing with the conversation going anywhere over the noises of the woodwork.

If you saw Denis as a rough guy, you did not know him well enough. Show him a baby or a child and there you had Denis the softie! Gentleness personified! He would absolutely melt and become a malleable putty. He loved children and was good at "koochie-koo", keeping them amused and interested. Our daughters remember Uncle Denis with immediate smiles and memories of a variety of visits.

Elsa, our eldest, shared her memories of him this way: "My childhood impression was of a tall, lumbering bear of a man with a wide cheerful smile. Yes, he had a great smile, and an engaging laugh. Definitely loved a good argument. He was very gentle with children; with us older ones there was gentle teasing and the odd joke. He kind of fills up a room when he walks in, as if his personal energy field moved ahead and around him, carving a space in the air."

We are the poorer for his passing. He leaves us much to reflect on, admire and emulate.

Thank you.



for Denis Solomon

BY PROFESSOR LAWRENCE CARRINGTON



Dr Solomon with family.

Editor's Note: On August 27, Dr Denis Solomon, a linguist and polyglot of note, and the inspiration behind the PGDip Interpreting Techniques of UWI St Augustine's Department of Modern Language and Linguistics (DMLL), passed away.

Dr Solomon began working at UWI St Augustine in 1969, and would have a long career that included, among others, positions as a lecturer in Spanish, Linguistics, and French, and later senior lecturer and head of department. He almost single-handedly reorganised the entire structure and orientation of French language teaching on campus, in addition to expanding the programme of Linguistics courses.

Throughout his distinguished career, Dr Solomon held posts as a diplomat, a translator and a conference interpreter. He was also a former member of the Association Internationale des Interprètes de Conférence (AIIC), a columnist and an editorial writer. He was fluent in multiple languages, including English, English Creole, French, French Creole (Patois/Kwéyòl), Italian, Russian, and Spanish.

His most significant piece of published work was entitled *The Speech of Trinidad: A Reference Grammar*, but he also produced numerous articles and monographs. In 1984, he was awarded the Chevalier de l'Ordre des Palmes Académiques of the Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale de France.

The funeral service for Dr Solomon was held on Thursday, 7 September 2023. UWI TODAY is pleased to share reflections on his life by his colleague and friend, Professor Lawrence Carrington.

Lawrence Carrington is Emeritus Professor of Creole Linguistics at The University of the West Indies, and is a pioneer in the study and documentation of St Lucian French Creole. He was awarded the Chaconia Medal, Gold, in 2019, for Language and Development.

■ OUR PEOPLE

As one of his final wishes, the late author, historian, and publisher Gerard “Jerry” Besson was cremated wearing a University of the West Indies tie — an indication of the esteem he placed on the institution.

Besson’s relationship with The UWI dates all the way back to the late 1970s when he served on the St Augustine Campus Council from 1979 to 1985. Thirty years after his council appointment, Besson was awarded an honorary doctorate in 2015.

The doctorate was an amazing feat for someone born in 1942, in Port of Spain, during a time when learning disability diagnoses were virtually non-existent. It wasn’t until he was an adult that Besson was able to identify his childhood reading issue: dyslexia. After being initially traumatised by education, he came full circle. He became a noted writer and publisher with a 50-year career, and he was recognised not only by the academy, but also the people of T&T. Besson was also awarded a Hummingbird Medal in 2007.

“Jerry saw the appointment to the Campus Council as both pivotal in his personal life as well as a great honour to have been bestowed on him,” Besson’s widow, Alice Besson, tells UWI TODAY.

“Being dyslexic, his formal schooling was cut short in the 1950s due to the inability of the teaching system at the time to accommodate children with learning disabilities. As such, without any degrees or certificates to his name, to serve on the Council of the country’s highest educational body for seven years was exceedingly gratifying for him.”

She adds, “If I remember correctly, one of the achievements he took pride in while serving on the council was the establishment of the public relations function at the St Augustine Campus.”

SCHOLAR, LIFE-LONG FRIEND, AND LITERARY CO-CONSPIRATOR

According to Alice, while serving on the council, Besson also established lifelong friendships with faculty members like the late Professor Brinsley Samaroo and Professor John La Guerre.

“The honorary doctorate was a dream come true for him. He absolutely loved The UWI. The little boy, who in 1948 was expelled from Tranquillity because he couldn’t read, received a doctorate of letters 60 years later — a hard-won achievement if there ever was one,” notes Alice.

In 1981, Besson, who passed away in July, founded Paria Publishing — a publishing house primarily dedicated to the history and culture of Trinidad and Tobago. With a background in advertising, he guided Paria through the publication of over 130 books. Many were rare reprints on T&T history. Besson himself was the author of over a dozen books of fiction and non-fiction including *Folklore and Legends of Trinidad and Tobago*, *The Book of Trinidad* (with Professor Bridget Brereton), *The Angostura Story* and *Roume de St Laurent: A Memoir*.

Writer and editor Judy Raymond was one of Besson’s many literary co-conspirators and friends. She describes him as both whimsical and extremely knowledgeable.

“He loved this place (T&T), found it endlessly fascinating, and had a passion for sharing what he knew or thought about it with other people, which I presume was the impulse that gave rise to Paria,” says Raymond.

“Paria,” she says, “has also done immensely valuable work in reprinting books which otherwise would be impossible to find now, such as the *Caribbean Quarterly* of 1954, which contains a number of essays by experts about aspects of Carnival, old-time characters and customs, which is indispensable for anyone studying Carnival traditions. The company was a vehicle for publishing Jerry’s own books, some fiction, some non-fiction, but it also published a number of useful and important books for anyone interested in local history.”

IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTION TO HISTORY

Professor Brereton, Emerita Professor of History at The UWI, shared similar sentiments, noting the important work Besson contributed to local museums. He served as the director of the National Museum and Art Gallery, and curated numerous museums throughout Trinidad, including the Museum of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, The Angostura Museum, and the Museum of Spain.

Yet, Brereton will also fondly remember Besson for his storytelling.

“If I had to describe him in one word, it’s irrepressible. Jerry loved to talk. He was a raconteur. He loved telling stories,

Something of a Romantic

Gerard Besson overcame a learning disability to become a writer, historian, and publisher, telling T&T’s story with whimsy and love

BY ZAHRA GORDON



PHOTOS: COURTESY PARIA PUBLISHING

“Being dyslexic, his formal schooling was cut short in the 1950s due to the inability of the teaching system at the time to accommodate children with learning disabilities. As such, without any degrees or certificates to his name, to serve on the Council of the country’s highest educational body for seven years was exceedingly gratifying for him.”



Receiving his Hummingbird Medal Gold for Heritage Preservation and Promotion in 2007 from Professor George Maxwell Richards, who served as President of Trinidad and Tobago from 2003 to 2008.

some of them tall stories, which is what he named his house in St Ann’s. He was bouncy, he was bubbly, and something of a romantic. There was just something about the way he saw the world,” she tells UWI TODAY.

It is for this unique perspective and vast historical expertise which Alice believes Besson will be best remembered.

“Jerry will be remembered by the people who knew him personally, whom he helped in their own academic and artistic endeavours, whom he taught, inspired and motivated. He will be remembered by the readers of the many books he wrote and his blog, Caribbean History Archives, whose readership reached the two million mark in the first decade of its existence. And thanks to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, he will always be a part of a select group of citizens on whom was bestowed the Hummingbird Medal Gold and an honorary doctorate as an expression of their gratitude and recognition,” she says.

She plans to continue operating Paria Publishing, and in 2024 the company will posthumously publish a trilogy of historical fiction novels, *Philippine*, which Besson worked on up until his death.

■ OUR STUDENTS

“Guild Fest aims to showcase UWI Life to all new and continuing students. It is an explosion of all the services we have to offer through student clubs and associations, administrative support services, and the Guild Council,” says Tyrese St Louis, Guild Vice President.

Guild Fest 2023 was hosted by the Student Guild Council at the JFK Quadrangle of UWI St Augustine campus on September 6 and 7.

The event included the Annual Club Expo, Culture Night, Parade of Nations, and the Hall Spirit Competition, all aimed at showing the passion and cultural diversity at UWI St Augustine.

For many first-year students, including Sofiah Thomas, Guild Fest was especially beneficial. She mentioned that finding club information online was limited, but at Guild Fest, “everything was laid out”, allowing students to “see all the Guild has to offer”.

Day 1 at Guild Fest featured the opening ceremony, Club Expo, Spiritual Hour, and Cultural Night. Day 2 included the Hall Spirit Competition, which has made a well-received comeback in the 2023/2024 academic year after a three-year hiatus.

Regional students had the opportunity to represent their countries as the Guild Fest events followed the theme, “We is We: is here you would find your identity”.

Speaking on Guild Fest and the role of the Guild Council for UWI St Augustine’s student body, Guild President Aishwarya Maharaj emphasised the Guild Council’s dedication to student advocacy and support.

“As an executive, we have a shared collective vision to provide unyielding advocacy for the students, ensuring they are supported in every possible way,” she said.

Presently, the Guild Council is brimming with plans and ideas for the future.

Behind the scenes, the Guild Administrative Office played a crucial role in the success of Guild Fest. According to Mrs. Amanda Best-Noel, the Manager of the Guild Administrative Office, her team acted as the “engine room behind Guild Fest”.

She stated, “We collaborate with student leaders to transform these ideas into reality.”

Her office plans to work with the Guild Council to continue serving the student body, and support activities to boost student engagement.



Guild Fest 2023

A celebration of many cultures, one campus community

BY SCYLLINA SAMUEL

Scyllina Samuel is a writer and a second year Literature and Communications student at UWI St Augustine.

■ OUR CAMPUS

First come, first serve

UWI’s 2023 FYE orientation programme gives new students a very warm, and helpful, welcome

Imagine yourself a fresh-faced graduate from secondary school, and now you are here, on the sprawling St Augustine campus, beginning your higher education journey. It can be overwhelming, perhaps even terrifying.

UWI St Augustine’s First Year Experience (FYE) student orientation programme was created to help students in this challenging transition. For the new academic year, 2023/2024, the Division of Student Services and Development (DSSD) has already been hard at work shepherding the latest cohort through campus life.

“Our campus’s FYE programme is designed to facilitate new student orientation and the process of successful transition to university life,” explains Jarell Alder, Manager of Student Engagement at DSSD.

The response from students this year, he says, has been great.

“Student feedback has been overwhelmingly positive for this year’s FYE cycle, and more importantly, the impact of the programme is seen and felt as student engagement levels are on a steady increase.”

FYE features a combined total of 20-plus initiatives and annual orientation events (both virtual and in-person), together with support resources including a new student orientation

guide, a self-paced orientation course, and the FYE YouTube channel that houses content for the benefit of new students.

“Smart Start” is one such initiative, a “pre-orientation” that takes the form of virtual information sessions, held weekly for the month of June. Each week, students get the opportunity to learn about topics such as the registration process, academic advising, student services at UWI St Augustine, and fees and funding opportunities.

Others include campus tours, faculty orientation, UWI Clicks (online tutorial for the campus’s student platform), library tours, a career advice programme, Guild Fest (featured in this issue of UWI TODAY), and many others (for the full list, visit the FYE site at <https://sta.uwi.edu/fye/>).

As Alder explains, “within the FYE programme are distinct initiatives that meet informational needs, promote social integration and relationship building, and provide instruction on navigating campus platforms.”

The five phases of the new student experience

DSSD’s student engagement programme is designed using the Gullarhorn W-Curve Transition Model, a model first proposed in 1963 to explain the adjustment to culture shock, and later applied to first year university students. The

W-Curve model identifies five phases - the honeymoon phase, culture shock, initial adjustment, mental isolation, and finally acceptance and integration.

“The ultimate aim of the FYE programme is to help students successfully navigate the aforementioned phases of the transition process to higher education,” says Alder.

The programme, he adds, has “evolved from a single orientation event to a dynamic and comprehensive programme that guides intentional engagement with the new student cohort, particularly through their first year of study with us”.

Evolution is one of DSSD’s major themes when it comes to FYE. They intend to keep the programme growing and developing. In 2024, they will launch a new theme for FYE’s next three years.

“Our team at the DSSD,” says Alder, “remains committed to empowering students through the FYE programme, and look forward to continuing our work with campus stakeholders in leveraging FYE to facilitate the highest levels of student success.”

■ **For more information on FYE,** visit <https://sta.uwi.edu/fye/>. For more on the Division of Student Services and Development and the services they offer, go to <https://sta.uwi.edu/dssd/>

The UWI Calendar of Events | November–December 2023



RESEARCH FESTIVAL & AWARDS 2023

22ND - 23RD November

Connect & Learn More About Research Innovations!
Don't miss it. Save the date! Look out for more details.

For further info please contact:
Director, Graduate Studies and Research The UWI, St. Augustine Campus
E: STA-grs.director@sta.uwi.edu | T: +1 868 662-2002 ext 82003

UWI Research Festival and Principal's Research Awards November 22 and 23 St Augustine Campus

In commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the establishment of The University of the West Indies, the St Augustine campus will showcase the exciting research activities of its eight diverse faculties in one mega event. This research festival will reflect the past and present innovations of the campus while setting the research agenda for the future. UWI St Augustine will celebrate some of its outstanding researchers with the presentation of the Principal's Research Awards. All are invited.

For more information, visit <https://sta.uwi.edu/researchawards/>
or contact the Director of Graduate Studies and Research at
STA-research.awards@sta.uwi.edu

2023 Conference on the Harmful Use of Alcohol in the English-speaking Caribbean December 1 The University Inn and Conference Centre St Augustine

Explore the critical issues surrounding alcohol consumption in the English-speaking Caribbean. Hosted by the Department of Para-Clinical Sciences in UWI St Augustine's Faculty of Medical Sciences, this conference brings together experts, professionals, and stakeholders to raise awareness of the harmful effects of alcohol consumption in the region. It will also commemorate the Eighth Annual Caribbean Alcohol Reduction Day organised by the Healthy Caribbean Coalition.

The conference will look at topics such as alcohol and mental health, alcohol consumption among the youth, alcohol and the elderly, alcohol's impact on women and families, alcohol and conditions such as hypertension and cardiovascular disease, and many others.

Cost: \$500.00

To register, visit <https://bit.ly/HUOACConf>. For more information,
email Dr Rohan Maharaj at rohan.maharaj@sta.uwi.edu



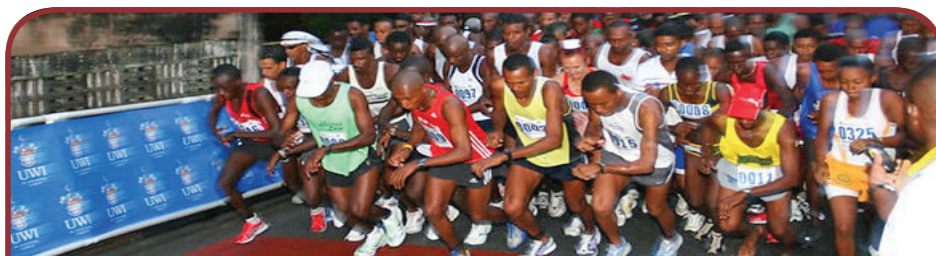
2023 National Health Research Conference, T&T November 17 Hyatt Regency Trinidad Port of Spain

"Healthcare for the Future: Emerging Threats and Sustainable Solutions" is the theme of this one-day conference created to share research findings, strengthen the national health research culture, and foster collaboration among researchers at different institutions.

This conference will be an informative and engaging event for medical practitioners, laboratory specialists, Regional Health Authority administrators, Ministry of Health officials, health policymakers, researchers, and members of the public with an interest in healthcare.

For more information, including pricing details,
visit www.healthresearchconferencett.com

2023 | **NATIONAL HEALTH
RESEARCH CONFERENCE**
NOVEMBER 17, 2023
**Healthcare for the Future:
Emerging Threats and Sustainable Solutions**



UWI SPEC International Half-Marathon and 5K November 19 St Augustine Campus

After three long years, one of the Caribbean's premier distance running events has returned. See our top regional runners vie against the international competition, and witness lovers of racing at all levels take part in this fun and challenging contest. Hosted by The UWI's Sport and Physical Education Centre (SPEC) and the St Augustine Academy of Sport, this year's race will also include a 5K. This year, the half-marathon will highlight and support the Sport Scholarship Fund.

For further details, including registration information and event updates,
please visit <https://bit.ly/UWISPECHalfMarathon>



**UWI SPEC INTERNATIONAL
HALF-MARATHON & 5K**

19 NOVEMBER, 2023

Register Now: bit.ly/UWISPECHalfMarathon