



Healing

A young man recovers himself in a painting entitled “Pride” by **Roheim Leslie**, a member of the 2021 final year class of the Visual Arts Unit at UWI St Augustine’s Department of Creative and Festival Arts (DCFA).

“A realistic painting is my artistic way of saying this thing is beautiful and people must pay attention to it,” says Roheim.

Mental and emotional health, especially following these long and hard months of the pandemic, have become increasingly important national topics. As we see signs of progress in our national response to COVID-19, it’s a good time to self-assess the toll this crisis has taken on our emotional well-being and, if necessary, seek out positive forms of treatment.

PAINTING: ROHEIM LESLIE



OUR PEOPLE – 07

Case Closed

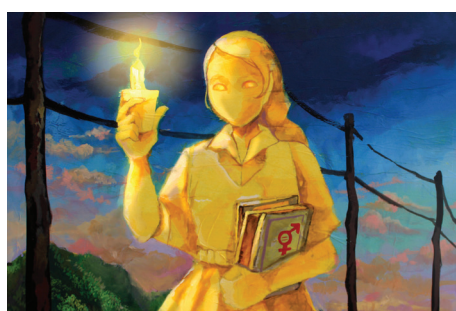
Prof Rose-Marie Belle Antoine completes tenure as first Dean of the Faculty of Law



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FROM THE PRINCIPAL

Moment to Breathe

On July 2, teaching ended for the third and final semester (also called the “summer” semester) of UWI St Augustine’s Academic Year 2020/2021. It has been quite a year, dominated by the pandemic and our national response. Our students have been forced to adapt to a new learning environment and new methods of assessment. Many, if not the majority, of our faculty members have been required to transform their teaching practices and find new ways to encourage their students to succeed. Our other staffers, in the many administrative and support functions, have had to show enormous flexibility and ingenuity to keep this institution functioning while working remotely.

As difficult as this year has been, we made it through.

It is especially fitting that as we end the chapter of this challenging year, Trinidad and Tobago seems to be emerging from the worst of this phase of the pandemic. Confirmed cases and deaths have been decreasing. Lockdown measures are easing. The nation has received a good supply of vaccines and is engaged in an aggressive vaccination programme. For the first time in quite some time, we can truly be cautiously optimistic.

We are at a moment – both the campus and the society – to pause, breathe, self-assess, and practise self-care. In this issue of UWI TODAY, Dr Sarah Chin Yuen Kee, the Coordinator of our Counselling and Psychological Services Department (CAPS), recommends that we do more to take care of our emotional and mental health, particularly during these times. We have been working for our material well-being and the well-being of T&T. In doing so, many of us have neglected our internal state. Let’s use this moment to replenish those stores for the academic year



Our students have been forced to adapt to a new learning environment and new methods of assessment. Many, if not the majority, of our faculty members have been required to transform their teaching practices and find new ways to encourage their students to succeed.

ahead of us. Knowing how to do so should be at the centre of a new national education agenda.

There are many ways to recharge – involvement in fulfilling hobbies, recreation, exercise, proper eating, therapy, and connection with positive and uplifting social circles. Of course, we must still pay heed to the risks of COVID-19. We are in no position to drop our guard. There is, however, a space between restriction and freedom, where we can engage in activities that support emotional and mental healing.

The COVID-19 pandemic has reminded us that life is not just about survival or even material prosperity. There is enormous fulfillment in finding the intrinsic value and deeper meaning of our existence. Particularly now, in an age where we face the risk of pandemics, climate change, natural disasters, crime, inequality, and economic uncertainty, enjoying the simple pleasures in life – while we work for better – is crucial.

In these last few months, many lives have been affected by COVID-19. Many have been lost. Apart from the pandemic, we have lost, as well, some extremely prominent members of our extended campus community. We should all celebrate their lives and legacies. We should also recognise their mortality, and in doing so, recognise our own.

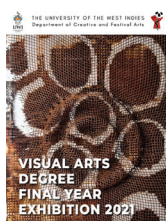
Life is meant for contribution, connection and enjoyment. As we prepare for Academic Year 2021/2022, let us not forget to take care of ourselves as we take care of business.

Brian Copeland

PROFESSOR BRIAN COPELAND

Campus Principal

EDITOR’S NOTE: For this issue of UWI TODAY, we would like to express our gratitude to the Visual Arts Unit of the Department of Creative and Festival Arts (DCFA) for the artwork used throughout the publication. Coordinator of the unit Dr Marsha Pearce and her students have been generous and helpful in sharing their time and work.



This issue includes pieces by students **Ariel Baptiste, Roheim Leslie, Faith Ramlal, Krysten Reid,** and **Kevon Weekes**, all in the final year class. You can see more of their work, and that of their classmates, in the publication



(un)seen: 2021 DCFA Visual Arts Degree Exhibition Catalogue. View it online at: https://issuu.com/dcfavisual/docs/exhibition_catalogue_2021

For more information on the Visual Arts programme at DCFA, visit <https://sta.uwi.edu/fhe/dcfa/visualarts.asp>



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■ CAMPUS NEWS

UWI St Augustine and SporTT PARTNER TO DEVELOP SPORT INDUSTRY

The Sports Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited (SporTT) and UWI St Augustine have entered a groundbreaking memorandum of understanding (MOU) for collaboration to increase the social impact of sport.

The MOU, virtually signed by SporTT CEO Jason Williams and UWI St Augustine Campus Principal Professor Brian Copeland, seeks to formalise cooperation between the two institutions to enable knowledge exchange and partnership. The agreement will also seek to create an environment for the transition from students to sport professionals ready to impact the industry upon graduation.

Speaking at the ceremony, Mr Williams noted that this new MOU “recognises that for the nation to drive towards positive change in sport development, there needs to be more collaboration, more so, in times of limited resources. As such, partnerships like this one will assist in increasing the potential for greater achievement.”

As part of the agreement, SporTT will work with UWI St Augustine to develop and research concepts and proposals to acquire relevant data for the industry. They will also explore ways to provide scholarships or financial grants to encourage uptake of programmes by national governing bodies of sport and their administrators.

Professor Copeland said the MOU will “create an environment to foster sports professionals, grow the industry, improve training and raise the profiles of UWI and SporTT as regional players and leaders in the development of the sector”.

The UWI’s Faculty of Sport reaches across the campuses through Academies of Sport established at the Cave Hill, Mona, St Augustine and Open Campuses. These academies are responsible for academic activities, sports at all levels, as well as outreach to communities through sport. The faculty provides high-quality education in sports with emphasis on application via research, and development of the sports and athletes of the region.



Dr Akshai Mansingh, Dean of the Faculty of Sport



Mr Jason Williams, CEO of SporTT



SporTT will work with UWI St Augustine to develop and research concepts and proposals to acquire relevant data for the industry. They will also explore ways to provide scholarships or financial grants to encourage uptake of programmes by national governing bodies of sport and their administrators.

ARTHUR LOK JACK GSB HOSTS WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE 2021

The UWI Arthur Lok Jack Global School of Business hosted the “Women in Leadership Conference” on July 9, 2021. The conference, themed “*Women Challenging and Changing the World*” this year, featured regional and international speakers aimed at preparing women for the new calibre of leadership required for the changing world. The conference promised to help attendees find the courage to face volatility, uncertainty, and complexity, while building connections with some of the most influential women in the Caribbean.

The online event allowed the attendees to network with more than 200 female leaders from across the Caribbean, and the US and UK. The virtual format allowed the audience reach to expand into new territories and increase the opportunities for building business relationships.

The conference was started by Prime Minister of Barbados Mia Amor Mottley, who spoke about the development of the Caribbean. While she recalled great Caribbean achievements, Prime Minister Mottley reminded attendees that “*amongst the undeniable iconic names associated with the heyday of Caribbean development, not a single one was a woman*”. She said that the women of the Caribbean were present and made important contributions, but they were not recognised or as celebrated as their male counterparts.

The other conference speakers also addressed this issue, along with others faced by women. Eva Mitchell, CEO of The Trinidad and Tobago Stock Exchange Commission, shared anecdotes from her life, including how her late



Prime Minister of Barbados,
Ms Mia Mottley



Digital Media Entrepreneur,
Ms Ingrid Riley

mother’s tenacity and resourcefulness to increase the household income became a major influence on who she would become. Ms Mitchell shared how she overcame negative feedback from previous managers, who told her that she would never become a leader, by improving her skills and becoming exceptional in completing tasks. Her leadership potential could not be ignored.

Ingrid Riley, Founder and CEO of SiliconCaribe and Rebel Grrl Media also shared her experiences, actionable steps, and insights for Caribbean women that want to strengthen their leadership skills.

“*Learn to say no and mean it, but also learn how to ask for help and receive it gracefully,*” she said.

Ms Riley provided great insight into her own success by explaining that, “The key to where I am today is about

obeying my instincts, following my curiosity, and doing what I love naturally.”

Conference attendees benefitted from the experienced leadership of Ingrid Lashley, Chairman of Bourse Securities Group and National Enterprises Limited. She shared her challenges as a leader and then challenged the attendees to be super leaders themselves.

“*A Super Leader is characterised by her ability to get things done at every level,*” said Ms Lashley. While she emphasised the varying unstated expectations of the roles of men against those of women at work (and even in the home), Ms Lashley confronted all the females present with their obligation to be super leaders in all areas of their lives.

The international speakers at the conference came from the United Kingdom. Helen Gordon, Chief Executive of Science Council UK, spoke on the topic of “Leading to Galvanise Energy and Engagement”. As the lone male on the agenda for the day, John Mark Williams, CEO of the Institute of Leadership and Management, spoke on “Leading with Agility: A Women’s Advantage”. Mr Williams argued that agility is the ability to predict and prepare. Both speakers touched on the need for collaboration and teamwork for leadership to be successful.

“*Working together as a community can make change happen,*” said Ms Gordon.

■ **For more information on**
The UWI Arthur Lok Jack Global School of Business, visit <https://lokjackgsb.edu.tt/>

■ CAMPUS NEWS

NGC/UWI complete Phase 2 of CARBON SEQUESTERING MEASUREMENT PROJECT

The National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited (NGC) and UWI St Augustine have completed the second installment of a project to measure the positive impact of the company's reforestation programme. This phase of the project, which was created to calculate the amount of carbon dioxide that is removed from the atmosphere by trees, focused on below ground carbon sequestering from the roots.

First covered last year in UWI TODAY, https://sta.uwi.edu/uwitoday/archive/march_2020/article4.asp, UWI started working with NGC on carbon sequestering projects in 2018.

"Trees take carbon dioxide out of the air and convert it into solid wood, which is how the carbon is sequestered, and helps to ameliorate climate change warming from greenhouse gases," explained Professor John Agard, one of the world's leading climate scientists and Director of the St Augustine Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (STACIE).

Prof Agard, who is also lead on the UWI team of staff and students working with NGC on the project, said: "The first project measured above ground carbon sequestration and the second project looked at below ground carbon sequestration from tree roots."

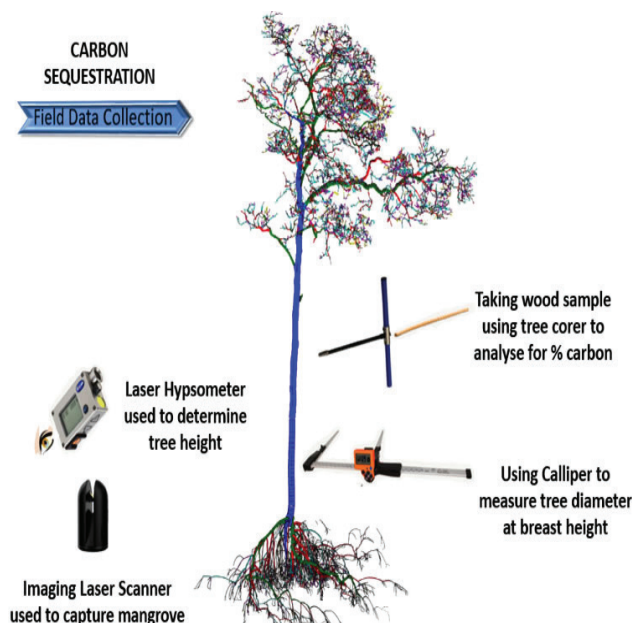
This second phase of the project started in 2020 and was completed in June of this year. Innovation played a great part in the carbon measuring exercise as the team was able to gather data not only from standard trees, but also mangrove trees, which have complex prop roots.

The team went deep into NGC's reforestation sites in Mayaro, Moruga, Rio Claro, Grant's Trace, and Guapo/Parrylands. They used advanced technological equipment – laser-based devices such as hypsometers to measure height, and electronic calipers to measure diameter – to calculate the volume and mass of trees.

In 2005, as part of its No Net Loss policy, NGC embarked on an operation to plant 100,000 seedlings representing 17 indigenous plants in south Trinidad. Community groups were instrumental to this effort. Residents from the nearby communities assisted with the planting.



Prof John Agard (centre) with students Hamish Asmath (left) and Nikia Gooding in the Caroni Swamp.



The company also provided capacity building training in group formation and seedling propagation. Four thousand plants were resupplied from community nurseries.

Through this programme, NGC has sequestered 8,404 tonnes of total carbon above ground and 2,185 tonnes below ground within the 79.25 hectares of land being maintained.

These encouraging results have laid the foundation for the next phase of the project, the Beyond 315 Programme. Myles Lewis, Head of Corporate Social Responsibility at NGC, explained that the initiative will lead to "community economic development and sustainability, and continued development for NGC's community reforestation groups through several interventions". They plan to transition the reforestation groups to a point where they are self-sustaining.

According to Mr Lewis, "Our aim is to be recognised as a global leader in the development of sustainable energy-related businesses." He stressed that this is all in keeping with NGC's strategic focus on sustainability. The carbon sequestration study forms part of their Green Agenda, which embraces renewables, energy efficiency, fuel switching, advocacy and carbon capture.

NGC believes the programme can have positive regional implications. "[We] can play a role via knowledge and information transfer for other organisations seeking to initiate such a project."

As to the partnership between The UWI and NGC, both organisations are satisfied with the response and envision future collaborations.

"The relationship between UWI and NGC is outstanding," says Prof Agard. "My expectation is that this will continue as NGC for many years has had a memorandum of understanding with UWI through which they have provided support for many projects ranging from an Entrepreneurship Unit in the Faculty of Social Sciences to projects in the Faculty of Humanities and Education."



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RESEARCH



DMLL student researcher uncovers unique challenges faced by the Deaf and Hard of Hearing with online learning

BY AMY LI BAKSH

When the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the world last year, the Caribbean was faced with the daunting task of attempting the first large-scale e-learning project at all levels, under less than favourable conditions. For the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) community, the challenges created by the onset of digital learning have been unique and largely unstudied. Noor-ud-din Mohammed, a student of the Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics (DMLL) at The UWI, decided to take on the task of uncovering what some of these unique challenges are, and help to shed some light on the issues facing Deaf and Hard of Hearing students when it comes to learning in a pandemic.

On June 14, in collaboration with the Deaf Empowerment and Advancement Foundation, Noor-ud-din shared some of his findings and held a discussion on the needs of DHH students with parents, teachers and interpreters who are part of or working within the DHH community.

According to the World Federation of the Deaf, “Deaf people, like other marginalised groups, face greater and unique vulnerabilities during this time of crisis, particularly concerning equitable access to information and education.”

As Noor-ud-din presented some of the data from his research, which has now been published in Deafness and Education International in an article entitled “Deaf students’ linguistic access in online education: The case of Trinidad”, it is striking how these accessibility challenges can have a lasting impact on DHH students and their ability to learn, communicate and develop at the same pace as their peers.

The Zoom discussion, which is available now on the Deaf Empowerment and Advancement Foundation’s

Facebook page, was interpreted into Trinidad and Tobago Sign Language (TTSL) by Dr Ben Braithwaite, lecturer at the DMLL. Niobe Rodrigues interpreted questions from Deaf participants from TTSL into English for non-signers; and her husband Bryan Roderigues, who made history as the first Deaf president of the TT Association for the Hearing Impaired, mediated the session. Despite a relatively small sample size comprising mainly primary school students from the Cascade School for the Deaf and the Audrey Jeffers School for the Deaf, as well as parents, teachers and translators from both primary and secondary school level, there were many issues raised that require our attention as a Caribbean community.

In addition to the widespread problem of lack of reliable access to devices, which is especially prevalent in working-class communities, e-learning has restricted the abilities of Deaf students to pick up and practice their primary language, TTSL. As one of the participants described, sign language is a “3-D language in a 2-D setting.” Within the limited space of a computer screen or, in some cases, a tiny smartphone, the nuances of signs can be lost—far less for devices which have internet connectivity issues that can cause lag or blurriness.

For many of our Deaf children with hearing parents, their first access to a sign language comes at the age of five or six, when they enter school. Their parents often do not sign, and so they are cut off from communication with their family and lose valuable time when young children are picking up the basics of language from those around them and learning the cognitive skills that they can build upon later in life. Now, with their only access to teachers

and their peers being through a screen, they are also losing out on social activities like spending recreational time with friends at recess, which is an important part of how children practise socialisation and communication.

For teachers and interpreters, who are now being relied on more than ever as Deaf students’ main line of contact, they are learning how to use these online systems through trial and error, and without much support from the Ministry of Education or community resources.

“We are so far into the pandemic and there is still a great need for workshops for teachers and interpreters,” says Noor-ud-din. Techniques such as multi-pinning, side-by-side mode and closed captions are all available on platforms like Zoom, but in order to learn what works best for DHH students, there needs to be a lot more structural support and training. Students have learned methods to circumvent this, like using two devices, one for the teaching session and one for the interpreter, but this is a financially limiting solution because it requires access to two usable devices.

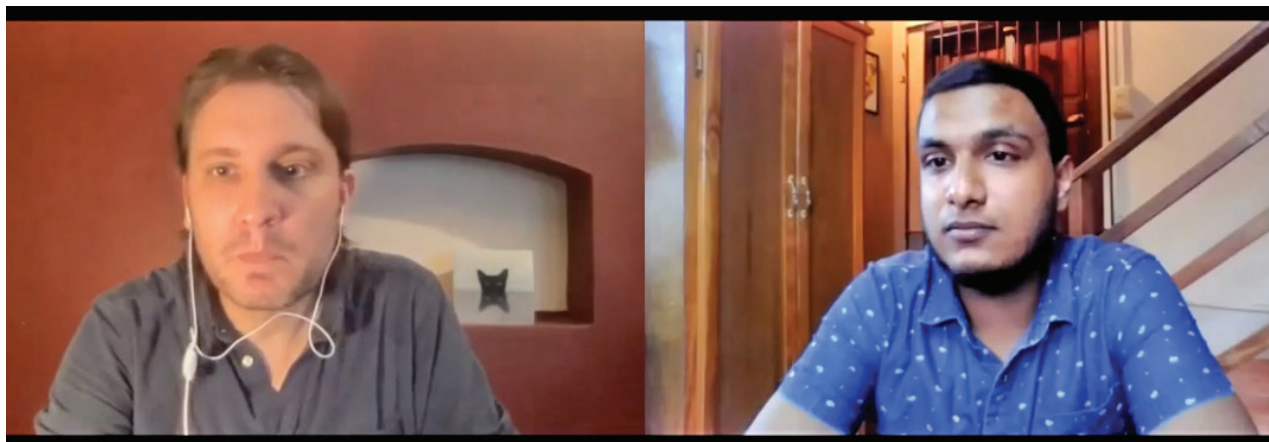
Noor-ud-din, who first became interested in working in the Deaf Community and Deaf Linguistics in 2018 when he had his first class with Dr Braithwaite, learned about the community by engaging with DHH persons who were willing to help him and his classmates learn sign language and Deaf culture through hands-on practice.

“We realised that right here in the Caribbean, and in Trinidad and Tobago, there is a separate, rich sub-culture that is the Deaf community,” he says.

And a crucial aspect of this culture is TTSL. In order for young Deaf students to become immersed in their own culture and history, as well as for hearing parents and family members to understand the breadth of this culture, signing needs to become more widespread and to be recognised as a hugely underutilised resource that we must tap into. It is essential for the growth and well-being of our Deaf children.

“Right now, I’m in the process of writing letters to the Ministry of Education and the head of the Trinidad and Tobago Association of the Hearing Impaired and also thinking about creating sign language learning materials, and I spoke to some students and teachers who would like to work together as a team to create those resources. But we may need grant funding to get a project like that off the ground,” says Noor-ud-din.

As the pandemic continues to change and shape the way we live, we must ensure that the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community, and all marginalised communities, are not left behind in the process.



Dr Benjamin Braithwaite

Mr Noor-ud-din Mohammed

Amy Li Baksh is a Trinidadian writer, artist and activist.

■ OUR PEOPLE

“Law is meant to produce something good,” says Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine.

It’s a statement that encompasses her outlook and, in some respects, her career. She’s an award-winning legal scholar, an author, an advocate for social justice, and a public intellectual. To the community that populates the St Augustine Campus however, she’s recognised as the first Dean of the Faculty of Law at UWI St Augustine, a journey she completed at the end of July.

“I was given a huge but exciting task,” she remarks in an interview by telephone.

These last few months, Prof Antoine has been writing and speaking in the media, giving her insights on the legal ramifications of compulsory vaccinations for COVID-19. Many are happy to hear from her again. For years she has shared her expertise on legal and social matters in public fora, but a serious car accident on December 31, 2020 forced her to concentrate on recovery.

“It was very scary,” she says of the experience, “but also uplifting. I received thousands of well-wishes. That really uplifted me. I had no clue that so many people knew me.”

It’s hardly surprising, as Dean she has not only ensured that the Law Faculty has become widely known in the eight years of her tenure and the nine years of its existence (the faculty officially started in 2012 under an interim dean and she was appointed the first dean in 2013), but she has also engaged its staff and students to address numerous matters of national and international importance. Migrants, sustainability, First Peoples’ rights, remand injustice, gender, marijuana decriminalisation, children’s rights, and on and on, the faculty has been a constant presence, providing its scholarship, legal expertise, and advocacy for a host of issues.

“One of our big successes is our outreach and continuing legal education,” Prof Antoine says. “When we started, people had no idea there was a law faculty. Certainly, we have made our presence felt. In the community, country and even the region in some respects. We have even ventured internationally.”

In 2019, the Faculty of Law made history in holding two coveted hearings before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in Washington, on Migrants and Refugees, and on Remand Injustice. This was the first time The UWI has presented formally to an international body.

The Faculty of Law was officially launched on April 15, 2014 (it started as a fully-fledged faculty in 2012). Culture change, along with staff shortages, were two of the main challenges the faculty faced. Another was the plan to move the faculty to The UWI South Campus in Debe/Penal. In 2017, law students and some lecturers protested against the move. Eventually, the plan was scrapped.

Prof Antoine is also proud to have overseen the addition of cutting-edge courses added to the curriculum, such as Oil and Gas Law, Banking Law, Entertainment Law and Sports Law. The self-financed LLM and PHD programmes, which she developed, are also very successful and the envy of other campuses. Important too are the tremendous developments in terms of the now well established conferences and workshops, supported by significant private sector sponsorship and an administrative staff whose expertise has been honed by these initiatives. She is also pleased to see the flourishing of research and publication in such a young faculty.

The students, led by a now vibrant Student Law Society, have also accomplished much in terms of publishing their magazine and their own community outreach.

Despite the challenges therefore, Prof Antoine feels great pride in the accomplishments of her staff and students. “When I look back, we have done so much work and we have grown so much,” she says.

In its second year of operations (Academic Year 2014/2015), the Faculty of Law had an enrollment of 309 students. In 2019/2020, that enrollment had risen to 487 students. These numbers though, don’t tell the complete story of the enormous interest students have in studying at the faculty, including increasingly, regional students. They limit intake to 150 students per year. Apart from acceptance into the faculty on academic merit, they also put in place a

Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine *ends era as Dean of the Faculty of Law*



quota for applicants from law enforcement, as well as mature students and students with disabilities.

One of the most interesting legal education initiatives created under Prof Antoine’s leadership is the Makandal Daaga Scholarship in Law. The scholarship was created to give opportunities to students who would not normally qualify using the competitive academic criteria for Law but who do so because of an outstanding record of social activism, thereby expanding access, a UWI strategic goal. The first winner, Sea Lots community activist Kareem Marcelle, was selected in academic year 2017/2018. The second, Suana Sookdeo, was awarded the scholarship in 2020. The scholarship is an example of her vision of law as an instrument for social engineering.

“It’s one of my proudest moments as Dean,” says Prof Antoine on the creation of the scholarship.

Perhaps the most impactful example of this approach is the creation of the Faculty of Law’s International Human Rights Clinic (IHRC). Established in just the faculty’s second year of existence, and fueled by a landmark European Union funded grant the Faculty won to implement a project entitled “*Growing Capacity for Elevating Trinidad and Tobago to International Human Rights Standards*”, the IHRC is essentially the headquarters for their advocacy education, research, staff development, film-making and outreach activities.

Through the IHRC, the Faculty of Law has carried out an enormous amount of work. It is an innovative learning and activist tool which combines academia, legal practice and advocacy.



A course was created to support the IHRC and students work with NGOs, attorneys and even international organisations such as the UN Refugee organisation. In academic year 2018/2019, the faculty won another big grant, this time from the European Development Fund, for training, public discussions, research and litigation, on a host of social justice issues.

A third EU grant was secured to interrogate issues on Remand Injustice with Special Emphasis on Domestic Violence Female Remandees, which examines the undue delays persons on remand in Trinidad and Tobago suffer while awaiting trial – sometimes as much as 21 years. This issue is close to Prof Antoine’s heart.

Trinidad and Tobago has the unenviable record of having the largest remandee population in the Caribbean and for the longest periods. This led to another historic first – the Faculty, partnering with invited attorneys from the firm of Gregory Delzin, initiated a constitutional claim before the High Court to declare this practice a violation of human rights. Dean Antoine, together with colleague lecturer Afiya France, is also pursuing another landmark case before the Equal Opportunities Tribunal, on alleged discrimination at work due to mental disability.

Prof Antoine says she’s not sure what the future holds. She is “blessed to have options” but hasn’t made a decision yet.

“For now I need to re-centre,” she says. “I’m also going to do some writing. I also want to continue my advocacy in a more targeted way.”

“When we started people had no idea there was a law faculty. Certainly, we have made our presence felt. In the community, country and even the region in some respects. We have even ventured internationally.”

WELLNESS

Devi, a 2021 graduate of UWI St Augustine's Faculty of Law, had been experiencing symptoms of depression and even suicidal ideation for years. She'd considered going to the campus' Counselling and Psychological Services Department (CAPS), but hadn't made an appointment. Then, while attending an interview for a mentorship programme, it happened.

"When one of the questions we had to answer was 'who are you?'; I had absolutely no idea what to say and I started to panic," she recalls. "Tears and everything – I was having a full-blown identity crisis in the middle of this room full of people. That sent me spiralling into existential confusion for maybe a week before I decided to make an appointment."

On the surface, Devi's story might seem rare, but numerous studies have shown that the number of people dealing with emotional and mental health challenges globally are well over 10 percent and in some societies (like the US) it is as high as 40 percent. Many (some studies show the majority) of those affected start experiencing symptoms in their teenage years into their twenties. That means many of them will have an added burden while pursuing higher education. It's the job of CAPS to attend to the psychological needs of these students at UWI St Augustine.

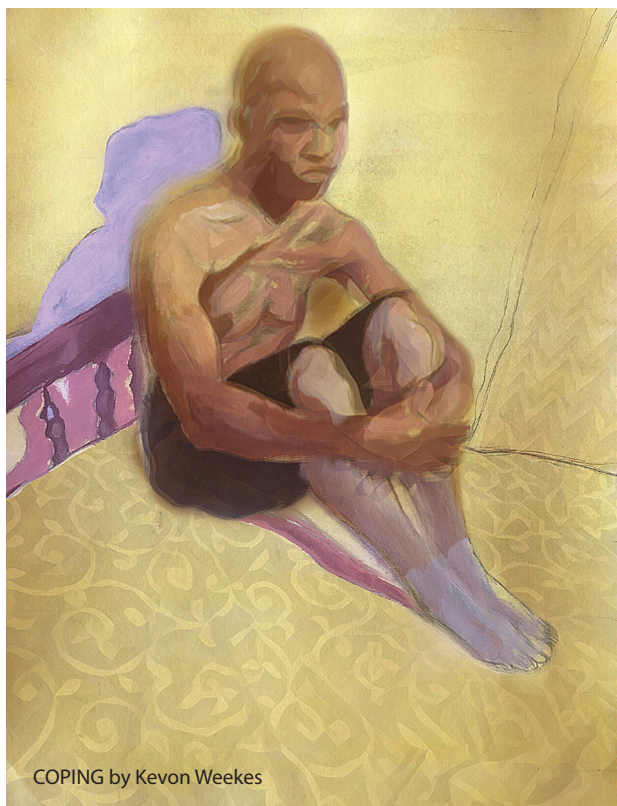
"We offer direct counselling, workshops, skill-building, awareness raising, and outreach to the general campus population," says Dr Sarah Chin Yuen Kee, coordinator of CAPS.

Many students appreciate the support they give. Prashaanta, a 25-year-old student at the Faculty of Medical Sciences, says the counselling she received at CAPS "most certainly did help". Dealing with issues of identity and extreme difficulty with some of her relatives, she turned to counselling.

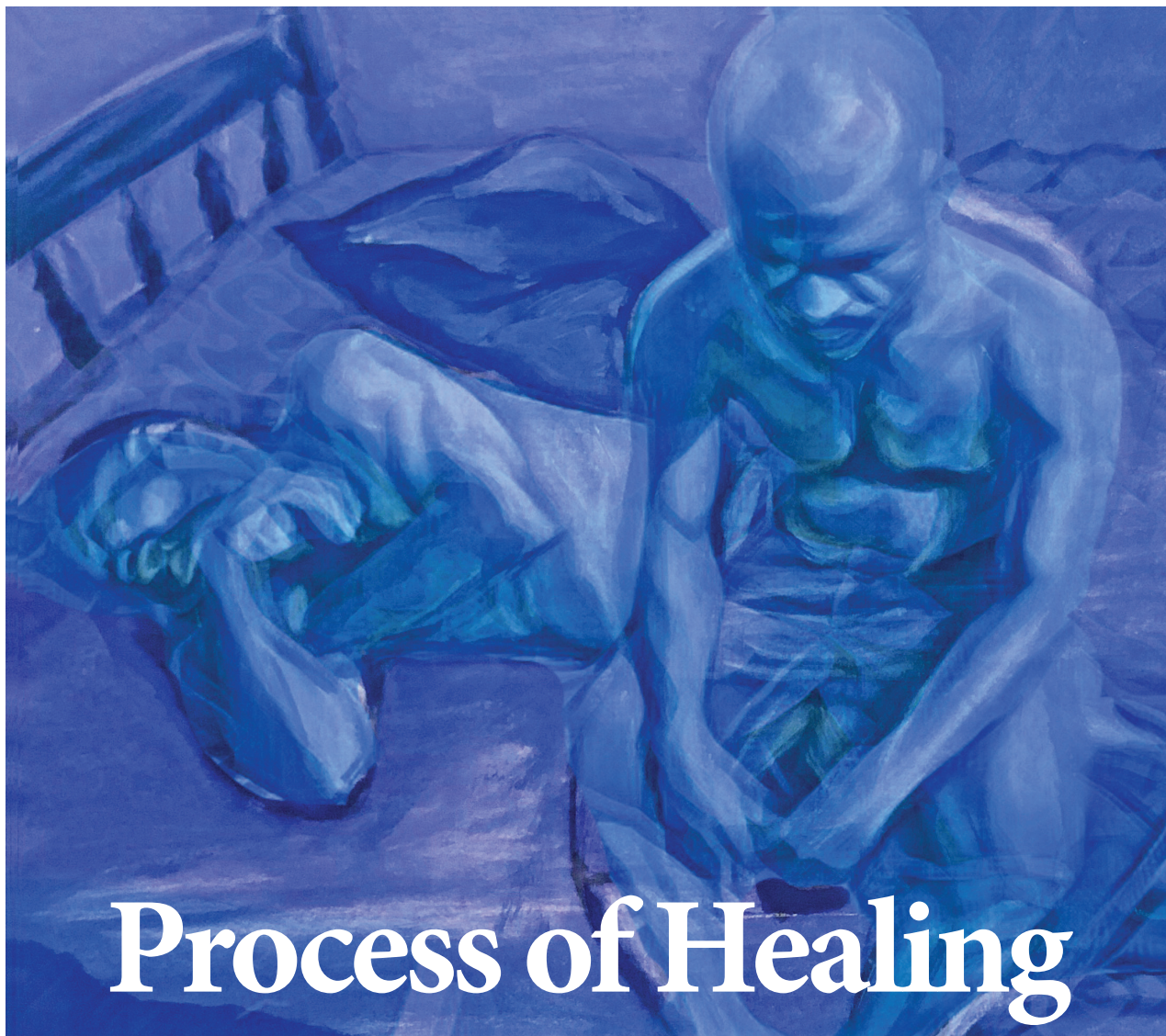
"My school president made a post about [CAPS] and sent a link to register. I didn't even hesitate to sign up because I had a really good feeling about therapy. It was my very first time taking an active role in seeking help."

Dr Chin Yuen Kee says that interpersonal issues (with sexual partners, friends, family and others) are one the main reasons that students seek counselling. The others are mood disorders – anxiety and depression. Less common are those with what she calls "more disruptive psychological events" such as their first episode of schizophrenia or bipolar disorder, conditions that often manifest in the early twenties.

Then there are students who have suffered trauma from a bad experience like a robbery or the loss of a family member.



COPING by Kevon Weekes



Process of Healing

BY JOEL HENRY

INSOMNIA by Kevon Weekes

"Sometimes you get high achieving students that are coping well all the time and then some personal catastrophe happens, which can derail them a bit," explains Dr Chin Yuen Kee.

Though emotional or mental issues often manifest in the young adult years, they are not guaranteed to be solved or go away within that time frame. Jane, a mature student, has been dealing with anxiety and panic disorder for two decades. Pursuing her graduate degree in History while also teaching full-time and giving lessons, she has found therapy "very helpful".

"This was not my first time speaking to a counsellor," says Jane. "I had previously seen one talk therapist years ago. However, the approach my therapist uses was very different and very helpful. It gave me a more rational and empowering approach to my mental health. And her more clinical way of looking at my 'issues' gave me such needed perspective while also trying to teach me to look at them like that in the future."

She adds, "The experience was so great and so needed. I often go back to my notes from those sessions in times of extreme panic/anxiety to ground myself."

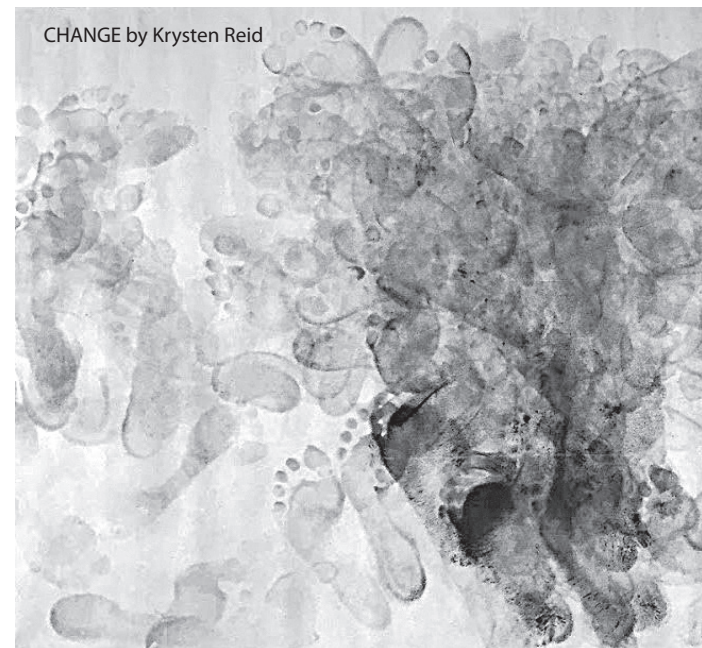
Like both Prashaanta and Jane, Devi has been helped through therapy at CAPS, saying the experience assisted her in no longer "invalidating [her] own experiences" and in recognising her own self-worth.

"It also showed me how effective and important having a game plan is, and that slow progress towards the type of life that I want to live is still progress. I learnt new coping mechanisms and how to self-regulate my emotions, which is really helpful in my day-to-day life."

Services for students

CAPS is part of UWI St Augustine's Division of Student Services and Development (DSSD), the campus body responsible for student life and well-being. Sharing a space with the Health Services Unit (HSU) in a picturesque pocket away from much of the foot traffic, the Department has a handful of therapists and an administrative staff of one.

Apart from counselling, they offer programmes like Mindful Mondays (an hour-long open session for students



CHANGE by Krysten Reid

and staff focused on managing stress and taking part in meditation) and Safe Space (a gathering for members of the LGBTQ community and their allies). And although CAPS is mainly a resource for students, they also provide training for staff to help them identify students in distress as well as to assist them.

For students, CAPS offers a co-curricular course in peer counselling.

“We really try to educate students across the board to help each other,” says Dr Chin Yuen Kee. “We carry out many adjunct activities that are really about trying to increase mental health across campus.”

The campus, however, has been very different since March of 2020. Since then, UWI St Augustine, like all educational institutions in Trinidad and Tobago, has been closed to protect students from the COVID-19 pandemic. This has had a dramatic effect on the workings of CAPS and the students they serve.

“While COVID made my school life easier, it made my home life a lot harder,” says Prashaanta. I was day in and day out in my pajamas, feeling sad because I had to constantly be cooped up in my home. My perfect schedules were destroyed and I lost my sense of stability in life.”

As someone whose emotional challenges were family-related, being house-bound meant she had no refuge:

“I had no schedule, no one to bond with, and this led to a few months of constant depression. It became so bad I started using sleep as a form of escape from my life.”

Dr Chin Yuen Kee pointed to the role UWI plays in many students’ lives as an oasis from dysfunctional situations at home, as well as a place for much-needed socialisation.

“Whether you are in a difficult family environment, whether you are trying to work remotely, or deal with the uncertainties of university life, you also have less access to support, less access to recreation, and also to your friends,” she says.

Jane says the “lack of structure and routine has impacted my mental health and I started experiencing panic attacks and physical anxiety symptoms again”. She also points to its effects on her own students, as well as the added burden of economic uncertainty.

Although CAPS has no statistical data on the impact of COVID on students across campus, they do have statistics on student visits to CAPS. The data they have collected reveals a concerning indicator—the number of clients with suicidal thoughts. Before the lockdown, about 20 to 24 percent of clients reported such thoughts. Now?

“As of September 2020 to early June 2021, it’s 53 percent,” says Dr Chin Yuen Kee. “We have at least one in two students who are reaching out to us requiring some kind of check-in.”



CAPS is doing their best to be proactive in meeting the students’ needs, especially in this time of isolation and instability. Dr Chin Yuen Kee advises people to pay more attention to how they are feeling and what they are thinking.



THE ONSET by Kevon Weekes



AWARENESS OF POWER by Ariel Baptiste

Compassion and patience for the self

Although the move to remote working has taken some adjusting, there are positives for CAPS.

“The sessions online are fine. Therapy actually works really well online,” says Dr Chin Yuen Kee.

In fact, virtual therapy has worked so well that she is considering incorporating it in the services they offer. Apart from the convenience for counsellor and client, it also allows CAPS to overcome the limitations in physical space for their five therapists to work.

There were some initial issues with the administrative aspect of their work which have been mostly fixed. The one big concern is being able to respond quickly to students in need of a check-in.

CAPS is doing their best to be proactive in meeting the students’ needs, especially in this time of isolation and instability. Dr Chin Yuen Kee advises people to pay more attention to how they are feeling and what they are thinking.

“Even pre-COVID, we have not been great at thinking about emotional health. We think about physical health. Nobody is forgetting to brush their teeth. But nobody checks in with how they are doing. What’s my energy level like? What’s my mood?” she says.

Her recommendations include remembering to relax and take part in recreation, exercise, eat well, and enforce boundaries with hours of work. Above all, she advocates for being kinder to ourselves:

“A lot more compassion and patience for ourselves is key. Your motivation and focus may not be what they used to be.”

If that’s not enough, there is also therapy. All three students have had very positive experiences with CAPS and highly recommend counselling.

“You really can’t keep everything bottled up inside,” says Devi. “Counselling, at least the way that I experienced it, is a safe space to air your thoughts and process your emotions. There is absolutely nothing selfish or shameful about seeking help if you need it.”

■ If you are a current student of UWI St Augustine in need of counselling or would like more information on CAPS and the services they provide, visit them online at <https://sta.uwi.edu/dssd/counselling>, or email them at counsellor@sta.uwi.edu.

■ UWI IN SOCIETY

Minder of Minds

Dr Katija Khan works to help Caribbean society through COVID-19's psychosocial toll

BY ZAHRA GORDON



For Dr Katija Khan, COVID-19 is more than a national crisis. It's a call to action. A clinical psychologist and lecturer at The UWI St Augustine's Faculty of Medical Sciences, she is acutely aware of the toll that the pandemic has taken on the mental and emotional health of people throughout the Caribbean. She sees her role to assist those in need not only as her job, but as her duty.

"I am very fortunate to have had a stable salary from The UWI throughout the pandemic and I believe those of us who have this privilege and are managing to cope better, have a moral imperative to help those that are struggling; to sacrifice what we can, where we can and when we can to help others get through this pandemic," Dr Khan says.

One way of doing so is to take part in a region-wide effort to shepherd the Caribbean through the crisis, and take part in our recovery efforts. As such, she has brought her scholarship and expertise to The UWI COVID-19 Task Force.

Dr Khan, whose research interests include disaster mental health, neuropsychology, and cognitive psychology among others, has been able to get through the pandemic relatively unharmed. This is not the case for many in Trinidad and Tobago, who have been grappling with the consequences of a second lockdown due to the surge of COVID-19 cases. These consequences are not only financial, but have an impact on the collective mental health of the population.

In 2020, the Ministry of Finance distributed more than 85,000 salary relief grants to retrenched citizens. During this most recent lockdown, which began in April, 2021, the Ministry allocated an additional \$30 million for retrenchment. Meanwhile, World Bank data estimates that the unemployment rate in T&T jumped from 3.46 percent in 2019 to 6.74 percent in 2020.

In a recent study, the American Psychological Association found that unemployment was linked to anxiety, depression and loss of satisfaction in life. The study also found that underemployment and job instability have caused distress for those not counted as unemployed. Overall, the study concluded that lengthy periods of unemployment were detrimental to both mental and physical health and amounted to psychological and financial trauma.



Dr Katija Khan

Dr Khan, through a community survey conducted with collaborators from the Psychiatry Unit and Public Health Unit of the Faculty of Medical Sciences and PAHO, found that since the onset of the pandemic, 17 percent of adults had depression scores and 27 percent had anxiety scores in the moderate to severe range. Men and women were equally affected, while young people scored higher than their older counterparts. These results could be linked to the ongoing economic instability.

The pandemic has demonstrated the need for increased access to public mental health care, according to Dr Khan:

"While only some persons' physical health has been affected, everyone has had their mental health affected in some way during the pandemic, especially given the length of time. Common impacts have been increases in anxiety, depression and stress symptoms. So, while the pandemic has brought mental health to the fore, I still think there is a greater need for increased public access to free, high quality mental health services, especially during this time to mitigate against pandemic stress turning into or exacerbating existing mental health problems."

While dealing with the effects of the pandemic personally, Dr Khan sees her work both as a lecturer and with the task force not merely as a job, but part of her advocacy. On a personal level, she has also had to employ habits to preserve her own wellbeing.

"Like many others, the reduced physical interaction with family and friends and restrictions from outdoor activities took a toll on my own mental health and I have had to ensure that I practice what I preach as a psychologist by employing good coping strategies and self-care," she says, adding that, "Professionally, while I miss seeing my students, colleagues and patients face-to-face, working remotely has allowed me to widen access and further develop my technical skills to be a more savvy and virtually competent lecturer, presenter and clinician."

Her workload has increased since being appointed to the task force in March last year, as she maintains her class schedule while conducting research into the psychosocial impact of the pandemic on different groups such as university students, staff and young adults. As a member of the Psychosocial Unit, her work also includes participating in numerous communication outreach programmes, and leading training and psychoeducational interventions aimed at helping people through the pandemic.

This type of work has cemented her commitment to advocacy and prompted her to call on others to do the same.

"For those of us who have enough financial and psychosocial resources, there are many lessons that could be learnt from the pandemic that can help us emerge stronger and more resilient. However, for those who were already vulnerable, pandemic-induced poverty and digital poverty will only widen the existing inequities in our societies."

She continues: "For these citizens and children, the situation is dire and our pandemic response has to be the empathetic, practical and responsive rising tide that lifts all boats; not just those in our immediate bubbles, but those who have been affected the most and those that need help the most. Our mental health affects so much of who we are, our interactions and our quality of life."

■ If you are in need of mental health or psychosocial support, the Ministry of Health of Trinidad and Tobago has established a free online resource to help. Visit **FindcareTT.com**

HEALTH

THE ECONOMIC COST of Excessive Sugary Beverage Consumption

Findings for Trinidad and Tobago

BY DR KIMBERLY-ANN GITTENS-BAYNES

Obesity is a worldwide epidemic. Many factors contribute to its constant increase. Two of these are unhealthy eating habits and a lack of exercise. Sugary beverage intake is a main source of calories with high sugar content and no other nutrients. Research has that excessive consumption of such drinks increases the risks of obesity, diabetes, cardiac conditions, cerebrovascular and musculoskeletal disorders, renal failure, dementias, asthma, and cancer.

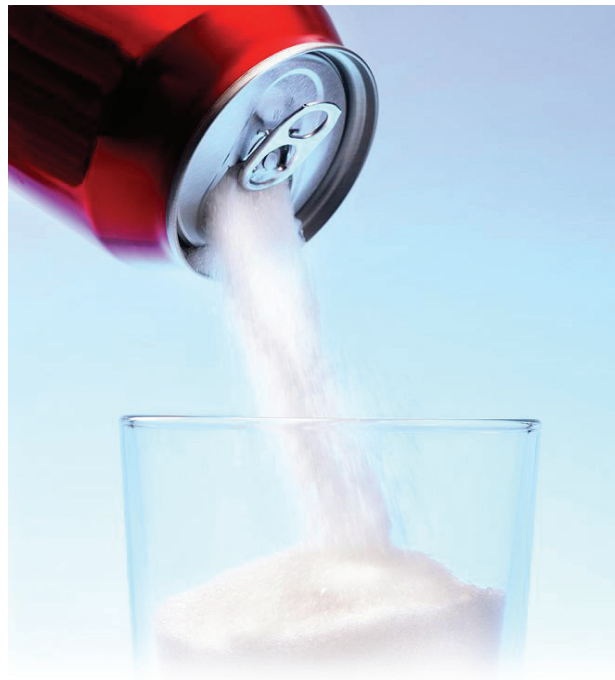
The UWI HEU, Centre for Health Economics, in collaboration with the Institute for Clinical Effectiveness and Health Policy (IECS) in Argentina, was involved in a research project with the main objective of supporting decision-makers in the implementation of sugar-sweetened beverage control policies by generating country-level, evidence-based knowledge. Funded by the International Development Research Centre, the project is entitled, “Empowering Healthcare Decision-makers to achieve Regional Needs for Sugar-sweetened Beverages Consumption Control in Latin America and the Caribbean”.

The first project activity was a two-day regional policy dialogue coordinated by IECS, which took place in May 2018 in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The workshop brought together 35 participants from Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) countries. Participants included representatives from the research teams from each of the four study countries (Argentina, Brazil, El Salvador, and Trinidad and Tobago), as well as decision-makers, academicians, civil society representatives, and strategic partners from the LAC region.

Presentations were delivered by country representatives from each study country, who detailed policy measures implemented to reduce the excessive consumption of sugar sweetened beverages. Participants from Trinidad and Tobago included representatives from the HEU, Centre for Health Economics, the Ministry of Health, and the Trinidad and Tobago Non-Communicable Diseases Alliance/The Diabetes Association of Trinidad and Tobago.

A key output of the workshop was participants’ identification of priority interventions and perceived barriers to implementing new, and enforcing existing interventions, in each study country. They also discussed the main information needs that an economic model should satisfy to be useful to policy-makers.

The second component of the study involved estimating



387 deaths in Trinidad and Tobago may be associated with the excessive consumption of sugary beverages and 9,000 years of healthy life are lost due to premature death and disability.

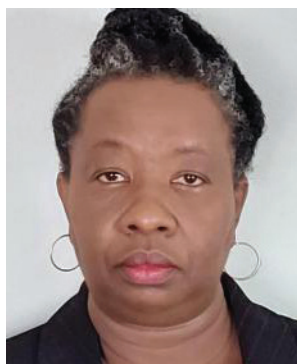
the burden of disease and costs associated with the excessive consumption of sugary beverages in the four study countries, building on the information needs identified in the regional policy dialogue. Part of the research work was carried out in 2020 by investigators and healthcare decision-makers at universities, research centres, and public institutions from Argentina (IECS), Brazil (ACT Promoção da Saúde), El Salvador (Ministry of Health) and Trinidad and Tobago (The UWI HEU, Centre for Health Economics). The results of this study were obtained by using a mathematical model developed by the research team. The model allowed for estimating the probability of being overweight, suffering from disease, or death due to diabetes and different conditions associated with the excessive consumption of sugary drinks.

Results for Trinidad and Tobago show that excessive consumption of sugary beverages is associated with increases in diseases, deaths and rising healthcare costs. Utilising 2020 estimates, the model estimated that every year, 387 deaths in Trinidad and Tobago may be associated with the excessive consumption of sugary beverages and 9,000 years of healthy life are lost due to premature death and disability.

Further, study estimates showed that approximately TT\$156 million was spent in the public healthcare system to treat diseases associated with excessive consumption of sugary beverages. This was roughly 1.37 percent of Trinidad and Tobago’s yearly investment in healthcare. Of this amount, approximately TT\$13 million was estimated for the treatment of overweight and obesity (in childhood, adolescence and adulthood for both sexes). The majority, TT\$143 million, was associated with the treatment of diabetes, cardiovascular and renal disease, musculoskeletal disorders, cancer and other conditions, which may be associated with the excessive consumption of sugary drinks.

In line with the study objectives, the researchers are hopeful that the study results will raise awareness about the potential impact of excessive sugar consumption on both the health system and the economy.

■ More information on the study results is available at: <https://sta.uwi.edu/fss/heu/fiscal-policy-taxation-sin-taxes> and www.iecs.org.ar/sugar



Dr Althea La Foucade



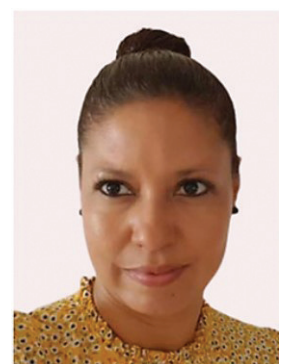
Ms Vyjanti Beharry



Mr Samuel Gabriel

Dr Kimberly-Ann
Gittens-Baynes

Dr Christine Laptiste



Ms Charmaine Metivier

The UWI HEU, Centre for Health Economics project research team was led by HEU Director Dr Althea La Foucade, and consisted of Ms Vyjanti Beharry, Mr Samuel Gabriel, Dr Kimberly-Ann Gittens-Baynes, Dr Christine Laptiste and Ms Charmaine Metivier.

SPORT

The University of the West Indies is in the midst of a renaissance of sport. Many of the Caribbean's top sports people attend one of its campuses, where they train and compete to hone their abilities for competition at all levels. The UWI itself has teams in sports like cricket and football. At St Augustine, the campus hosts sporting events, including The UWI International Half-Marathon, one of the top races of its kind in the Caribbean.

If there's one initiative that best signifies how important sport is to the university, it is the establishment of the Faculty of Sport.

"On 1 August 2017, The UWI established the Faculty of Sport, its newest faculty in over 40 years," says Dr Akshai Mansingh, Dean of the faculty, "to underscore the new thinking at the institution about the importance of sport and sport studies in the 21st century."

That quote is taken from the first chapter in a recently published book titled *Sport Matters: View from The UWI Faculty of Sport*. *Sport Matters*, a collection of columns written by staff and affiliates of the faculty, is edited by Emeritus Professor of Literatures in English, Funso Aiyejina, Head of The UWI St Augustine Academy of Sport. The column is carried in the *Trinidad and Tobago Guardian*.

"It was a labour of love," says Professor Aiyejina, who is best known as a poet, writer, academic and contributor to the literary life of the region.

The Faculty of Sport is unique in The UWI system as it is the only multi-campus faculty. Based at The UWI Regional Headquarters in Jamaica, it is represented on all campuses through Academies of Sport, which function like departments in a faculty. It's a new structure, for a new faculty, to make a new foray into an area that has the potential to not only nurture generations of athletes that can compete on the world stage, but also unlock new economic opportunities.

In his introduction to the anthology, Professor Aiyejina quotes UWI Vice-Chancellor Professor Sir Hilary Beckles, who states that sport is "one industry that we can develop right now to diversify our economies and make our economies competitive".

From its founding, there has been a deep interest in sport at The UWI. Sport was seen as a component for developing a more complete graduate who could take on the role of developing the region. In a message written in the *Pelican Annual 1966*, UWI's Guild of Students publication, cricket legend and Dean of Students Sir Frank Worrell states that the University Games Committee had ten "recognised West Indian sports".

However, he lamented that, "the university has not quite succeeded in bringing out the wealth of [sporting] talent that abounds on campus," and concludes, "One can advance a thousand and one theories on this disappointing state of affairs. The most reasonable, I think, is that the West Indian student has not been able to strike the mean between his mental and physical exertions."

Field of Play

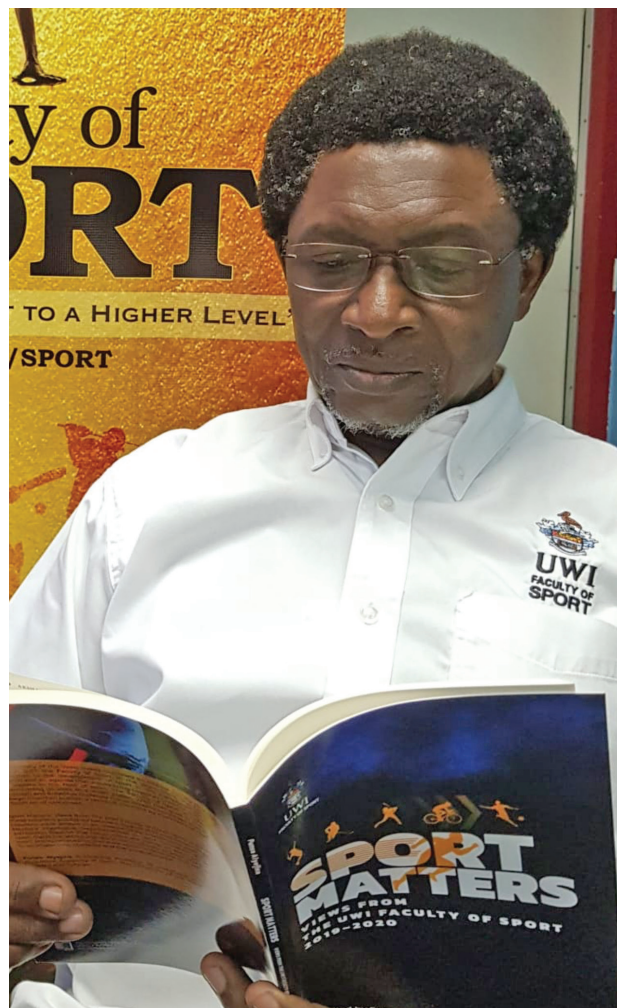
Now, it's a new day for sport at The UWI. The Faculty of Sport offers a host of programmes at the certificate, undergraduate and graduate level. These include, among many others, Sport Coaching, Sport Medicine, the UWI/FIFA/CIES Diploma in Sports Management, and the MPhil/PhD in Sport. Initiatives like the *Sport Matters* column (and now book) are very important in creating the environment for the new professionals that the university is producing.

"For sport to thrive," says Professor Aiyejina, "there must be effective communication within and between its ecosystems of athletes, coaches, administrators, medical teams, facilitators, supporters, and the like."

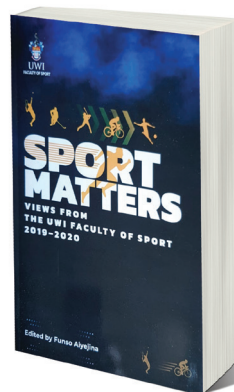
The anthology covers columns that ran from August 2019 to December 2020, and look at themes like sport policy, injuries and their prevention, drug use, racism in sport, keeping fit, and of course the overall development of the sector. COVID-19, its impact and strategies for mitigating its risk, is the subject of several of the articles.

Sharing the STORY of SPORT

BY JOEL HENRY



■ For more information and to purchase **Sport Matters: Views from The UWI Faculty of Sport 2019-2020** visit The UWI Press website at <https://www.uwipress.com/>



Professor Aiyejina says the book is the product of many people beyond the writers and editor. These include the *Trinidad and Tobago Guardian*, Dean Mansingh, the wider Faculty of Sport team, and The UWI Press.

Sport Matters is a quick and informative read, surprisingly entertaining (even for people who may not be particularly interested in sports). It also serves, in a way, as a record of a movement towards a new paradigm in education, and potentially, industry. A half a century from now, writers and historians may look back, the same way we can look back today at the writings of Sir Frank, at the emergence of our Caribbean sporting renaissance.

'The Experience has been Wonderful'



Emeritus Professor
Funso Aiyejina

On July 31, Professor Aiyejina left the post of Head of the St Augustine Academy of Sport. He was its first head, taking up the position in 2018. At the end of his first year at the helm, The UWI Vice-Chancellor's report to the University Council for 2018/2019 said Aiyejina's institutional knowledge "has assisted immensely in shaping the structure of that academy".

Professor Aiyejina was a senior administrator at UWI St Augustine for many years until his retirement in 2014 as Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Education. With no background in sport, he approached his role at the St Augustine Academy of Sport as an organisational leader.

"I am just a sport enthusiast," says Professor Aiyejina. "I cannot qualify for the last 11 in my family of four! Luckily, my job as the Head of the Academy of Sport was, in the main, to administer the Academy on a day-to-day basis, walk the programmes (designed by subject matter specialists) through campus and university approval processes, coordinate academic and outreach activities, represent the Faculty of Sport on campus committees, and design an administrative structure to take the academy forward."

Though the inherent challenges of establishing a brand new academy for a new faculty was compounded by the destabilising effects of the pandemic, he is extremely positive about the experience:

"The experience has been wonderful. The staff at the academy, from cleaners through grounds men to administrative and technical assistants, are very dedicated and they work well under pressure, as was demonstrated when we part-hosted the CPL T20 Tournament in 2020. They reaffirmed my core belief that once you treat people as people, they will treat you as a person in return."

Now that the foundation has been secured, what are Professor Aiyejina's hopes for the Faculty of Sport and sport in general for the region?

"The Faculty of Sport has staff and affiliates who are committed to teaching, research and outreach for the development of the Caribbean," he says. "The leadership of the Faculty is progressive, passionate, and humane. The Faculty's policy of cross-campus teaching affirms the need to, no matter their home campus, give our graduates a global UWI experience. The quantum of articles on Sport and COVID-19 in *Sport Matters* underscores the interventionist, public intellectualist ideology of the Faculty and a clear rejection of an ivory tower mentality."

■ UWI IN SOCIETY

Throughout history, positive change is often spurred by the youth. Young people have enormous potential for dynamism, courage, resilience, compassion, and the ability to conceptualise a better world. UWI St Augustine is lead coordinator of a European Union-funded project created to unleash the energy of the emerging generation by giving them a voice on a host of issues of community and universal importance.

Entitled “Youth Speak UP”, the project, which is also intended to strengthen the capacity of civil society organisations (CSOs) to participate in matters that impact migrants and displaced persons, was launched late last year and is expected to run for two and a half years.

Speaking on The UWI’s motivation to become involved with the project, Professor Indar Ramnarine, Deputy Principal of UWI St Augustine, said at a recent virtual launch event that “The UWI is an activist university committed to building capacity to create positive change in this region”.

He added that, “We are all aware of the wide and varied challenges created by the rapidly evolving physical, social, and economic environment. There is no doubt that, in the present and in the future, we need persons who are adequately equipped to successfully navigate our societies and challenges therein. While we cannot predict the future, we can prepare those who will be around to lead in the future.”

Youth Speak UP is being implemented by the Office of the Deputy Principal along with three partner organisations — the Rotary Club of St Augustine, youth-focused NGO Jabulous, and the Coalition Against Domestic Violence. The EU is providing funding of 275,000 euros for the execution of the project. Each of the three co-applicants has lead responsibility for one of its core components.

Since its launch in November 2020, Youth Speak UP has attracted 186 participants so far, representing the various identities that make up T&T. The programme is open to young people between the ages of 16 and 29. They will receive training to become leaders and advocates, all to further the positive transformation of society.

Speaking at the virtual ceremony, Mr Sanjin Soldatic, Charge d’Affaires at the EU Delegation to Trinidad and Tobago, said, the EU considers engagement with youth a key dimension for their international partnerships agenda.

“The mandate is that youth should not only be one of our main target groups for EU actions, but also should be an EU dialogue partner in their own right. The ultimate objective being to ensure that the voices of young people are heard and taken into account in public life and in the decision-making processes,” said Mr Soldatic.

Participants of Youth Speak UP will take part in sessions in what the project calls “core areas”. These include knowledge and information sessions (already underway), training in information and communications technology and the use of social media, leadership and advocacy training, and community engagement projects.

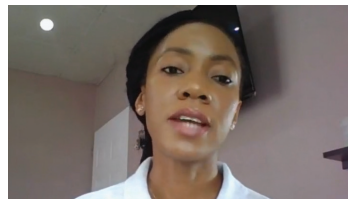
The knowledge and information session, which is currently in its third cycle, covers topics like the history of the youth movement in

YOUTH SPEAK UP

gives a voice to the future



Professor Indar Ramnarine



Ms Raysha Purcell



Mr Sanjin Soldatic



Ms Lynette Joseph-Brown



T&T, migration, social and child protection, understanding legislation and policy, and project planning and development, among others. Facilitators for the presentation of these topics are drawn from a wide range of experts.

President of the Rotary Club of St Augustine Mr Krishna Boodhai said his organisation’s support for Youth Speak UP was in keeping with Rotary Club International’s vision statement: “Together we see a world where people unite and take action to create lasting change across the globe, in our communities, and in ourselves.”

Mrs Sabrina Mowlah-Baksh, General Manager of the Coalition Against Domestic Violence, speaking on the importance of youth, said, “the earlier we can shape minds to appreciate the value of gender equality, the greater the chance to foster respectful and healthier relationships. This is why we are so excited about the Youth Speak UP project.”

Her sentiment was shared by CEO and Founder of Jabulous Salorne McDonald, who said his organisation understood the importance of “harnessing youth”.

“Youth culture, youth innovation, and youth energy,” said Mr McDonald, “and giving youth the opportunity to develop and hone those skills”, is the focus of Jabulous.

Project Manager of Youth Speak UP, Lynette Joseph-Brown, explained that the proposal was written with face-to-face delivery in mind. However, the emergence of the COVID

pandemic a few months before its start led to a reconceptualisation of the project for full online delivery.

This had its drawbacks but also quite a few benefits. According to Ms Joseph-Brown, “we were able to reallocate project funds for the development of outputs which will provide a greater foundation for sustainability when the project is officially over.”

These outputs included recordings of the knowledge and information sessions, as well as content created with the guidance of specialists in online computer technology training from UWI’s School of Education. A learning management system was developed and maintained by ClicktoStart, the NGO responsible for delivering the ICT and social media training.

“I believe that it is truly going to create a cultural shift in Trinidad and Tobago,” says Assistant Manager of the project, Ms Raysha Purcell. “It brings together different genders, different ethnicities, people that reside in different districts within T&T, all coming together into this one virtual space where they are going to be trained to raise their voices and say, ‘Hey, these are my concerns. What is in place that can assist our communities?’ They will emerge as the leaders and advocates that they are destined to become.”

■ For more information on Youth Speak Up, visit <https://sta.uwi.edu/youthspeakup/>

■ ARTS

NGC Bocas Lit Fest, the Caribbean's ultimate celebration of literature, was held in April of this year despite the gruelling toll of the COVID-19 pandemic and the isolation it has required. The literary festival took place mainly through the screens of computers, phones and other digital devices. Nevertheless, through readings, open mic performances, film, and conversations with recognised and emerging creators, Bocas captured the essential intimacy of the literary arts.

Among the winners at this year's festival was UWI graduate (Mona Campus) Desirée Seebaran, who took the 2021 Johnson and Amoy Achong Caribbean Writers Prize (JAAWP), the region's only prize for emerging writers. Full disclosure, I've known Desirée for many years. We are more professional acquaintances than close friends, both operating in the space between creative and corporate work. She was the friendly but reserved digital professional. Imagine my surprise to read work like this:

*You are 30 and too late: picong blisters
the wrong side of your skin: black & ugly.*

*Like iron screwed to ship's hull, the timber
twisting cold metal into sin, black & ugly.*

*Your face is a mask: eyes shuttered,
calabash cheeks and dark skin—black & ugly.*

*The chorus leaps to your lips like prayer,
a torrent of tongues that sing, "Black & ugly."*

It's an excerpt from her powerful piece, *Picong*, printed in UK magazine *Wasafiri*. The poem won her the Queen Mary Wasafiri New Writing Prize in 2019, a massive accomplishment for any up and coming writer or poet. The prize is part of a trajectory that includes participation in the Cropper Foundation Residential Workshop for Writers, shortlisting of her work in both the Small Axe Literary Competition and the Frontier Poetry Award for New Poets Contest, and now JAAWP.

"My close friends prepared me for it mentally this time," says Desirée about her win at Bocas, "so I wasn't as shocked as with the Queen Mary Wasafiri prize. "Not that they had inside info; they just believed in me a great deal and I am grateful for that support. It's always an honour and very uplifting to have your work recognised."

She adds, "I'm especially grateful that this prize will give me the resources to continue and complete a collection that hopefully will be published."

The JAAWP is sponsored by philanthropist and medical practitioner Dr Kongshiek Achong Low, and is dedicated to (and named after) his parents. The prize includes US\$3000, as well as a trip to the UK for an intensive writing course at Arvon Foundation, mentorship with an established author, and opportunities to meet editors, publishers and a literary agent. While she hasn't been able to leave the country because of the pandemic travel restrictions, Desirée is still very enthusiastic about what is to come.

"Bocas and Arvon have been really proactive in planning different courses of action, so I'm not worried. It will come at the right time and right way," she says.

Desirée grew up (and still lives) in east Trinidad. "I love being able to randomly buy mangoes at the side of the road wherever," she laughs. She's married and has one child, with another on the way. She studied journalism at the Caribbean Institute of Media and Communication (CARIMAC) at UWI Mona, and works mainly in marketing and communications, focusing specifically on digital and social media.



In Her Own Corner

Poet Desirée Seebaran wins at Bocas Lit Fest

BY JOEL HENRY



"It's a good fit for a journalist who realised she wanted more creative control and more money, and it pays the bills," she says.

Interestingly, last year's JAAWP winner was also a CARIMAC graduate, Amanda Choo Quan. When asked if UWI had helped her develop as a writer, Desirée responds:

"All the other electives I did were literature courses. I had the opportunity to study with brilliant people like Prof Eddie Baugh, Prof Mervyn Morris, Dr Victor Chang and Dr Michael Bucknor. I didn't just study poetry, but drama and fiction too. The literature courses at The UWI were beautifully balanced between the traditionalists and Caribbean/African literature, so we got a really broad perspective on what is considered 'canon' internationally and also built a strong idea of our own canon right here in the Caribbean and diaspora. Dr Bucknor taught Dionne Brand's *No Language is Neutral*, which was pivotal in pushing me to start writing poetry more seriously."

UWI St Augustine's Funso Aiyejina, Professor Emeritus and renowned author, was chief judge for the JAAWP. At the virtual prize giving, Aiyejina, who is one of the founders of the Bocas Lit Fest, described Desirée's work as having a "confident tone and sensitive exploration of gender and culture". The winning poet, he said, was "witty, evocative, and challenges orthodoxy".

Her work won against a field of 35 submissions from eight Caribbean countries.

Speaking on the value of the literary festival, Desirée says, "Bocas has been staunchly committed to providing writers that space and support, as well as building community, in many different ways and forms. I can't say enough about what they do, and this is not even taking into account the prize. Just the

opportunity to sit and hear rich discussion on new work, regional literary concerns, or Caribbean cultural influences, or hear from writers who get the Caribbean context and the themes that thread their way through our work... it's been invaluable to my growth and the growth of others."

She also has praise for the Cropper Foundation for "the work they do in creating space for writers as well". The JAAWP winner is hoping that The UWI will make a similar investment in Caribbean writers.

"The resources are there, the experts are there, the organisational memory is there, the library is there! How is The UWI building the canon of Caribbean literature? By all means, let us honour the Derek Walcotts, Kamau Brathwaite, Earl Lovelaces, Mervyn Morris and Eddie Baughs. But what is the University doing to spark the writing career of a new cadre of pioneers and give them the room to develop and grow and write?"

Still, despite the challenges emerging writers face, Desirée is encouraging both in her advice and example. She recommends that writers "find a community".

"It doesn't have to be large. I have maybe two or three other writers who I trust and bounce things off of," she says. "But most of us need that."

She also recommends workshops through Bocas, the Arvon Foundation or other reputable organisation. Still, she knows that at heart writing is about the writer and the page:

"You have to be committed to your own work and your own growth, no matter how slow. You need to be in your own corner. The literary world can be just like any other industry, so bet on yourself as [actor and performer] Billy Porter said. And read as voraciously and as widely as you can."

RESEARCH

Dismissed by many as mere “drainfish”, guppies have long been held in high esteem by the global scientific community for their ability to reveal insights into many aspects of biology – from medicine and genetics to evolution and ecology.

A new study in the prestigious journal, *Ecology*, represents yet another example of how research on Trinidad’s humble guppy can provide valuable insights towards answering important questions. In this case: Why do some introduced species succeed where most fail? How can a species successfully invade in one location yet fail in another?

These questions are pressing ones as invasive species are one of the greatest threats to biodiversity, causing devastating economic as well as ecological damage across the globe.

The guppy (*Poecilia reticulata*) is native here in Trinidad and Tobago, but is a notorious invasive species outside of its natural habitat. Once established, guppies can cause damage to ecosystems by outcompeting native species for food and space and, in some cases, eating their eggs and young. Thanks to its popularity as a pet and as a mosquito control agent, it enjoys an introduced range that spans six continents and more than 70 countries.

Despite this remarkable success, there are notable places where guppies seem unable to establish despite ample opportunity. One such anomaly is Florida.

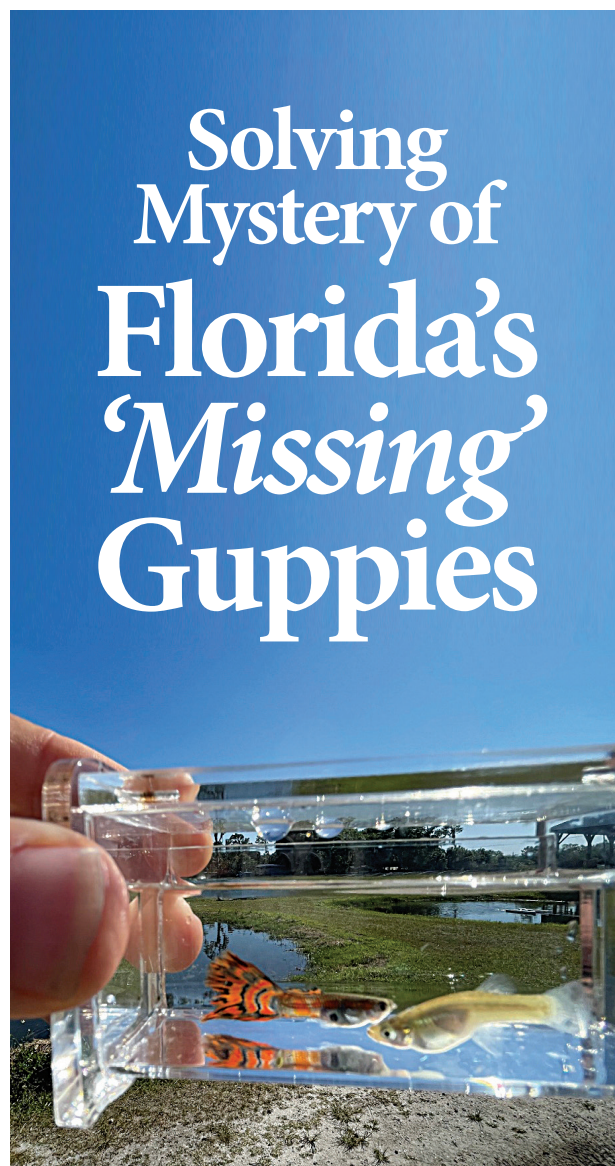
Guppies have been bred commercially in outdoor ponds in Southern Florida for decades, with frequent escape opportunities, and they should be well-suited to the climate. What’s more, Florida is famously susceptible to invasion by tropical invasive freshwater fish. Thus, the persistent absence of guppies from Florida’s waterways has long represented a puzzle to fish experts.

A team, led by Dr Quenton Tuckett from the University of Florida’s Tropical Aquaculture Laboratory (an expert on non-native fish) and Dr Amy Deacon of The UWI’s Department of Life Sciences (an expert on guppies), set out to solve this mystery.

Dr Deacon explained: “We recreated typical ditch habitats in artificial containers, and followed the fate of introduced guppies under various conditions.”

The results confirmed the suspicions of many – that one of Florida’s native fish species, the mosquitofish (*Gambusia holbrooki*) provides “biotic resistance” – in other words, the presence of mosquitofish prevented guppy establishment. “Guppies thrived in the containers when on their own, but always failed in the presence of even low densities of mosquitofish,” reported Dr Deacon.

The team then tried to get to the bottom of precisely *how* the mosquitofish were impacting the guppies so dramatically by observing the behaviour



The battle of the drainfishes: although exceptionally good at establishing in places outside of Trinidad, our guppies (above) have failed to colonise Florida thanks to small but aggressive native mosquitofish (below). PHOTO: QUENTON TUCKETT

Solving Mystery of Florida’s ‘Missing’ Guppies

of the two species in aquarium tanks in the laboratory.

These trials revealed that mosquitofish were extremely aggressive towards adult guppies, causing serious fin damage.

Further experiments demonstrated that mosquitofish readily consumed young guppies, preventing population growth. Interestingly, guppies also fed on mosquitofish fry, but their smaller mouths meant that young mosquitofish quickly grew too large to be eaten.

These findings are consistent with predictions based on this ecological theory: two species that prey upon each other are unlikely to be able to coexist for very long as one will always have the edge and eventually force the other out. However, this is the first time that biotic resistance between two strongly-interacting species has actually been demonstrated to be the cause of a failed invasion.

A huge amount of effort goes into studying successful invaders, what allows them to succeed and how we can minimise the damage they cause. In contrast, failed introductions, despite being much more common, are rarely studied or even documented. “These failed introductions often go unnoticed, yet they offer valuable insights into what determines the success of an introduction,” explains lead author Dr Tuckett.

In this case, the guppy’s failed attempt to put down roots in Florida shows us that species’ interactions can sometimes be more critical to invasion success than more commonly considered factors, such as a suitable climate or the number of fish released. And, rather than being unique, the guppy-mosquitofish system may be just one of many where this is the case.

In Florida, where invasive species cost the state US\$45 million per year, this work has immediate implications for invasive species management. Dr Tuckett says, “[A]lthough highly invasive on paper, the reality seems to be that guppies pose very little threat to places like Florida where another species consistently prevents their establishment.”

Dr Deacon adds, “It is exciting to discover yet another way in which Trinidad’s guppies can offer vital insights into real world problems.” She expects that this work will encourage invasion biologists and policy makers to consider how a potential invader might interact with the native fish community and how this impacts the level of risk posed.

“In some instances, it might give us cause for concern – for example, if there is no species capable of ‘pushing-back’ – while, in others, it may provide reassurance that however hard it tries, a particular exotic species is unlikely to spread and cause a problem.” Thankfully, this seems to be the case for Florida’s “missing” guppies.

■ CAMPUS NEWS

UWI St Augustine HELPS GET T&T VACCINATED



UWI St Augustine has held a COVID-19 vaccination drive for students, staff, and the general public. The exercise began on Monday, July 19 at the campus' vaccination centre at the University Inn and Conference Centre. Vaccinations were open to the public the following day. The vaccines were allocated by the Ministry of Health.

"UWI has joined the ranks of other professional organisations and civil society groups to launch mass vaccination drives alongside the national vaccination drive, all with the same aim: getting our citizens vaccinated," said Deputy Principal Professor Indar Ramnarine.

In June, the St Augustine Campus began offering vaccines to medical students so that they could continue their training and join frontline medical staff.

"I want to say thank you to the members of our community who have already chosen to get vaccinated. Globally over three billion doses of the COVID-19 vaccine have been administered and UWI St Augustine is committed to doing our part to help get Trinidad and Tobago to a point of safety and comfort," said Professor Ramnarine.

He urged all members of the campus community to get vaccinated:

"When you choose to get vaccinated you are not only protecting yourself but also your families, neighbours, friends and our national community. Many questions have been voiced about the safety and effectiveness of the vaccines, but the shots that are being administered have been found to be effective in reducing the spread of the disease, but more importantly, they are very effective at preventing serious illness and hospitalisation."



PHOTO: VICKY KHADDOO-RAMSINGH

UWI Calendar of Events AUGUST 2021



**The Faculty of Food and Agriculture
100th Anniversary Celebration of
Research and Innovation
August 30**

ONLINE

The Faculty of Food and Agriculture is celebrating its 100th anniversary. This year marks 100 years of agricultural legacy through teaching, research and innovation at The UWI St Augustine Campus. You are invited to the faculty's Centennial Legacy Celebration of Agriculture. The virtual festivities will include the following activities:

August 30 Virtual Launch and Tree Planting
August Webinar
September Montage and Grand Reunion
October Voices of Youth
November Virtual Conference under the theme:
*"Celebrating a Hundred Years of Agricultural Research
 and Innovation: Perspectives on Tropical Food and
 Agricultural Systems"*

For more info and updates, visit the FFA 100th Anniversary site at:
<https://sta.uwi.edu/ffa/100-years-agriculture>



**First Year
Experience (FYE)
2021-2022
August 12-23**

ONLINE

The UWI St Augustine invites all new students to take part in its official student orientation programme, First Year Experience (FYE) 2021-2022. FYE caters to incoming undergraduate and postgraduate students of all sub-groups within the student population, including regional and international students, commuting students, first generation students and students with disabilities and medical conditions. The month-long initiative includes a comprehensive suite of orientation activities geared toward helping new students have a seamless transition into campus life. For the month of August, there is a dynamic programme of events lined up:



**August 12-13
New Student Orientation Launch**
 (first year students across campuses)

FACULTY ORIENTATION

August 18 Engineering
August 18 Social Sciences
August 19 Humanities and Education
August 19 Food and Agriculture
August 20 Science and Technology
August 23 FYE 101 Orientation Course
 (registration opens)

September 1 Law
September 2 Sport
September 6-9 Medical Sciences

For more info and updates on FYE events,
 visit <https://sta.uwi.edu/fye/>