

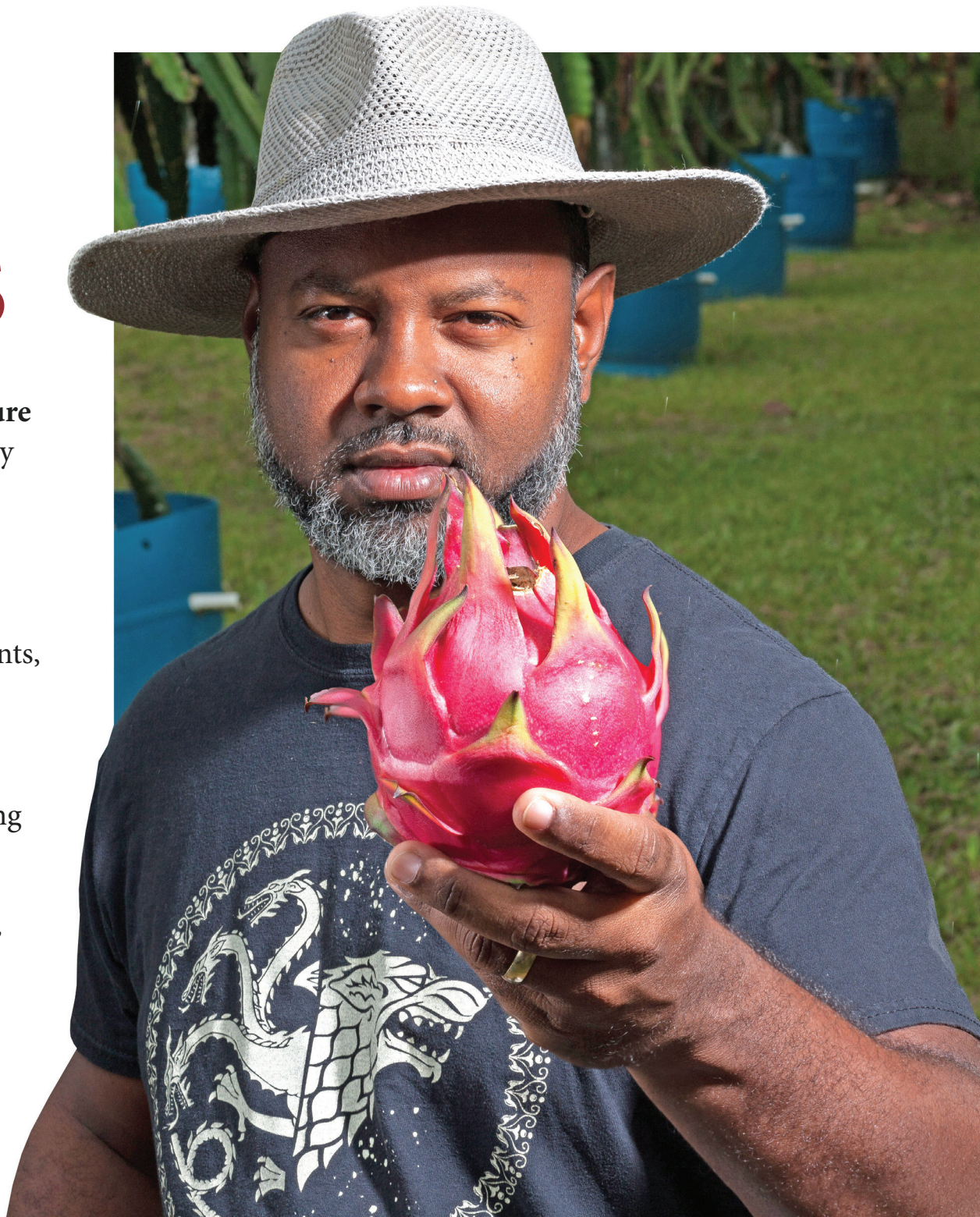


## Farmer of DRAGONS

**First year Faculty of Food and Agriculture student Anderson Bissoon** holds a freshly picked dragon fruit. In 2017, Anderson became intrigued by this exotic, versatile and healthy fruit that is native to Central America. Today he has over 1600 dragon fruit plants. He sells the fruits and the plants, both of which are in high demand, and is even doing small-scale manufacturing of wine and teas. A hardworking and driven farmer, Anderson also receives outstanding support from his family, and The UWI.

*"[There are a] lot of things we think we know about agriculture, but we don't know the why and the how," he says. "UWI has taught me those things and now I have a greater appreciation for agriculture. It has broadened my way of thinking about food security."*

PHOTO: MARLON ROUSE



### CAMPUS COUNCIL – 04

#### Governance and Good Works

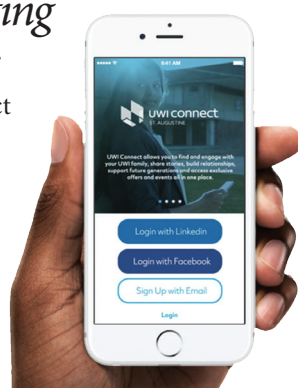
UWI St Augustine looks back to move forward



### CAMPUS NEWS – 06

#### Connecting the Dots

UWI Connect app links alumni, students



### HISTORY FEST – 10

#### Ghosts of Pandemics Past

COVID-19 was not our first health crisis



### OUR PEOPLE – 11

#### Aqua Woman

Dr Carla Ayanna Phillips wins ANSA Award





See what it's like to **#BeUWI**



2021 VIRTUAL

# OPEN DAYS

## PROGRAMMES & APPLICATION INFORMATION

**Undergraduate Applicants**

Wed 14 April | 6pm-8pm

**Postgraduate Applicants**

Thur 15 April | 6pm-8pm

## FINANCIAL AID & INFORMATION

**Undergraduate Applicants**

Tue 20 April | 6pm-8pm

**Postgraduate Applicants**

Wed 21 April | 6pm-8pm

## FACULTY OPEN DAYS

**Coming Soon! Visit [sta.uwi.edu/virtualopenday](https://sta.uwi.edu/virtualopenday) for details.**

### Come with your questions!

Visit <https://sta.uwi.edu/programmes> for quick links to:

- Digital programme brochures
- Faculty websites
- The BeUWI Undergraduate Search App (NEW!!)

### Missed a session?

**Recordings will be uploaded to the UWI STA Channel on YouTube.**



Triple 1<sup>st</sup> recognition among  
THE BEST IN THE WORLD



- ▶ CARIBBEAN'S #1
- ▶ LATIN AMERICA'S TOP 20
- ▶ WORLD'S GOLDEN AGE TOP 100



[facebook.com/UWISTA](https://facebook.com/UWISTA)

Get information on UWI's response to COVID-19: <https://sta.uwi.edu/covid19>



## FROM THE PRINCIPAL

# ‘How The University Creates Value’

*The following is an excerpt from the Principal's Review delivered at the 2021 Campus Council meeting and published in the UWI St Augustine 2019/2020 Annual Report.*

When the year started in August 2019, the campus was looking forward to celebrating its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary. We were laser-focused on putting everything in place to open the St Augustine Campus at Penal-Debe during the academic year. But just prior to mid-year, we were alerted to the outbreak of a yet unnamed virus in Wuhan, China, and had begun to prepare for its possible impact. That said, few could have predicted the extent to which the COVID-19 virus would take lives and up-end economies.

There has been much discussion about the changes that this pandemic will bring about for our world as we rethink the way we work, exist in our environment, and interact. In the higher education sector, the focus has been on the likely changes to delivery of programmes – the education and fundamental knowledge transfer function of a university. But there has been little consideration of the other equally fundamental function of a university – that of knowledge creation, commonly known as research. The same research that has helped us survive this global crisis thus far, and which will be integral to creating a safe and sustainable new normal.

The challenges to the survival of The UWI in the post-pandemic information age require an institution that is accessible, agile, and aligned to the needs of its major stakeholders, with a structure that can provide the transparency and accountability that are increasingly demanded by modern society of all institutions – government and business, public and private.

Some four years ago, the St Augustine Campus started its own introspection and review, by:

- Attempting to identify a singularly impactful rationale for the national and regional education system in which it is situated;
- Developing models for a formalised structure for educational delivery;
- Weighing strategies to cost operations and improve operational efficiencies; and
- Identifying the need to create a new branch of activity that engages in innovation and entrepreneurship.

We provide an update on the relevant initiatives in our 2019-2020 annual report, all within the context of The UWI's 2017-2022 Strategic Plan.

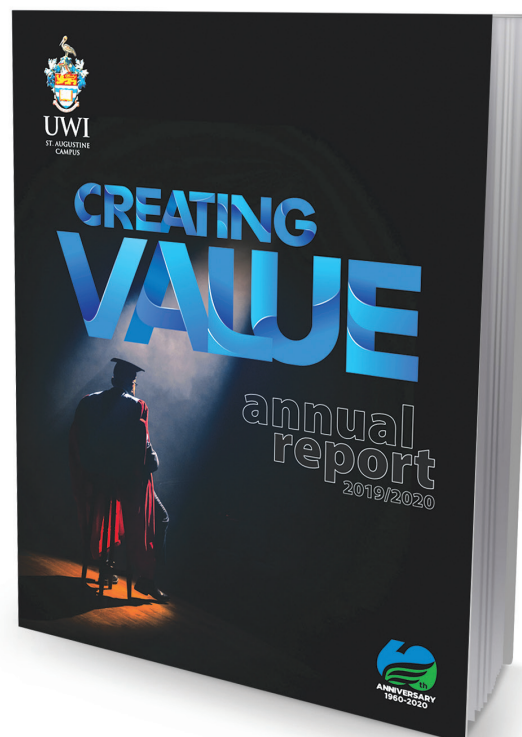
Of significance to this matter of institutional introspection is the ongoing but long overdue university-wide review of The UWI governance system. This exercise has brought two intrinsic issues to the fore. The first relates to the need to highlight and ascribe value to the many outputs from institutions like ours. The second pertains to the cultures required to generate these outputs. There is much to discuss on these and other issues.

## HOW A UNIVERSITY CREATES VALUE

While the output of graduates from the various teaching programmes is by far the most visible and easily identified output, universities also impact society through their research and outreach activities. The significance of these two are generally neither fully recognised nor appreciated by the wider society or, at times, by even university stakeholders—including university academics and support staff. However, the fact remains that a university draws upon the society in which it is situated and brings to bear its knowledge and expertise to impact on that society in a variety of ways.



**‘It is imperative that UWI and its stakeholders collaborate to identify and agree on the value that the institution brings to our various societies.’**



It needs to be understood that research engagement is the very core of any institution that is called a university. Indeed, The UWI Charter (1972), Article 2(a) states that it is “To provide a place or places of education, learning and research of a standard required and expected of a university of the highest standard...” Further, it is largely through university research that society has been “enlightened” and has developed as much as it has in the past few centuries.

However, all the above really leads to questions of research financing. From all accounts, traditionally scholarly activity was primarily financed through the tuition charged to students who, it was assumed, would benefit from the experience and expertise of those who operate at the boundary of knowledge. Since the industrial revolution, research funding has increasingly diversified to include private funding from industry and commerce, seeking to improve their competitiveness or create products anew.

The UWI inherited its DNA from the University of London and it has done well to date. But, even as its predecessor grapples with the same questions of funding and relevance, the time has come for The UWI to engage in discourse with its stakeholders on, for example, who pays for the resources required to generate research output?

Why (in the context of a university located in a developing nation) should research be funded if, in particular, the benefit of the research effort is not of immediate benefit? How can research staff performance be best recognised and rewarded? The latter is a question that The UWI and other universities are still grappling with, especially when determining assessment and promotions. It is imperative that The UWI and its stakeholders collaborate to identify and agree on the value that the institution brings to our various societies.

For the entirety of Professor Copeland's review, annual report highlights and the full report, visit <https://sway.office.com/eAHCwlvATYIJucJ>

*Brian Copeland*

**PROFESSOR BRIAN COPELAND**

*Campus Principal*

### EDITORIAL TEAM

**CAMPUS PRINCIPAL**  
Professor Brian Copeland

**DIRECTOR OF MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS**  
Wynell Gregorio

**AG. EDITOR**  
Joel Henry  
Email: [joel.henry@sta.uwi.edu](mailto:joel.henry@sta.uwi.edu)

**CONTACT US**  
**The UWI Marketing and Communications Office**  
Tel: (868) 662-2002, exts. 82013 / 83997  
or Email: [uwitoday@sta.uwi.edu](mailto:uwitoday@sta.uwi.edu)



# UWI TOMORROW

*Campus Council meeting addresses purpose, governance in a post-COVID world*

BY JOEL HENRY

## “Reflect, review and build that university of tomorrow.”

That was how St Augustine Campus Principal Professor Brian Copeland described the goal of The UWI in his presentation at the open session of the 2021 Campus Council meeting. Copeland reviewed UWI St Augustine’s performance over the past year, a period dominated by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, while outlining what he saw as crucial steps for the success of the campus.

“We are moving to a stronger culture,” the Campus Principal stated at the virtual session held on March 16. “We are not there yet, but we are moving in the right direction.”

The annual Campus Council meeting, which is held to review the work undertaken in the completed financial year (in this instance 2019/2020), took place not only against the backdrop of the pandemic and its impact on the university, but also the Chancellor’s Report on Governance, an in-depth and critical look at the operations of The UWI. The report has dominated headlines throughout the region in recent weeks.

“All over the world, entities are struggling with the financial consequences of this pandemic,” said Campus Council Chair Sharon Christopher. “Universities are facing drops in student enrolment, increasing costs as a result of moving programmes into online environments, and reduced funding from benefactors and governments.”

Ms Christopher said the circumstances required the university to “use the tremendous intellects and energies that exist in our system to ensure that we take the actions that would strengthen not only the St Augustine Campus but indeed the entire UWI and prepare it for the new future.”

She saw the Chancellor’s Report, which was commissioned in December 2018 and delivered in July 2020, as one means of creating change. The report is currently under review by The UWI and a final decision on its findings will be made on April 30 at the University Council meeting.

The St Augustine Council Chair pointed out however that previous governance reports had findings and recommendations that “echoed” those in the current report that were not fully implemented. The urgency of the university’s current position, she said, requires a different approach.

“The UWI no longer has the luxury of treating this current governance report as an academic exercise,” said Ms Christopher. “There is an urgent need to strengthen the governance systems in The UWI in order to ensure that we have a university that can withstand the challenges that lie ahead and continue to grow from strength to strength.”

She added that, “To build an organisation that adheres to the highest standard of governance will require culture change, and culture change is always difficult. But what choice do we have?”

In his review, themed “Creating Value”, Professor Copeland focused on both the leadership and operations of the university, and underscored the fact that UWI, like any other university of similar standing, is not an entity on to itself, but an institution that provides a range of valuable services to society.

“Caribbean people invested in UWI,” he said, “and we should never forget that.”

The St Augustine Campus Principal opened the meeting by speaking on the development of universities, starting from their predecessors in pre-medieval times in advanced cultures in Central America, Asia, Africa and Europe, to the ultimate formalisation and recognition of what we now recognise as a university in Western culture in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The modern university, he said, provided crucial teaching and learning, and research and development functions. They met the needs of society through research generated publications and intellectual property, outreach, library curated knowledge resources, and producing qualified graduates.



Campus Principal Professor Brian Copeland

He further opined that the research outputs are not as well understood and appreciated as teaching and learning, a function that touches the general public in the most tangible way. This is further exacerbated by the fact that it may take a long time, sometimes hundreds of years, before some research outputs find application in the real world, and therefore realise their true value. This makes the research mandate of universities difficult to cost, particularly for resource-strapped developing countries.

A better understanding of the services that institutions like The UWI provide, he explained, would guide governments and the private sector in recognising their value, and help the institutions themselves develop better metrics to determine their quality of service. He believed as well that a deeper understanding of the features of modern universities would help to fix the kinds of shortcomings that were pointed out in the Chancellor’s Report.

The UWI Vice-Chancellor Professor Sir Hilary Beckles acknowledged the challenges the university is facing but spoke primarily on its successes in recent years. Most notably, he saluted the response to COVID-19.

“We had no doubt that we were going to buckle down and take this university through this pandemic,” he told the

online audience at the open session. “We put together The UWI COVID-19 Task Force to prepare the region for the arrival of the pandemic.”

The Task Force, made up of UWI experts in several fields from throughout the region, began operating months before the pandemic had a visible impact in the Caribbean.

Sir Hilary commented, “I have no doubt that UWI, in partnership with our governments, saved thousands of lives in this region by putting the science first. This 2020 was UWI’s finest hour.”

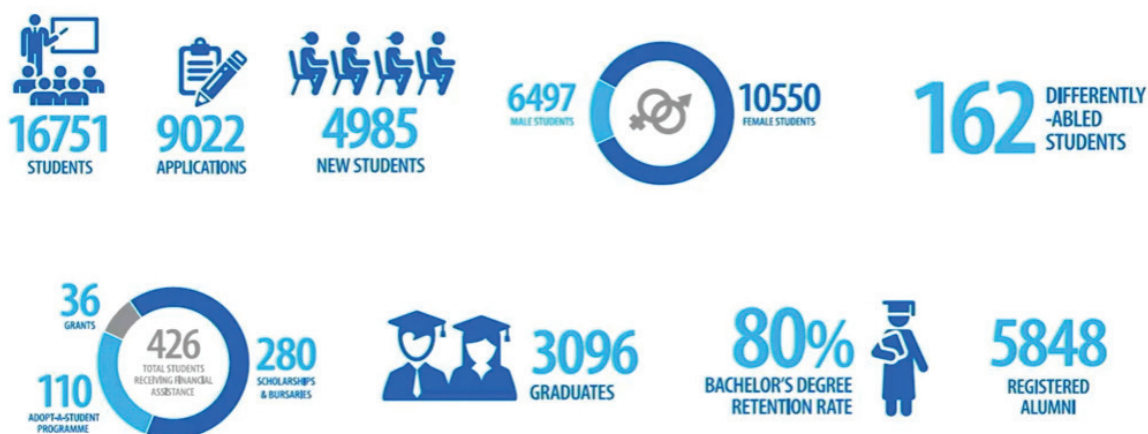
Professor Copeland was positive as well, and was thankful for the support of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, despite their economic constraints.

“We have to be realistic,” he said. “We are in challenging times. We have to dig deeper and think deeper in terms of responding to the challenges ahead of us if we are to survive.”

In closing, he reassured the online audience, “We shall be here post-COVID. We will be dominating. We will persevere.”

The Campus Councils are the governing bodies of the five UWI campuses. Every year they meet to receive reports from their various offices and committees. The annual and faculty reports are also presented.

## Assessing our Value: Summary Statistics 2019/2020



An informative graphic from the Campus Principal’s presentation.



## ■ CAMPUS NEWS

## “Game Changers” Social Media Campaign takes Silver ADDY in Caribbean Advertising Awards

In 2020, UWI St Augustine teamed up with advertising agency Caribbean Ideas Synapse (CIS) for the 2020-2021 “Game Changers” campaign. That campaign caught the eye of the judges of the 2021 Caribbean Advertising Federation’s (CAF) Awards, earning the team an “ADDY” award.



UWI St Augustine’s Marketing and Communications Office worked with CIS to create a campaign that highlighted the outstanding work of the campus community.

“We really wanted to focus on the amazing people on this campus and the outstanding and important work they do,” said Wynell Gregorio, Campus Director of Marketing and Communications. “The campaign showed prospective students what they can achieve if they invest in an education at UWI St Augustine. It also allowed the public to see the university’s commitment to its students and to society.”

Game Changers profiled high-achieving students taking part in academic and outreach activities for the betterment of local and the national community. It shared impactful campus events such as the graduation ceremonies. The campaign outlined many of UWI St Augustine’s initiatives in the height of the COVID-19 pandemic to support contact tracing and testing, public awareness and policy advice, and a unique manufacturing effort to provide safety and medical equipment for health workers, patients, and the public.

The ADDYs are the creative award show of the American Advertising Federation (AAF), of which the CAF is a member. 550 entries were submitted across all categories for the 2021 competition, and against a field of 17 winners (12 silver, 5 gold), the Game Changers campaign copped a prestigious Silver ADDY Award for Social Media.

Selection of the most creative entry in each category is affected by a scoring process in which a panel of judges evaluates all creative dimensions of every entry. Entries that are considered outstanding and worthy of recognition receive a Silver ADDY. The number of awards given in each category is determined by the judges and is based on the relative quality of work in that category.

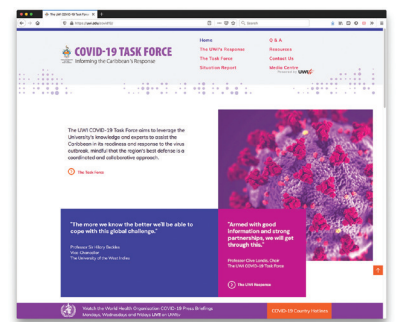
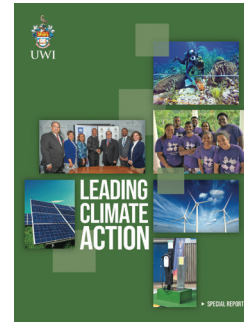
“Inspiration for the theme came from all the game-changing lecturers, students, staff and alumni who continue to inspire us every day,” said Mrs Gregorio.

Brevard Nelson, CEO of Caribbean Ideas Synapse, commented that “We’ve had such a great experience collaborating with The University of the West Indies and are delighted to share this award for the Game Changers campaign.”

He added, “Our agency believes that integrated marketing and cross-channel storytelling are essential capabilities for the modern marketer. This campaign really proved that by effectively showcasing real students and their stories, we were able to achieve impactful results.”

## UWI wins three awards for climate change, COVID-19 campaigns

The University of the West Indies has earned two gold awards and one merit award for creativity, marketing execution and message impact in its public education/communication campaigns on climate action and the COVID-19 response.



The work was recognised at the 36th Annual Educational Advertising Awards (EduAD Awards), announced on March 1, 2021.

The UWI competed in these categories against other top ranked universities such as Johns Hopkins, Emory and University of Toronto, to name a few of this year’s recipients.

Presented by *Higher Education Marketing Report*, the leading marketing publication for higher education professionals in the US, the EduAD Awards is the largest, oldest and most respected educational advertising awards competition in the country. This year, more than 2,000 entries were received from over 1,000 colleges, universities and secondary schools from around the globe.

Commenting on the announcement, Director of University Marketing and Communications (UM&C) Dr Rhonda Jaipaul-O’Garro said, “We’re absolutely thrilled to have earned these two gold awards and one merit award, in pursuit of advancing our UWI brand as a global activist university in areas of critical importance—climate action and COVID-19 response.”

Judged by a national panel of higher education marketers, advertising creative directors, marketing and advertising professionals, the UM&C’s 2020 work on a Leading Climate Action Special Report won a gold award in the e-Publication category. The UWI COVID-19 Task Force website, which was also conceptualised and managed by the Office, secured gold in the COVID Response Materials category, while the Leading Climate Advocacy and Action website received a special merit award in the Website category.

The UWI COVID-19 Task Force Website is an asset in the outreach programme of The UWI COVID-19 Task Force, formed in February 2020, to bring together The University’s knowledge and experts to assist the Caribbean in its response to the virus outbreak. The Task Force website provides resources and regular updates, all relevant to the Caribbean’s response to the pandemic, to actively counter misinformation and speculation.



**UWI**  
ST. AUGUSTINE  
CAMPUS

### Pre-Science (N1) Programme 2021/2022

Faculty of Science and Technology  
**1 year | September 2021**

**The Pre-Science (N1) Programme can help you jumpstart your career!**

**Enter UWI directly from Form 5 or improve your CAPE-Level results.**

- Entry Requirements: 5 CXC (CSEC) Passes- General Proficiency (Grades I-III)
- Courses offered in: Biology, Chemistry, Computer Science, Mathematics and Physics
- On completion, apply to pursue a full degree in Science & Technology, Medicine, Engineering, Food & Agriculture, or Law\*

**APPLY NOW!**

**Visit:** <https://sta.uwi.edu/fst/pre-science-n1-programme>

**For More Information-** T: (868) 662-2002 ext. 84505 | E: [fst.prescience@sta.uwi.edu](mailto:fst.prescience@sta.uwi.edu)

**APPLICATION DEADLINE:** AUGUST 27, 2021

Triple 1<sup>st</sup> recognition among  
THE BEST IN THE WORLD

THE WORLD UNIVERSITY  
RANKINGS

► CARIBBEAN'S #1  
► LATIN AMERICA'S TOP 20  
► WORLD'S GOLDEN AGE TOP 100

\*Conditions apply

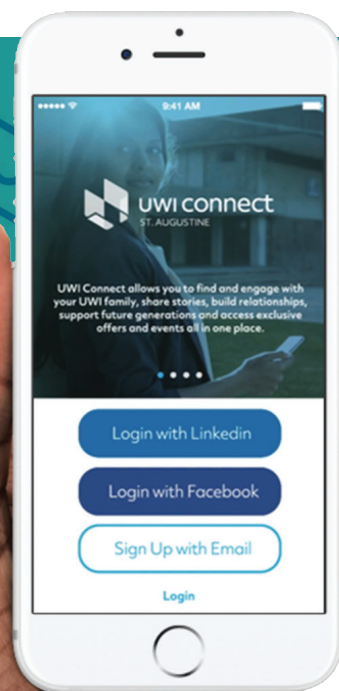


See what it's like to #BeUWI





## CAMPUS NEWS



# UWI alumni and students 'CONNECT' ON NEW APP



Members of the St Augustine Campus community – past and present – now have access to a new communications tool developed to facilitate networking, information sharing, and a stronger sense of university identity. UWI Connect, a website and app alumni platform, was officially launched at a virtual ceremony on March 8.

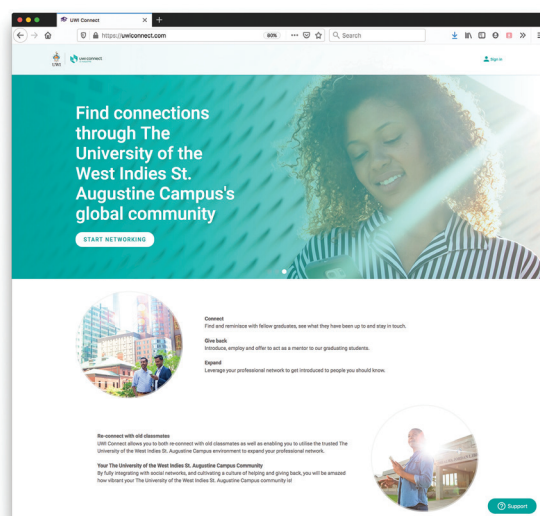
“The goal of this platform,” said Ms Carol Ayoung, Acting Director of UWI St Augustine’s Office of Institutional Advancement and Internationalisation (OIAI), “is to engage our alumni, students, colleagues, family and friends, and to give them a space to gather online while providing interesting information to the largest constituent group at The UWI.”

UWI Connect, an initiative of OIAI’s Fundraising and Alumni Affairs Unit, allows users to create customised personal and corporate profiles, reconnect with friends and colleagues, network with thousands of students and graduates, share opportunities for internships and jobs, and stay informed about events and activities taking place at the St. Augustine Campus.

The website and app were developed by a cross-functional Campus project team, comprising representatives from the UWI Development and Endowment Fund, the Office of the Campus Principal, Campus Legal, Campus IT Services, the Division of Student Services and Development, and the Marketing and Communications Office.

Speaking at the virtual launch, Pro Vice-Chancellor and Campus Principal Professor Brian Copeland tied UWI Connect to the university’s objective of technological advancement, saying “digital transformation has long been a goal of UWI”.

Through this new alumni platform, he told those in attendance, “we can successfully and seamlessly bring our alumni together in a space that helps its users to remember their roots and allows them to leverage their immense experience and expertise that reside in their fellow alumni while



A still from the UWI Connect site.

networking with connections old and new, to mutual benefit.”

UWI Vice-Chancellor Professor Sir Hilary Beckles, described the new app and website as a “portal to prosperity” and emphasised the importance of alumni to the university’s and all institutions of higher education.

“A fine university is one in which its alumni stand solidly behind it,” said Sir Hilary.

Mrs Elizabeth Buchanan-Hind, Executive Director of The UWI Institutional Advancement Division (IAD), spoke on the data protection policy for UWI Connect. Saying, “The university is committed to maintaining confidence and trust with respect to our alums’ privacy.”

The UWI, she said, would follow specific principles in their approach: “we will be transparent about what data we are collecting, the source of that data, and how we use the information we are privileged to have in our possession.”

Giving the student/alumni perspective, UWI St Augustine Guild of Students Council President Mr Warren Anderson focused on how the platform enhanced their ability to network and find opportunities.

“UWI Connect offers you a way to seek advice, seek mentorship—even offer mentorship. Most of all, it allows us to align our personal vision, mission and goals with people like us,” he said.

Speaking from both personal and leadership experience in his capacity as President of the UWI Alumni Association Trinidad and Tobago Chapter (UWIAATT), Mr Jerry Medford viewed UWI Connect as an evolutionary step in communication between past students and the institution.

“Over the years of my involvement with UWIAATT, it has not been uncommon to hear complaints from UWI alumni about the lack of connectivity and feedback from their alma mater,” said Mr Medford. “Today, though we are scattered throughout the diaspora and beyond, 117 of us are in constant daily communication and exchanges since 2016 via existing media platforms (and that is not Facebook).”

He added, “I fully understand and can identify with the change in networking and versatility that the launch of an app such as UWI Connect can bring to bear on the alumni fraternity.”



**Information on UWI Connect is available online at [uwiconnect.com](http://uwiconnect.com).** The app can be downloaded at both the **Apple Store** and **Google Play Store**.



Ambassador Moonup Sung, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea, with the package for the CLL.

## Korean Embassy donates books, DVDs to Centre for Language Learning

Since its inception in late 2017, the Korea Corner at the Centre for Language Learning (CLL) at UWI St Augustine has received great support from the Embassy of the Republic of Korea. December 2020 marked another such occasion as the embassy donated Korean language textbooks and DVDs to the CLL. His Excellency, Ambassador Moonup Sung was unable to do the handover in person because of COVID-19 restrictions. Nevertheless, he expressed his delight at being able to contribute to the ever-growing resources of the Korea Corner. Korean is a popular programme among learners at the CLL.



A selection of the donated books and DVDs.



## OUR PEOPLE

# UWI's Faculty of Science and Technology brings CHEMISTRY OLYMPIAD TO T&T

BY KANISHA VINCENT



From left, Couva East Secondary School Principal Ms Denise Mungal-Gosyne; TTChO Committee Member and Coordinator, UWI St Augustine's Faculty of Science Technology (FST), Ms Laura Rambaran-Seepersad; TTChO Top Junior Chemist Mr Zakareeyah Hosein; Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs Senator Dr Amery Browne; TTChO Top Senior Chemist Mr Dipak Anthony Balladin, Dean of FST Dr Brian Cockburn; and Acting Principal of Naparima College Mr Roger Ali.

**Dipak Anthony Balladin of Naparima College** and **Zakareeyah Hosein of Couva East Secondary School** have been crowned the inaugural senior and junior Trinidad and Tobago Chemistry Olympiad (TTChO) champions of 2020.

The TTChO is the local competition to qualify students for the International Chemistry Olympiad (IChO). This first ever TTChO was hosted by UWI St Augustine's Faculty of Science and Technology (FST) in 2019/2020 as part of an outreach project to engage students nationwide in the study of chemistry. Over 800 entrants from schools across the country participated in either Level A (forms 2-5) or Level B (lower and upper 6).

The prize-giving ceremony was hosted by the Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs (MFCA). Senator Dr Amery Browne, Minister of the MFCA, presented prizes to the students. Both the Minister and Acting Permanent Secretary, Ms Reita Toussaint, lauded the student's accomplishments and praised the efforts of the TTChO. The national Olympiad has the support of the MFCA and the Ministry of Education.

"The idea came from Dr Nigel Jalsa [lecturer of Biological Chemistry]," explained Mrs Laura Rambaran-Seepersad, TTChO Committee Member and Coordinator, FST. Mrs Rambaran-Seepersad, Dr Terry Mohammed (Deputy Dean of FST), and Dr Jalsa then formed the committee of the TTChO.

This year, hundreds of students will compete once again, going through three rounds, as T&T seeks to send (virtually) its first international participants to the 2021 IChO in Osaka, Japan.

In the 2019/2020 Olympiad, the students went through

two phases of competition. Out of approximately 200 students who moved on to phase two of each category, Dipak, age 20, and Zakareeyah, age 17, were the winners.

"I was really excited to see how much I understood of the chemistry," said Zakareeyah. Although both students admitted to being nervous, and increasingly so as the competition wore on, the merit of learning and being challenged outweighed the apprehension.

At the IChO level, the standard and syllabus content of the assessments is typically more challenging than what the average student would be exposed to.

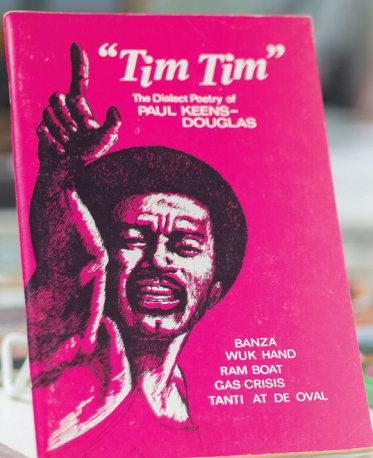
"The qualifying exams of the TTChO reflect these higher-level skills," says Mrs Rambaran-Seepersad. Upon making it past round two, the students have the opportunity to be tutored on the material through the TTChO, pushing the boundaries of local chemistry knowledge for secondary school students even further. These four students and two mentors then train vigorously for the final round at the international level.

When asked about future career aspirations involving the science, Dipak says, "I will be incorporating chemistry into [another] field."

The TTChO, through the FST, has highlighted the possibilities of chemistry and the way it weaves through many aspects of academics. With the number of participating students continuing to grow, the TTChO shows the versatility of chemistry and the value of love for the science.

**For more information on the Trinidad and Tobago Chemistry Olympiad, visit <https://www.ttcho.com/>**

*Kanisha Vincent is equal parts sport scientist, storyteller, poet and freelance writer.*



**A display of the works** of Caribbean storyteller, culture master, and now, honorary graduate of The University of the West Indies, Paul Keens-Douglas. As part of the St Augustine Campus' 2020 graduation ceremonies, the work of Keens-Douglas (who received the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters for his contribution in Culture and the Arts) was showcased on the campus. Professor Edgar Julian Duncan, a pioneering scientist in the field of plants, also had some of his works and mementos on display. He received the honorary degree of Doctor of Science for his legacy in Caribbean science and agriculture. PHOTO: ATIBA CUDJOE



## New Student Guild Council chosen in first virtual election

The student body at UWI St Augustine has elected a new Student's Guild. On March 19, the campus held its first virtual general elections for the Guild of Students Council. The new council is headed by President Elect **Kobe Sandy**, a second year student pursuing a degree in Public Sector Management with Law for the Social Sciences. The Vice President Elect is **Christon Malchan**, also in his second year, studying for a degree in Accounting.

All registered students of the UWI are automatically members of their campus' Student Guild. The Guild Council, made up of an executive, and representatives/chairpersons in a variety of posts, acts on behalf of the student body and speaks for them in university and campus matters. The Guild Council is elected toward the end of each academic year.

Here is the new UWI St Augustine Guild of Students Council:

*President*  
**KOBE SANDY**

*Vice President*  
**CHRISTON MALCHAN**

*Secretary*  
**BRITNEY SOOKDEO**

*Treasurer*  
**BRADLEY OSBOURNE**

*Part Time and Evening Representative*  
**TONHYA WHEELER**

*Publications Committee Chairperson*  
**SABRINA MOHAMMED**

*Student Activity Committee Chairperson*  
**JORDANNE PEREIRA**

*National Affairs Committee Chairperson*  
**DARIEN THOMAS**

*International Affairs Committee Chairperson*  
**DANIEL MC COLLIN**

*Games Committee Chairperson*  
**BERNADETTE ANTOINE**

*Faculty of Social Sciences*  
**DARRON JAMES**

*Faculty of Science and Technology*  
**JEREMIAH MATHURA**

*Faculty of Humanities and Education*  
**JOHN PAUL ANDERSON**

*Faculty of Law*  
**HIRAN RAMPERSAD**

*Faculty of Engineering*  
**CHELSEA BEST**

*Faculty of Medical Sciences*  
**MELISSA JACK**

*Faculty of Sport*  
**CANDICE JOSEPH**



## FOOD SECURITY

**Call it a hybrid history.** An obsession with mythical dragons collided with COVID-19 job cuts to transform Anderson Bissoon, a first-year student at UWI's Faculty of Food and Agriculture (FFA), into a leading dragon fruit pioneer in Trinidad and Tobago.

In 2017, Bissoon stumbled on the exotic plants at government nurseries in Centeno while shopping for fruit trees to plant on family land in Fyzabad. Intrigued by the evocative name, the *Game of Thrones* enthusiast decided to try and grow them, purchasing two, which he turned to four and continued propagating. With research, experimentation and ongoing guidance from FFA, he has since cut down all his traditional fruit trees, and now has over 1600 dragon fruit plants.

Dragon fruit is native to Central America, but has only recently started to become known in T&T. Bissoon compares the bright red fruit to "a big sorrel". Multiple layers of skin overlap around a fleshy fruit with lots of tiny black seeds. The taste calls to mind pears and kiwi fruit. The climbing, cactus-like plants, with their large, fragrant blossoms, are trained on trellises.

"Dragon fruit is a climate-smart crop. That's one of the reasons we are trying to promote it," says Professor Wayne Ganpat, Dean of FFA. "It is a cactus, so it doesn't require as much labour or water as some other fruits."

For several years now, Professor Ganpat and the FFA have been some of the region's most proactive advocates for re-igniting Caribbean agriculture. The FFA promotes and supports local agriculture through a host of programmes ranging from crop production, to alternative farming methods, to the business and marketing aspects of the food and agriculture industry. They host the annual techAGRI Expo (postponed in 2020 due to COVID-19) at the St Augustine Campus, an exhibition of farming technology, innovators and

entrepreneurs. The faculty supports regional farmers and governments through their expertise, policy advice, training and research. One of their goals is to encourage a new generation of young and dynamic farmers, farmers like Anderson Bissoon.

At his farm in Fyzabad, Bissoon makes tall concrete posts, each supporting four plants. He says it was the novelty of the fruit, in combination with its health benefits and multiple earning stream opportunities that made him invest everything he had in this "make or break" venture.

In fact, his previous experience was not in agriculture, but in oil. Over the course of 15 years, he worked in tech-oriented oilfield jobs, and with each new position he would seek academic knowledge and credentials to fit. Dragon fruit farming was no different: he applied at UWI to study for his degree in Agriculture. He was accepted, but deferred study because daily travel to St Augustine from Fyzabad seemed daunting.

When COVID-19 caused oilfield work opportunities to all but disappear, he took the opportunity to take his place at UWI, where online classes were now the order of the day.

"COVID was kind of a benefit for me. It didn't stop any farmers from planting, harvesting, distributing. The farming community continued as normal, as far as I know, and saw an increase in production and in sales."

His wife Candis, his children, mother and other family members are now his main helpers, and the farm is officially named Tropical Dragon Fruit.

He's been busy, experimenting with different by-products. The fresh flowers can be used in salads, and the dried flowers for tea. He plans to dry the fruit to make a healthy snack with an extended shelf life and frozen fruit for smoothies. He also makes and packages wine



Professor Wayne Ganpat



From left: Dr Wendy-Ann Isaac and Dr Oral Daley of the Faculty of Food and Agriculture with Anderson Bissoon at his farm in Fyzabad. On the right is Mr Samuel DeCosta, Crops Technician at the University Field Station.

**"COVID was kind of a benefit for me.** It didn't stop any farmers from **planting, harvesting, distributing.** The farming community continued as normal, as far as I know, and saw an **increase in production and sales."**

# Tami DRA FRU

BY GILLIA

A Tropical Dragon Fruit basket containing fruit, tea and wine.  
PHOTO: MARLON ROUSE





# g the GON UIT

AN MOORE



He's been busy, experimenting with **different by-products**. The fresh flowers can be used in **salads**, the dried flowers for **tea**. He plans to dry the fruit to make a **healthy snack** with an extended shelf life and **frozen fruit for smoothies**. He also makes and packages **wine and tea**, although these are not yet being mass produced.

and tea, although these are not yet being mass produced.

"It's kind of limitless," he says. "Dragon fruit is just a whole new flavour, for ice cream, for sorbet, a new flavour in everything that you could possibly want. And the colour attracts people as well – that particular variety that's red or magenta on the inside. We can explore limitless possibilities."

The fruit is also rich in iron, vitamins, antioxidants and gut-friendly probiotics. It's high in fibre, and reputed to help lower blood sugar levels and blood pressure.

The business sells fruit to wholesalers, and in the off-season sells young plants. He has seen increased interest, with over 500 young plants sold to customers since Christmas, "and the fruit is always in demand, we can't seem to provide enough".

Professor Ganpat sees great potential in dragon fruit: "There is growing demand for it in the exotic fruit market. People's tastes and preferences change, and they seem to have become very taken with the dragon fruit in Trinidad over the last couple years since it was introduced."

The Dean of FFA says dragon fruit cultivation could help with local nutrition security (the production of a wide range of foods which provide essential, needed nutrients). The fruit can also contribute to import substitution as a locally grown fruit that can replace foreign fruits.

"Consumers can get it from the farm to their tables in a shorter time," says Professor Ganpat.

Even Clarence Rambharat, Minister of Agriculture, Lands and Fisheries, has taken note of the farm's initiatives. In November last year, he visited, posting on social media: "Tropical Dragon Fruit's investment in this in-demand fruit is heartwarming, and signals the strength of local agriculture and the prospects for growth."

Bissoon has sought the assistance of the Agriculture Ministry in the form of the Agriculture Incentive Grant to further expand his farm. After the Minister's visit he was informed that he was approved for funding. He continues to slowly expand as he awaits the disbursement of funds by the Ministry.

Bissoon has high praise for his academic training at the FFA: "I think I have the best lecturers".

He says, "I'm learning a lot. There are things we think we know about agriculture, but we don't know the 'why and the how'. UWI has taught me those things and now I have a greater appreciation for agriculture. It has broadened my way of thinking about food security. I think we are trying to pick ourselves up from a bad place, and the solution for that is the new generation of farmers as young entrepreneurs."

The FFA is more than happy to support Bissoon and other student farmers.

"Producing a new generation of farmers has become a heightened focus of the faculty; ones who are innovative and business-oriented," says Dean Ganpat. "Anderson is certainly benefitting from this renewed effort. The FFA continues to support the industry through its Agribusiness and Entrepreneurship programmes and this bold initiative is certainly worthy of our full support."

He adds, "The on-going COVID-19 pandemic has ignited several other students, past and present, to engage in business activities to meet food and nutrition security goals. We salute all our success stories!"

To provide assistance, two members of staff, Dr Oral Daley (lecturer in Crop Science) and Dr Wendy-Ann Isaac (Deputy Dean of Graduate Studies, Research and Innovation), recently visited the farm. Bissoon is now working in collaboration with the FFA to supply The UWI crop museum with different varieties of the dragon fruit. He volunteered to help set up the area for these new varieties at the University Field Station.

Of his new occupation as dragon fruit farmer, he says, "I'm proud and happy to contribute to the development of UWI and the dragon fruit industry in Trinidad. The country can reach very far with this."



Gillian Moore is a writer, editor and singer-songwriter.



## HISTORY FEST 2021



# Caribbean health through the ages

*Historians focus on pandemics and the people who fought them*

BY JODY ROBINSON

**Yellow fever, cholera, and now COVID-19.** Throughout its history, the Caribbean has been impacted by disease – sometimes with devastating consequences. From March 24 to 26, historians looked at the epidemics that plagued the region, and the way these deadly viruses impacted not only lives but also culture. History Fest 2021 unearthed stories from the Caribbean's struggles over the centuries with these invisible opponents.

Titled “History Fest: Epidemics and Caribbean History”, the three-day initiative hosted by the Department of History within UWI's Faculty of Humanities and Education, included a host of compelling presentations from historians, public health experts, and scholars and other professionals from a variety of fields. Among them was Dr Rana Hogarth, Associate Professor of History at the University of Illinois, who spoke on yellow fever and slavery.

“Yellow fever was believed to have come to North America and the Caribbean from Africa through the Slave Trade,” she said. There was the perception that blacks were somehow immune to this disease while whites were vulnerable. Indeed, white people did rapidly catch yellow fever.

“Blacks were regarded as ‘naturally’ immune,” Dr Hogarth said, “however, it is more possible that slaves already caught yellow fever [growing up in Africa] and simply developed an immunity.”

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, physicians and notable Europeans, fueled this “black Immunity” narrative with writings suggesting race was a determinant in contracting yellow fever. Dr Hogarth asserted that, “yellow fever killed many troops in the Caribbean, notably in Jamaica, and numerous guide books, essays, and articles on how to survive yellow fever in the Tropics, were written.”

In 1748, American scientist John Lining wrote, “there's something very singular in the constitution of the Negroes, which rendered them not liable to this fever”.

Dr Hogarth exclaimed, “These beliefs were damaging and continue to be damaging!” There are little to no records of black people suffering from yellow fever; in a way deleting from history these experiences of illness, treatment, survival, and death.

“Even in instances where, physicians observed black people getting yellow fever, they still reported distortions of the truth, implying that there were differences in symptoms because of race,” she said. When 800 black troops contracted the disease, it was downplayed: “writers suggested it was because of their diets!” History still does not accurately reflect how an epidemic truly impacted a race of people, simply because of the colour of their skins. Their experience has been erased.



## MARY SEACOLE

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, cholera, much like yellow fever, stormed the Caribbean but also impacted Europe. Physicians did not know how to treat it, and many British soldiers as well as other whites, blacks and mixed race people died. Dr Aleric Josephs, Senior Lecturer (retired) at the Department of History and Archeology at UWI Mona in Jamaica, shared

how a controversial figure emerged during this time: “the doctors realised that the plants could be used as cures and the Africans knew how to use them. One of which was Mary Seacole!”

Dr Josephs, who has published extensive work on Seacole, told the virtual listeners, “Mary Seacole was a nurse, even though never officially or legally recognised,

a doctress, a businesswoman, a writer and a wife! She had learned the art of African healing from her mother, which is extracting cures from plants.”

Seacole eventually established lodging houses in Britain, Panama and Jamaica. “They provided boarding and healthcare to soldiers, sailors, poor whites and freed slaves,” Dr Josephs said.

Mary Seacole could not get formal training as a coloured woman, but she developed her medical skills through interactions with physicians willing to share. Dr Josephs gave intriguing facts about Seacole, such as the autopsy she performed in Panama on a cholera patient to learn more about the disease, and that she cared for and treated her husband Horatio Seacole until his death.

Now, we find ourselves faced with similar circumstances to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century outbreaks. COVID-19 is regarded as a significant event in our history and History Fest 2021 did not ignore the enormous responsibility of historians to accurately record how the Caribbean survives this crisis.

“Just imagine writing the history of 2020/2021. What will it look like?” said Dr Heather Cateau, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Education, and a senior lecturer in History.

She added, “Only by looking at the past, with the right eyes, can we contextualise and stabilise the present.”

This year is the first virtual staging of History Fest. Dr Debbie McCollin, Lecturer in the Department of History and host of History Fest 2021, stated, “COVID-19 continues to ravage our societies and to really make a mockery of our systems and our plans!”

However, as Government Archivist of the National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago and President of the Caribbean Branch of the International Council of Archives (CARBICA) Ms Avril Belfon said, quoting CARBICA, “the duty to document does not cease with a crisis; it becomes more essential.”



## ■ OUR PEOPLE



THE  
ANTHONY N. SABGA  
CARIBBEAN AWARDS  
FOR EXCELLENCE

## Guardian of Aquatic Ecosystems

*Dr Carla Ayanna Phillips Savage wins ANSA Caribbean Award for Excellence*

BY OMEGA FRANCIS

**Carla Ayanna Phillips Savage is a veterinary surgeon, aquatic One Health practitioner, and a guardian of aquatic ecosystems.** Since returning to Trinidad 11 years ago, she has worked arduously towards one of her largest professional goals: to champion aquatic ecosystem health, conservation, and management. This work has been recently recognised and she has been jointly awarded the ANSA Caribbean Award for Excellence (Science and Technology).

“I am happy to be pioneering the field within our region and it means a lot that our Caribbean colleagues felt what I was doing was noteworthy,” she says.

However, her journey was not a straight shot to the top. Dr Savage’s story goes back more than 30 years to when she was taken to Sea World by her mother as an 11-year-old girl. There, she was so entranced by the orcas that she told herself she wanted to one day work with whales and other aquatic animals. Throughout secondary school, she maintained this pursuit but found that unfortunately there was no avenue to work with orcas in Trinidad and Tobago. Eventually, her ambition appeared to be nothing but a far-fetched dream.

By the end of secondary school, Dr Savage had a hard decision to make: pursue marine biology, or veterinary medicine? While marine biology seemed like the obvious path to working with aquatic species, she ultimately decided to pursue veterinary medicine at The UWI St Augustine School of Veterinary Medicine (UWI-SVM). While in her third or fourth year, Dr Savage got the opportunity to do a research project on aquatic animals. Her project on viral diseases in shrimp was the first ever aquatic animal-based student project to be conducted at the School and turned out to be well-received and highly graded.

Upon completion of her degree in Veterinary Medicine (DVM), she was employed as a teaching assistant in the Large Animal Unit at the UWI-SVM and started pursuing an MPhil in Large Animal Medicine, anticipating that she would make this field of veterinary medicine her area of expertise. While completing her MPhil, she received a Fulbright Scholarship with the opportunity to pursue a PhD. With her mind set on doing a PhD in ruminant theriogenology (the branch of Animal Science concerned with reproduction), the Acting Director of the Vet School at the time, Dr Winthrop Harewood, reminded her of her earlier passion for aquatic animals and pushed her to see what options were possible. With this new outlook, Dr Savage was matched with the University of Florida by the Fulbright programme to pursue a PhD in Aquatic Medicine in their Marine Mammal programme.

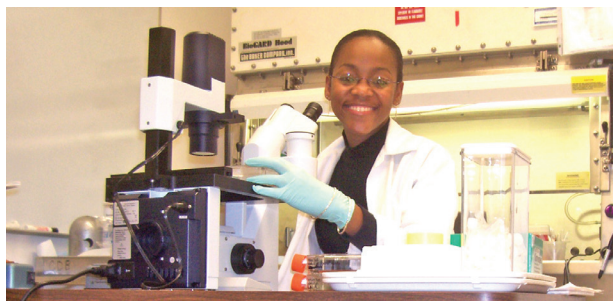
This was all she needed. Everything took off for her, and her network began to build. After spending five years there and earning University Academic Excellence awards during each year of study, she returned to Trinidad and



Dr Phillips Savage treating a giant Japanese spider crab.



Performing fish surgery.



Tobago in 2010. The Director of the UWI-SVM at the time, Professor Abiodun Adesiyun, requested that she develop an Aquatic Medicine programme for the School. Today, Aquatic Animal Medicine has been built into the DVM curriculum from years one through five, and students have a good foundation of knowledge which can be applied to any aquatic internships overseas.

In addition to building the aquatic component within the UWI’s DVM programme, Dr Savage also assumed leadership of the Trinidad and Tobago Marine Mammal Stranding Network. The Network’s mandate is to assist marine mammals and sea turtles that become stranded

on T&T’s shores. Dr Savage coordinates the team that helps in rehabilitating sick or debilitated aquatic wildlife and return them to their natural habitat. She is a member of the National Sea Turtle Task Force, and a member of the Management Committee of the Caribbean Fisheries Training and Development Institute, where she chairs the curriculum subcommittee. She has served as the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) Focal Point for Aquatic Animal Diseases for Trinidad and Tobago, and as the fish health consultant for several state-run facilities. She is also a member of multiple international aquatic veterinary medical associations.

For Dr Savage, the interconnection between human health, environmental health, and animal health (One Health) is a critical link that must be recognised if aquatic ecosystems are to stay healthy. Her research and community outreach projects typically focus on this interconnection, including the student projects she currently supervises which seek to identify diseases that are present in aquatic animals and their environments (freshwater, brackish and marine) that could also readily infect humans, particularly those in constant or regular contact with animals in natural or man-made aquatic environments (oceans, rivers, ponds, tanks, aquaria). Recognising the vital interconnection between the health of the environment, aquatic animals and humans is paramount to industry sustainability. Dr Savage’s work has informed public health guidelines and provided diagnostic support for aquaculture industry stakeholders, both locally and regionally.

For the last two years, Dr Savage had been spearheading the UNDP Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme-funded “Enhancing National Health Standards in Aquaculture Systems” (ENHSAS) project, which has been responsible for increasing laboratory diagnostic capacity and conducting public educational outreach workshops to support aquaculture industry sustainability, improve productivity, and prevent deleterious aquatic habitat impacts.

Dr Savage feels a tremendous sense of honour and pride in receiving the ANSA award. It came through a path that was seemingly very unlikely, and she sees it as a testament to following the path that God laid out for her. Once she tapped into what she felt God was leading her to do, it ultimately took her to this point where she has been able to make a significant impact.

To anyone who wishes to pursue Aquatic Animal Medicine, Dr Savage has these words, “Pursue it wherever you can. You would have to carve out your niche a bit, but don’t narrow your vision too early; keep your focus wide and embrace all the opportunities that come your way because you never know how it would serve to shape your career. Be sure to develop a wide knowledge base on many aquatic species; be adaptable and be able to perform in several different spheres; a holistic approach is best.”



## LEADERSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT

# Business Development Unit leads by example

BY DIXIE-ANN BELLE



Dr Meena Rambocas

At a time when many administrations are contemplating their prospects with apprehension, the staff of the Business Development Unit (BDU) of the Faculty of Social Sciences has their sights fixed on a future full of potential and growth.

The Unit provides educational and professional services within the disciplines of the social sciences to the business community, civil society, public servants, and students.

“The vision is that the BDU becomes a self-sustaining entity within the Faculty, within the university,” explains Dr Acolla Lewis-Cameron, Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences and Head of the BDU. Her research and consultancy in tourism education, planning and policy, as well as marketing, are instrumental in her position.

Over the last 10 years, the Unit has been working towards its goal, starting with a successful summer school. Some of the services offered include programmes for CAPE students looking to get a head start on university, and courses for UWI and non-UWI students who want to accelerate their programmes.

Recently the BDU has expanded its purview. “In 2019, the Faculty agreed on a vision for Social Sciences going forward which is to be socially engaged and solutions-oriented and, in building on that vision, we have restructured the way that the Faculty works in terms of our internal operations,” explains Dr Lewis-Cameron.

Dr Meena Rambocas, Deputy Dean, Planning and Programming, at the Faculty of Social Sciences also brings her expertise in marketing to the team. Commenting on their new options, she notes, “It is a means of capitalising on the vast experience that our staff members possess. Our staff members have a wealth of experience, a wealth of cutting-edge research that has been produced, and it’s a means of sharing this with the general stakeholders, to

**“We need change agents. We absolutely need people who will go out there and do things within their sphere of influence. We need thought leaders.”**

**Lisa McDonald, BDU Coordinator**

engage stakeholders, and to really promote the practice of business in the Caribbean and the wider sphere.”

This expansion involves promoting their consultancy services. They work with private and public sector stakeholders to assess their needs and then develop customised programmes to match their goals. The unit is also exploring an innovative initiative of “stackable credits”, an option for people looking to upgrade their skills and acquire certification.

Presently the staff is excited about a new programme launching in September. “Another arm of the Unit is creating multiple learning pathways for persons interested in furthering their education or looking for certification,” says Dr Lewis-Cameron. “We have been offering the Strategic Leadership and Management Master’s, which we have restructured, and it’s now the Strategic Leadership and Innovation programme.”

Expanding on their next steps, Lisa McDonald, Business Development Unit Coordinator, talks about the professional development seminars they are planning. “We’re looking at customised training. We’re looking at different learning pathways. So in other words, in

one semester, we launched the BDU under these new parameters and created a strategic plan.”

She notes the potential implications of their services on society. “We need change agents,” she affirms. “We absolutely need people who will go out there and do things within their sphere of influence. We need thought leaders.”

The BDU team takes their own roles as change agents seriously. When the pandemic struck, they made the necessary alterations to be safe, adapted and pushed on. All their recent courses have been offered online. Through the work of Support Technician Sophia Persad, they are one of the few faculties with a live chat for site visitors.

They also began to investigate the issues of their stakeholders in the current unique and challenging climate. “There was a need to deal with the softer side of the consequences of COVID, and to deal with the mental turmoil that may exist in individuals in an organisation,” says Dr Rambocas. The result was a well-received virtual seminar tailored to help managers to reflect and evolve their leadership strategy in a post-COVID-19 era.

As they continue to engineer their evolution, the team is eager to expand their reach. Dr Lewis-Cameron envisions, “When we look down the road we are looking at a space where stakeholders can come for guidance, for training, for advice, for counsel on all things pertaining to learning solutions.”

They are also invested in their role in the advancement of the university and the country at large. “We are part of the UWI brand,” emphasises Dr Rambocas. “That means something to the quality and standards that we offer.” She adds, “We are mindful of the changing demand, mindful of the needs of the market, but we are also mindful of our strength, and we think that our strength can promote the needs of society, the needs of Trinidad, particularly diversification needs at this point in time.”



Lisa McDonald



Dr Acolla Lewis-Cameron

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



## ■ CAMPUS LITERATURE WEEK

The band Terrenaissance performs *Song for Eshu and Moko* by writer Dr Pete Kalu.

# Still living, Still Writing, Still Together

BY ZAHRA GORDON



Professor Emeritus Gordon Rohlehr



Novelist Lawrence Scott

For the first time in its 23-year history, Campus Literature Week had no writer-in-residence, and was pushed online for the second year in a row due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These setbacks didn't prevent organisers from securing in-depth interviews with noted local authors including Celeste Mohammed and Lawrence Scott, who shared insights into their recently published and upcoming work.

Campus Literature Week is annually organised by students in the Masters of Fine Arts (MFA) Creative Writing programme at The UWI St Augustine's Department of Literary, Cultural and Communication Studies. This year's theme was "Channelling Literary Wisdom". Established authors were put in conversation with emerging authors, shedding light on topics such as the writing process and inspiration. In addition to the customary lunchtime readings featuring both students and established authors, there were also roundtable discussions, a musical performance and a live lecture with Professor Emeritus Gordon Rohlehr, all hosted virtually on the department's website.

Rohlehr read from his 2020 experimental memoir, *Musings, Mazes, Muses, Margins*, which was long listed for the 2021 OCM Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature in March. *Musings* is written in multiple forms – poetry, fiction, journal excerpts and philosophical creative non-fiction. An interesting aspect of the work, as Rohlehr shared, is the exploration of his "three personalities" – Danielle, Frederick and Gordon, which are derived from his first and middle names. Rohlehr said he explored his relationship to Rastafarian ideology as well by referring to these personalities as "I & I & I" – a play on the Rastafarian term "I & I", meaning "we". The three personalities also play on the Holy Trinity, as Rohlehr also explores his relationship to religion.

Reading from the first chapter, "Six Parables of Disconnection", Rohlehr shared the story of discovering the ability of "prophetic vision" as a child, which he attributed to African heritage, and quickly learning to repress such tendencies from his Christian, middle class family. "The entire book is about disconnection; about my disconnection from places and issues and sometimes people. The main place is UWI, where I spent the last 40 years – some of which were acrimonious – but I enjoyed my stay here," said Rohlehr.

Religion, much like race, class and sexuality, was a common theme among many of the writers featured. Novelist Lawrence Scott said his latest book, *Dangerous Freedom*, dealt primarily with race and identity and is important in terms of racial history. *Dangerous Freedom* was launched on March 24 via Zoom. The book fictionalises the story of Dido Elizabeth Belle, a mixed-race woman raised in the home of England's Lord Chief Justice in the 18th century. According to Scott, although there are historical works and even a movie that discuss Belle's

Author Celeste Mohammed read an excerpt from her upcoming novel *Pleasantview*.

life, his research points to *Dangerous Freedom* being the first novel to do so.

He added that *Dangerous Freedom* is his first novel set outside of Trinidad or without Trinidadian memory. Scott added that he's working to excavate or redress history and move away from romanticism with this text. "The main character is from the extended Caribbean and the novel was grown out of my Caribbean consciousness. These subjects – sexuality, race – have become important themes if you like, or concerns of all my fiction in some way or another, and the politics of these things. I wanted to de-romanticise history," said Scott.

Although Scott's work is generally referred to as historical fiction, he denied this, giving a deeper explanation for his purpose as a writer. Scott described his writing as having a subgenre of fictive empathy (where the fiction writer engages with history empathetically). "I wouldn't consider myself as writing historical books. I write books that are inspired by history. I wanted to explore myself in that history and I wanted to explore the history, and writing gives me a chance to explore myself and the world around me."

While Scott's work focuses on de-romanticising the past, author Celeste Mohammed shared the ways in which her work is de-romanticising the present. Mohammed read an excerpt from her upcoming novel *Pleasantview*, which follows corrupt political candidates, domestic abuse victims and other characters occupying the "dark side of the Caribbean dream". Although a novel, *Pleasantview* is written in a series of short stories.

"The inspiration for *Pleasantview* in the simplest sense is Trinidad and Tobago. What I tried to do in *Pleasantview* was hold up a mirror to modern Trinidad society and say, 'These are our prejudices. Do we really want to continue like this?' I'm asking the reader to reconsider what they learnt growing up," said Mohammed.

"I'm trying to strip off that rainbow country veneer. The rainbow country is an incomplete story because every person I've ever met in Trinidad and Tobago feels they've been victims of prejudice. We are all complicit in perpetuating certain prejudices – of race and religion. *Pleasantview* is a provocation. I'm asking readers: Could you possibly have some compassion? Could you possibly see the other side of the coin?" remarked Mohammed.

The book was written in both English and Trinidadian Creole, meaning that the local vernacular was not only used in the dialogue, but also in the narration. Highlighting Creole was important to Mohammed as it presented a challenge not only of technique, but also of overcoming her own personal prejudices. "It was very difficult for me to write in Creole. In the time that I grew up, it was not called Creole or Trinidadian English or Trinidad Patois. There were no nice names for it. It was simply bad English, and it had been drummed into me that it was not acceptable. As I began writing though, I discovered that T&T culture can't be represented in Standard English because it sounds so robotic. Creole is agile and that's great. It evolves quickly and is not standardised – it's alive and growing and we have to evolve with the language and learn how to use it," observed Mohammed.

She also added that she believes The UWI as a "West Indian" institution plays a significant role in the inclusion of Creole in academia. Mohammed used Belize as an example of a Caribbean country that had made progress in standardising Creole and including the language in the education system. "UWI has to grapple with the question of using Creole in academia and whether or not it wants to accept scripts in Creole. That's what academia is here for."

Other writers featured at this year's Campus Literature Week included Breanne McIvor, Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné, UWI instructor Rhoda Bharath, June Aming and Alake Pilgrim. Regional writers were also featured including Celia Sorhaindo from Dominica, and Ide Thomas and Sammarko Lightbourne of The Bahamas. MFA students who shared their work include Rashad Hosein, Stacy Lela, Elyse Harlow, Garvin Parsons, Nadja Nabee, Patti Ali, Vishala Christopher, Megan Cox, Sunnil Whittle, Randy Ablack, Al Alexander and Christopher Thomas. There were also two spoken word performances by Derron Sandy and Shaquilla Sylvester.

In her introduction to the event, Dr Muli Amaye, MFA Creative Writing Programme Coordinator, said the virtual Campus Literature Week was a symbol of resilience: "This past year has not been the easiest for a lot of us but we're still here, we're still writing and virtually, we are still together."



## ■ ACADEMIC ADVISING AND MENTORSHIP

# Caribbean Higher Ed embarks on NEW ERA OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

BY JOEL HENRY

On March 22 to 24, UWI St Augustine hosted its first “Academic Advising and Mentoring (AA&M) in Higher Education” virtual symposium. With a focus on “A Caribbean Context”, the three-day event brought together representatives from higher education institutions from throughout the region for the evolution and expansion of this vital area of student services.

The AA&M symposium included four paper sessions with 15 presentations; and two panel discussions – “Interrogating Well-Being in Higher Education” and “Academic Advising in Shifting/Vulnerable Contexts”. The keynote speakers were Dr Sandra Reid, Deputy Dean for Clinical Programmes and Senior Lecturer in Psychiatry at UWI St Augustine’s Faculty of Medical Sciences and Professor Jerome De Lisle, Director of UWI St Augustine’s School of Education.

In her keynote address on the opening day of the virtual symposium, Dr Reid made a powerful statement about academic advising and mentoring, and the change that must take place:

“If we aim to maximise student success and live up to our institutions’ visions and missions, we have to go beyond the hard numerical indices and focus on the equally important non-academic indices like mental health, confidence, social support, and resilience, all of which have tremendous impact on student outcomes.”

She added, “In other words, we have to look at student well-being.”

Traditionally, the focus of academic advising in the Caribbean has been supporting students in the areas of course selection and registration. That narrow focus is now being expanded and The UWI is taking a leading role.

“As our student population grew and diversified, it became clearer that to support students successful navigation of university from matriculation to graduation, good academic advising had to include other kinds of conversations about career goals and future aspirations, extra-curricular and co-curricular activities, and the support systems that were needed when non-academic issues negatively impacted students’ academic performance,” said Symposium Planning Committee Chair, Mrs Lynette Joseph-Brown.

Mrs Joseph-Brown, who is the Programme Officer in the Office of the Deputy Principal, said a paradigm shift was taking place:

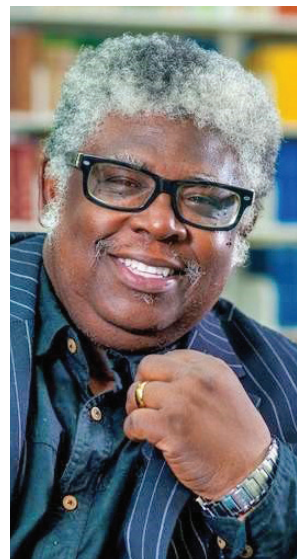
“What we have, colleagues, is a growing community of persons interested in ensuring that we change the culture of academic advising and mentoring where this is needed.”

In his presentation, “Diverse Realities, Experiences and Challenges of Delivering Academic Advising”, Professor De Lisle looked at “difference and diversity” in the academic advising process. He pointed out that not only had the student body become more diverse, but the advisors themselves, and the institutions of higher education were diverse in terms of values, cultural beliefs, disciplinary theories and other areas.

In line with the general consensus of the symposium, he said academic advising was moving beyond “narrow” perspectives focused only on academic processes, to



Dr Sandra Reid



Professor Jerome De Lisle

different dimensions that included academic guidance, pastoral (a point of contact for students experiencing personal difficulties), and employability (helping students think of future career goals and preparing for work).

Professor De Lisle, citing Professor Vincent Tinto from Syracuse University, a leading scholar on student retention, stressed the importance of multi-dimensional academic advising in preventing students from withdrawing from university.

“People don’t drop out just because they are doing poorly,” he said. “They drop out because they are not fitting well in that environment and they drop out because of personal factors.”

Also speaking on this issue, Dr Reid revealed that she had intimate experience with the effects of personal difficulties on the performance of students. As Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Medical Sciences, one of her responsibilities was meeting with students whose programmes were delayed because of failure or setbacks.

“Being the psychiatrist that I am, I naturally interrogated the circumstances of their setbacks. The results were eye-opening,” said Dr Reid.

Between 2016 and 2019, she met with 222 students. Of those requesting a leave of absence, the two most common reasons were mental or physical illness (29 percent and 22.6 percent respectively from a total of 62 students). Of those who failed, 42 percent (out of 104) gave the reason as non-academic or personal reasons.

“From this experience,” said Dr Reid, she became strongly convinced that “there was a need to focus on student well-being, and a different kind of engagement with students was necessary”.

She developed a holistic approach to academic advising and mentorship. Currently, this method is being implemented at the Faculty of Medical Sciences, said Dr Reid, explaining that it “is a work in progress”.

Both participants and the symposium organisers pointed out that new approaches to academic advising and mentorship will take time and effort. The three-day AA&M however, is an outstanding step and important milestone in the process.

“This is a unique moment for academic advising and mentoring in our region,” said Deputy Principal of UWI St Augustine Professor Indar Ramnarine. “Many in the higher education field worldwide have written extensively about the importance of academic advising and mentoring. The benefits all point to better student achievement and learning, higher student retention and ultimately, an overall positive student experience.”

Of the benefits of the symposium, Professor Ramnarine said, “I hope that it also provides the impetus for more research into academic advising and mentoring in the Caribbean region. This research can feed into the best practices for our region and for our students.”

The virtual symposium had a host of speakers from within UWI as well as other institutions. Scientists, social scientists, student services professionals, administrators, education specialists, mental health experts, alumni representatives, performing artists, members of the Students Guild, and students themselves participated. Dr Maurice Smith, University Registrar of The UWI, chaired one of the panel discussions.

The symposium utilised an interactive platform that allowed for more engagement between participants.

“We wanted them to have a more interactive experience,” said Mrs Joseph-Brown.

Over 160 people took part in the AA&M symposium, the product of two years of work (it had been initially planned for 2020 but was postponed and restructured as a virtual event because of the pandemic) by the 20-member planning committee. Mrs Joseph-Brown said the experience was very positive and boded well for the future of academic advising in the Caribbean.

“The energy was really remarkable. It was a wonderful team.”

**ACADEMIC ADVISING  
& MENTORING IN  
HIGHER EDUCATION:  
A CARIBBEAN CONTEXT**

**22-24 MARCH, 2020**

WE ADVISE YOU DECIDE



## ■ UWI IN SOCIETY

There's no denying that our society is in great need of organisations and people that are equipped to help meet the complex requirements of our different communities, and to improve their quality of life. Social work is a field that addresses the barriers to well-being that exist in society, promoting social change and development and the empowerment of people. This requires not only a passion for helping others and creating social change, but also a range of skills in understanding human behaviour and the workings of social and cultural institutions.

In Trinidad and Tobago, the field of social work has come a long way since the establishment of social work training in the Caribbean as early as 1962, when the Social Welfare Training Centre opened its doors. Under the Department of Behavioural Sciences on the St Augustine Campus, "the programme began as a two-year Certificate in Social Work in 1990, established the BSc in 2000 and MSc in 2002-2003, and then the PhD. The Social Work Programme is committed to addressing the needs of communities in the country and the social work faculty actively engages in building relationships with communities," says Dr Cheryl-Ann Boodram, Co-ordinator of the Social Work programme.

"We've really come into our own as an academic discipline," she adds. "The mission of the Social Work Programme is to improve the condition of Caribbean people through the provision of teaching, research and outreach activities of exceptional quality."

According to Dr Karene Nathaniel-DeCaires, a lecturer in the programme, one of the highlights is the high level of practical work required by students: "The well-structured field practicum is the hallmark of social work education at The UWI St Augustine, giving students the opportunity to engage actively with practicing social workers and clients in social service agencies."

By performing the roles of social workers in government agencies, non-governmental organisations and community-based organisations, students learn valuable lived experience while also providing human resources for these organisations to pursue projects that may have otherwise been out of reach.

"We have high levels of community engagement," says Dr Boodram. "Our students, the Social Work Unit, spearheaded the collaborative Farm Road project."

This social innovation project for the Farm Road, St Joseph community was launched in 2017, and is still ongoing to improve education, health and social well-being in this underserved community of more than 900 residents. A joint initiative between the Careers, Co-curricular and Community Engagement Department of the Division of Student Services and Development and UWI's Social Work Unit, the project has set up homework

# Doing Necessary Work: THE SOCIAL WORK UNIT

BY AMY LIBAKSH



centres, vacation camps, parenting programmes, and is now assisting with COVID-19 pandemic support for families.

The global pandemic has compounded social issues, especially for vulnerable communities. This created a new challenge for the Social Work Unit. They had to find solutions while also functioning virtually and adapting to social-distancing measures.

As Dr Nathaniel-DeCaires notes, "The need for social work engagement and intervention is incredibly high. With children out of school, the risk of child abuse and endangerment increases. Isolation, physical distancing and limited social and recreational outlets increase the risk of mental health decline, and the digital divide compromises academic achievement. With high unemployment and under-employment, socio-economic factors can exacerbate other issues."

Despite the overwhelming need for social support, social workers are essential workers, and must be recognised for their work with at-risk groups of people who have experienced greater vulnerabilities due to the pandemic. Dr Camille Huggins also believes

that "social workers must be prepared to work with clients utilising trauma and grief-focused approaches, because of the trauma they may have experienced due to COVID-19".

"Social workers have traditionally worked in resource-strapped settings," says Dr Nathaniel-DeCaires. "I believe many are innovating, doing the best they can with what they have, and trying to respond where there is greatest need. While social workers are essential, the breadth of work created by the pandemic overwhelms the capacity of professionals to respond efficiently. This situation presents an opportunity for macro-practice approaches – robust inter-agency exchange and collaboration, community engagement and development, structural strengthening and social work advocacy in the interest of social justice."

Within the programme itself, the last year has been rife with unexpected changes that have required quick reaction times to circumvent. "Over the past year, social work practicum students have provided virtual support for families," says Dr Boodram. **CONTINUED ON PAGE 16**



Students at a Social Work Action project in 2018.



Social work practise teachers at a workshop.



## ■ UWI IN SOCIETY

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

As a result of COVID-19 restrictions, students were required to conduct needs assessments for particular groups in society and identify those experiencing steepened vulnerabilities due to the pandemic. They then engaged in virtual practicum projects which focused on supporting an identified vulnerable population during the restrictions and lockdown. The students hosted webinars to support groups such as the elderly and parents managing their children's online school education. Online resources were created for the children themselves to assist in learning as well as maintaining their mental health.

"Social Work Unit staff also engaged with social work agencies to develop their capacity to successfully transition practice delivery online or via tele-social work practice, and the general public to understand the psycho-social impact of COVID-19 on their physical and mental health," says Dr Boodram.

This practical approach has left an impact not only on the communities served, but also the students who will become the future of social work. One such graduate, Tya Jane Ramey, who was also Trinidad and Tobago's representative at the 2019 Miss World competition, remembers her time in the field as the highlight of the programme:

"If I had to choose the highlight of my time there, it would be as a student practitioner working with agencies such as the Children's Authority and Children Court. There we served children in vulnerable circumstances."

Ramey, who entered the Social Work Programme in 2016, says, "The three years [of the programme] managed to exceed my expectations; shaping my understanding of social injustice and its interaction on all levels of society, transforming my proclivity to help into skills to become a professional change agent, and providing guided exposure to social issues and social service institutions."

After graduating, and through the Miss World Beauty with a Purpose Project, she was able to create Project Esperanza. "As the social climate in 2019 was drenched with the concerns surrounding the high influx of Venezuelan migrants in our country, I decided that my project would address the xenophobia surrounding displacement, and to work directly with Venezuelan migrant children. I could not have advocated and gone on a nationwide media campaign of sensitisation, brokered child-friendly spaces with resources, or engaged in group intervention without the framework social work taught me."

As the Social Work programme continues to expand and change with the unstable nature of our daily lives under the global pandemic and the social and economic issues that surround it, the team hopes to continue training new generations of social workers who are passionate about changing the world.

"It's a beautiful profession that requires continuous learning and reflective practice," says Ramey, who considers the reward of working in the field to be reflected best in "testimonies of restoration".

And with an uncharted frontier ahead of us, it is more vital than ever that we invest in healing and bettering our society – especially the communities that have been overlooked in the past and who are now facing a wide range of crises that can only be solved when we work together.

*Amy Li Baksh is a Trinidadian writer, artist and activist who makes art to uplift and amplify the unheard voices in our society.*

## UWI Calendar of Events APRIL–JULY 2021

### Virtual Open Days 2021

April 14 to July 21

ONLINE

If you're interested in exploring your options for tertiary education at UWI St Augustine, now is the time. The Virtual Open Days give prospective students, new and returning, the opportunity to learn what is available and how to plan their educational future.

In depth information on admission requirements, financial aid, student services, campus life and everything you need to know about UWI's many programmes of study, will all be provided in easily accessible, online sessions.

For more information, visit The UWI St Augustine website at

<https://sta.uwi.edu/> or go directly to <https://sta.uwi.edu/news/notices/notice.asp?id=25948>



### Diplomatic Dialogue on the Commonwealth with Ambassador Ransford Smith

April 21

ONLINE

Since the first half of the 20th century, the Commonwealth of Nations has been part of the identity of the many states that were once part of the British Empire. This month, UWI St Augustine's Institute of International Relations and the Diplomatic Academy of the Caribbean invites the public to a virtual lecture on the legacy of the Commonwealth.

"The Commonwealth: its History and Contemporary Relevance" will feature a lecture by Ambassador Ransford Smith, Former Deputy Secretary-General, Commonwealth Secretariat. Join us for this engaging topic for anyone with an interest in international relations, past and present.

To register, visit: [https://uwi.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_Goht7iyGS1m1Wlu2aNF4vw](https://uwi.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_Goht7iyGS1m1Wlu2aNF4vw)



### The UWI Masterclass Series – Entrepreneurship

May 6 to June 10

ONLINE

Want to build your own enterprise but don't know how? This six module online workshop, now in its second year, will give you invaluable training in developing business ideas and models, marketing, proposal writing, cash flow management, and even the legal dos and don'ts.

Facilitated by Julian Henry, Programme Manager of UWI St Augustine's Entrepreneurship Unit, this highly regarded workshop successfully trained 29 people in its first year. The cost is TT\$500.00.

To register, visit <https://sta.uwi.edu/alumni/>. For more information, email [Camille.edwards@sta.uwi.edu](mailto:Camille.edwards@sta.uwi.edu) or call 224-3740.