



## UWI/MPA Partner for the Public Service



**Mr Claudelle McKellar, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Public Administration, signs a memorandum of understanding with Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine, UWI St Augustine Campus Principal, while Senator Allyson West, Minister of Public Administration, looks on during a signing ceremony on July 8 at the Office of the Campus Principal. The agreement is for the development of a training programme for Trinidad and Tobago's Public Service that will offer bespoke, demand-driven courses to build their capacity, and drive improvements in service delivery. PHOTO: ANEEL KARIM**





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FROM THE PRINCIPAL

# Getting the Balance Right

In a December 2023 post entitled “The Transformation of Higher Education”, Dr Francesc Pedró, Director of the UNESCO Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (IESALC), states that:

“Higher education changes, yes, but always preserving the continuity of those elements that the academic community itself considers essential and that continue to attract students, at least for the time being.”

He was looking in particular at the forces being brought to bear on institutions of higher learning in the region, the way those institutions adapt to these forces, and the analysis of the sector and its fortunes - whether “messianic” or “exacerbated pessimism” as he describes them.

As we draw closer to Academic Year 2024/2025, it is a good time for all of us at UWI St Augustine to evaluate our own outlook and activities.

Our approach has been one of optimism, not because we disregard the difficulties we face, but because we believe in the capacity of the institution, as well as Caribbean society, to succeed despite the challenges.

Dr Pedró lays out areas of what he calls “progressive evolution” that impact higher education and its providers. These include changing student profiles (including demographic shifts), the structure of educational programmes, and how programmes are taught.

As I have said often, the institution must also play a very prominent developmental role for society, which includes not only education, but research, economic development, policy support, outreach, and information services.

The key is in getting the balance right between performing these functions while increasing our financial strength and self-sufficiency. We must continue to demonstrate our long legacy of bringing value to Caribbean society while also using our creativity, efficiency, and acumen to enhance existing revenue streams and open new ones. The sweet spot is when we can do both at once.

One key area that the campus has been emphasising to bring new business to the campus and at the same time meeting the needs of the changing market is the promotion of Continuing Professional Education (CPE) short courses. All of our faculties are heavily engaged in this initiative, combined with more technologically savvy methodologies and hybrid learning to achieve this new emphasis.

Indeed, this is one of the areas Dr Pedró points to as very relevant for universities. “In Latin America and the Caribbean,” he says, “it is difficult to imagine an educational strategy for the future that does not contemplate the development of lifelong education policies with a leading role for higher education institutions.”

For example, this July, we finalised a partnership with the Ministry of Public Administration to assess the training needs of the public service, and develop and provide demand-focused short courses for them. The programme will begin with a cohort of 3,000 learners with the goal of eventually training 9,000 per year. This exciting venture will adequately support the professional development and capacity-building needs of T&T’s public service.

Yet, even as our campus continues to evolve its strategies for the delivery of educational services to attract new students/clients, it is involved in many other business development activities. Some we have discussed in this message and covered in UWI TODAY before, and others that are equally as exciting and will be revealed soon. We were proud to display some of our innovative scientific products such as our roofing sealants, organic pesticides, and chocolate at the recently concluded Trade and Investment Convention.

On the regional development side, we have entered into several new partnerships, including, most recently, an agreement with the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) to produce the Caribbean’s first catalog of carbon storage sites in depleted oil and gas reservoirs throughout Trinidad and Tobago. This “Carbon Capture Utilisation and Storage Collaborate” (CCUS-C) is part of a national climate change



mitigation plan. It is supported by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, the energy sector, and international partners.

As Campus Principal, I have been greatly pleased by the work of the many campus personnel responsible for bringing these partnerships to fruition, as well as our partners themselves – in government, industry, civil society, and internationally – that have shown such enthusiasm and camaraderie to work together, create new opportunities, and support society.

Undoubtedly, we are in an era of risk and transformation, but the other side of risk is reward, and many wondrous things are the product of transformation. It is my belief that the determining factor of our fate is outlook and ability. And both are in our favour.

*Rose-Marie Antoine*

**Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine**

*Campus Principal*

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■ UNIVERSITY NEWS

## UWI sets up 2024 Disaster Recovery Support Team after Hurricane BERYL



Aftermath of Hurricane Beryl on Union Island, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. CREDITS: © IOM 2024 / J CRICLOW-AUGUSTINE

**The UWI has set up a 2024 Disaster Recovery Support Team** to assist the region in the aftermath of Hurricane Beryl. Vice-Chancellor of The UWI Professor Sir Hilary Beckles has reached out to the governments of countries impacted by the storm to provide support. This assurance comes at a critical time, as the 2024 hurricane season has just begun and is predicted to be very active.

“The intensity of Hurricane Beryl this early in the season is a wake-up call for us to all be aware of the tremendous damage caused by these storms and the significant dislocation and financial and psychological impact that citizens suffer from the loss of loved ones and property,” said Vice-Chancellor Beckles.

He added, “It is our unwavering duty to serve our Caribbean community in times of need.”

Under the leadership of Dr Francis Severin, Pro Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the Global Campus, the university will work closely with the governments to determine their needs so that resources can be mobilised across The UWI system. The support team will also collaborate with the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) to identify other areas in which The UWI can assist Caribbean countries post-disasters.

This initiative reflects the assistance that The UWI has provided to governments in the region in the aftermath of natural disasters in previous years.

**The support team will also collaborate with the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) to identify other areas in which The UWI can assist Caribbean countries post-disasters.**



## CAMPUS NEWS

# UWI and MPA sign historic MOU

## to support the Up-skilling of Public Officers for a Modern Public Service

The Ministry of Public Administration and UWI St Augustine have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to assess the learning and developmental needs of the Trinidad and Tobago Public Service and provide programmes to meet those needs.

The MOU was signed by Permanent Secretary of the Public Administration Ministry Mr Claudelle McKellar, and UWI St Augustine Campus Principal Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine on July 8 at the Office of the Campus Principal. Minister of Public Administration Senator Allyson West, as well as representatives from the Ministries of Public Administration and Education, and The UWI were in attendance at the signing ceremony.

“This partnership between our campus and the Ministry of Public Administration represents a significant step in creating a framework for cooperation and the establishment of a training programme for the public service,” stated Professor Antoine.

A statement from the Ministry of Public Administration said the agreement “will create a framework for the identification and assessment of the learning and development needs of the Trinidad and Tobago Public Service”.

It would also, the statement said, lead “to the development and implementation of bespoke, demand-driven curricula to build the capacity of the Public Service, and foster continuous improvements in service delivery”.

In the first cohort, approximately 3,000 public servants – including junior staff, mid-level managers, and senior executives – are targeted to benefit from these online courses, with the objective being to provide training to 9,000 civil servants in each year of the programme.



FRONT ROW: (From left) Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Public Administration (MPA) Mr Claudelle McKellar, Minister of Public Administration Senator Allyson West, and UWI St Augustine Campus Principal Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine, along with representatives from the campus and MPA. PHOTO: ANEEL KARIM

Participants will benefit from accredited undergraduate and postgraduate courses in subject areas such as Project Management, Policy Development, Leadership and Conflict Management, Public Sector Management, Monitoring and Evaluation, Social Services Management, Business Communication, Digital Literacy, Facilities Management, Public Speaking, and Events Management. The programmes will be facilitated by lecturers from The UWI.

At the signing, Senator West spoke on the importance of these partnerships to deliver service excellence throughout the government.

“The Ministry of Public Administration is here to ensure that the Public Service works well...it’s about fixing what exists, making things better, and continuously improving. We cannot improve the performance of the staff unless we provide them with the required training that facilitates continuous improvement.”

## ‘Just Transition’ the focus at 4<sup>th</sup> UWI Oil and Gas Law Conference

UWI St Augustine’s Faculty of Law held its 4<sup>th</sup> UWI Oil and Gas Law Conference on June 28 and 29, bringing together legal scholars, industry experts, policymakers, and students to address several challenges and opportunities in the energy sector. Most prominent among the topics were the movement to renewable energy, and the mechanisms to ensure that Caribbean society enjoyed equal access through this transition.

“The theme for this year’s conference is ‘Towards a Just Transition’, and it reflects the dynamic and evolving nature of the oil and gas sector,” Dr Alicia Elias-Roberts, Dean of the Faculty of Law, told conference attendees at the Hilton Trinidad and Conference Centre.

She added, “The theme also underscores the urgent need to address the legal, social, and economic dimensions of transitioning to sustainable energy systems. The concept of a just transition emphasises not only the shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy, but also the imperative to ensure that this transition is equitable and inclusive, leaving no one behind.”

Throughout the two-day event, participants engaged in training sessions and discussions on topics like energy transition, energy taxation, and the legal aspects of petroleum contracts and transactions. Speakers from the University of Turin, the University of Groningen, the Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs, and UWI St Augustine shared their insights and expertise.



Law Faculty Dean Dr Alicia Elias-Roberts (centre) with the keynote speakers for day one of the conference (from left) Justice Anthony DJ Gafoor, Chairman of the Tax Appeal Board; Dr Indira Rampersad, Head of the Department of Political Science at UWI St Augustine; Dr Eduardo Pereira, founding partner at the International Energy Law Training and Research Company; and Ms Leanna Ramkhalawan, legal advisor at Perenco.

*“The theme for this year’s conference is ‘Towards a Just Transition’, and it reflects the dynamic and evolving nature of the oil and gas sector”*

The Oil and Gas Conference, previously held in 2015, 2017, and 2019, allows the Faculty of Law to work with the sector, and provides an opportunity to discuss issues in energy and enhance learning across the Caribbean.

The 4<sup>th</sup> UWI Oil and Gas Law Conference ended with a call for more collaboration and knowledge sharing.

“The oil and gas sector remains a cornerstone of the global economy, driving technological innovation, economic development, and international relations. However, it also presents unique legal challenges and opportunities, particularly in the areas of regulation, sustainability, and global market dynamics,” Dr Elias-Roberts said.

Dr Elias-Roberts thanked key supporters of the conference: “I would like to acknowledge our Campus Principal, Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine, whose vision supported the first conference and the development of the oil and gas law course in the Faculty of Law when she was the Dean.

“I also extend a special thank you to our sponsor, Shell Trinidad, for their generous support, and to the participants from Atlantic LNG and the Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs. Your commitment to advancing legal education and research in the field of oil, gas, and energy law is deeply appreciated.”

■ For more information on The UWI St Augustine Faculty of Law and its events and activities, visit [sta.uwi.edu/law/](http://sta.uwi.edu/law/)



## ■ CAMPUS NEWS

With technology playing a more prominent role in an increasingly digitised society, governments around the world are becoming more reliant on technology to deliver different aspects of public services.

But while governments invest in digital public infrastructure (DPI) to modernise the methods by which they provide their services, consideration must be given to ensure that people with low levels of digital literacy, disabilities, and others who may otherwise be intentionally or unintentionally excluded are guaranteed access to these services.

Under an initiative of the United Nations Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology and the United Nations Development Programme, Dr Kim Mallalieu is contributing to the development of a framework of safeguards to avoid inequalities, human rights abuses, market distortions, and other potential adverse consequences in DPIs.

A senior lecturer and leader of the Communication Systems Group in UWI St Augustine's Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, Mallalieu said in a recent interview that it is essential for all segments of society to have equitable and safe access to all resources and services delivered through digital public infrastructure.

"Without due care, many digital services may be inaccessible to people who have visual or hearing impairments; neurological, cognitive or neurological disorders; or are living with various other disabilities.

"Where these services are vital or mandatory, safeguards are essential to ensure equitable access for all."

She added, "Equitable access means that everyone can access the services through provisions which cater to their individual needs, for example those of the blind and hard of hearing."

While Mallalieu assumed this UN role in February 2024, she has previously worked and continues to work on a variety of UN initiatives relating to information and communications technology, policy, regulation and capacity building.



## ICT expert Dr Kim Mallalieu works with UN to make digital public services more accessible

BY TYRELL GITTENS

At UWI St Augustine, she is chair of the Campus Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Steering Committee and the principal investigator of the Caribbean ICT Research Programme.

She is also the deputy chair of both the Board of the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (TATT) and the Advisory Board of the Network of Women in the Development Sector of the UN's International Telecommunication Union (ITU). She holds multiple roles in the Organisation of American States (OAS) specialised agency for telecommunications, CITEL.

Carefully designed and implemented DPIs which use digital identity systems, digital payments, and consent-based data sharing can be considered a "cornerstone" of modern society, facilitating tremendous efficiency. That care is crucial in mitigating risks.

"Along with the tremendous advantages of digitising the processes associated with the production, delivery, and evaluation of public services, there are potential risks, she explained.

"For example, the centralised COVID Vaccine Intelligence Network (COWIN) platform enabled significant benefits in the efficiency, tracking, and reporting of COVID vaccines administered in India. However, until an alternative system was implemented, those without the requisite digital access and literacy could not book appointments to receive the vaccine."

With proper safeguards, she said, the risks associated with DPIs to individuals, communities, and the environment will be minimised.

Currently, Mallalieu, along with the rest of the Universal Safeguards team, is designing a table of recommendations which outlines actionable processes and practices that countries can localise to ensure their DPIs are safe and inclusive for all.

Once the recommendations are finalised, in-country UN work teams will collaborate with interested governments, civil society organisations, multilateral agencies, and technology companies to apply them.

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



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## ■ CAMPUS NEWS

The name “*Lamellibrachia judigobini*” may seem alien to most, but for those with knowledge of UWI St Augustine’s Department of Life Sciences (within the Faculty of Science and Technology) it’s quite familiar. This recently discovered deep-sea tubeworm is named in honour of the department’s own Professor Judith Gobin, an internationally recognised scholar in marine biology.

In March 2023, a team of scientists led by Dr Magdalena Georgieva from the Natural History Museum in London recognised Prof Gobin’s work by naming the species after her, the first time a deep-sea species was named after a marine scientist from Trinidad and Tobago.

On July 26 of this year, Prof Gobin handed the *Lamellibrachia judigobini* over to the Faculty of Science and Technology (FST) at an official ceremony at The UWI Zoology Museum. The ceremony had additional significance as she is retiring after 25 years at UWI St Augustine.

“I have brought the *Lamellibrachia judigobini* type specimen from the Natural History Museum in London back to Trinidad and Tobago where it belongs,” Prof Gobin, who is also the Head of the Department of Life Sciences, told those in attendance. “It will reside here forever at The UWI Zoology Museum where we expect to have many researchers visiting.”

A type specimen is a physical example of an organism used to formally describe a new species. It serves as the reference point for the species’ identity and characteristics, ensuring consistency in class.

Gobin, who is a Professor of Marine Biology, and an advocate for sustainability and the protection of the marine environment, said, “I am extremely proud and humbled to present this scientific legacy to the UWI Zoology Museum at the St Augustine campus.”

Dean of the FST Dr Brian Cockburn received the tubeworm on behalf of the campus and congratulated Professor Gobin.

■ Those interested in viewing the specimen or some of the other fauna preserved at The UWI Zoology Museum in the Department of Life Sciences can contact Mr Rajindra Mahabir at [rajindra.mahabir@sta.uwi.edu](mailto:rajindra.mahabir@sta.uwi.edu)

## DEEP-SEA DELIVERY

**Prof Judith Gobin, retiring after 25 years’ service at UWI St Augustine, hands over the deep-sea species named in her honour**



Professor Judith Gobin looks at *Lamellibrachia judigobini* during the handover ceremony at The UWI Zoology Museum. PHOTO: ANEEL KARIM

**A safe space can mean different things to different people.** For marginalised and vulnerable communities, creating safe spaces is crucial— but it is equally crucial that they be tailored to the specific needs of the community they are designed to serve.

Children are a particularly vulnerable community, and notably, boys and girls experience insecurity differently. To make spaces safer for our children, there needs to be work across agencies and organisations that deal with child welfare. The Institute for Gender and Development Studies St Augustine Unit (IGDS SAU) has long been working on initiatives surrounding the safety of children, with their Break the Silence project focusing on the elimination of child sexual abuse (CSA).

Break the Silence has been in existence since 2008, but more recently, the IGDS/BATT Break the Silence Project, “Enhancing Evidence-Based Advocacy: Developing IGDS Mainstreaming, Mentorship and Movement Building”, in collaboration with Dr Keisha Thompson, Professor of Psychology at Kingsborough College, designed a short course titled, “Safe Spaces for Children: Understanding and Creating a Safe Space in the Context of Child Sexual Abuse”.

This initiative was another phase of the project, rolled out in collaboration with the Bankers Association of Trinidad and Tobago (BATT), with the aim of training workers across a range of institutions that deal with child welfare to foster and build safe spaces for children. BATT provided invaluable support to this work by strengthening the Break the Silence in its capacity to partner with those involved in the national response to CSA.

Khadijah Pierre, project coordinator for the IGDS/BATT Break the Silence initiative, has overseen a series of activities, including the short course that was held in April. The genesis of the idea came out of a panel discussion held by the IGDS a year earlier, where there was a meeting of minds including teachers, counsellors, social workers, and representatives from various ministries.

“We were realising that amongst all of the other issues that we see when it comes to child sexual abuse, having

## Creating a safe space for Kids

UWI IGDS/BATT Break the Silence Project brings national stakeholders together for course on protecting youth from sexual abuse

BY AMY LI BAKSH



Participants of the short course. PHOTO: ASHA INNISS

or knowing how to build a safe space was something that people needed to build capacity on,” says Pierre.

“Dr Thompson [course facilitator] not only addressed the physical safe spaces which we tend to always focus on, but she also spoke to the psychological safe spaces and the social safe spaces that often get overlooked,” Pierre explains.

The course was attended by teachers, and workers from a range of organisations including members of the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service; the Office of the Prime Minister’s Division of Gender and Child Affairs; Children’s Authority; the Student Support Services Unit from the Tobago House of Assembly’s Division of

Education, Research and Technology; and the TTPS Special Victims Unit.

The course ran over the span of four days, and those present created an “action plan matrix” that would help them use these tools in their own fields to better respond to children of different developmental stages and support needs.

The course has two other goals: to spark collaboration between these organisations and IGDS SAU, and to help create a thriving network.

■ For more information on **Break the Silence**, go to [sta.uwi.edu/igds/breakthesilence/](http://sta.uwi.edu/igds/breakthesilence/)

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



## RESEARCH

# Health, Economy, Environment, *up in smoke*



Public health specialist  
**PROF PATRICIO MARQUEZ,**  
details the consequences  
of tobacco-related products



BY PAUL HADDEN

**“Tobacco is a legal product that kills,” says Professor Patricio V Marquez, former Lead Public Health Specialist for the World Bank Group, Honorary Professor at The UWI, and fierce anti-tobacco advocate.**

**That tobacco is a deadly product should come as no surprise to anyone living in our modern era, yet the sobering statistics surrounding current tobacco use presented by Professor Marquez during a recent interview serve as a stark reminder that the battle against smoking is far from over.**

**Although there has been a significant reduction in smoking over the last few decades, Professor Marquez explains that current data indicates that around one-in-four adults in the world smoke tobacco. The total number of smokers remains high due to population growth.**

## 1.3 billion tobacco users worldwide

Globally, there are 1.3 billion tobacco users aged 15 or older. More than 75 percent of male daily smokers live in a country with a medium or high human development index (HDI), whereas more than 53 percent of female daily smokers live in very high-HDI countries. In the Caribbean region, smoking rates stood at 16.3 percent of the adult population in 2020.

These are worrying statistics,” adds Mrs Haleema Ali-Sisbane, economist at the UWI’s HEU, Centre for Health Economics, “that warrant immediate intervention.”

The discussion between Professor Marquez and Mrs Ali-Sisbane took place during a recent discussion on the dangers of tobacco for health and the economy hosted by the HEU. The virtual event was organised in recognition of the World Health Organisation’s World No-Tobacco Day, which raises awareness of the harmful and deadly effects of tobacco use, and draws attention to what many consider the questionable business practices of tobacco companies.

Professor Marquez is no stranger to advocating for public health issues, and has more than 35 years of experience in the field which have been spent working in over 80 countries. He also served as a Pledge Champion for the Tobacco-Free Portfolios Pledge Initiative.

Much of the current tobacco use, argues Professor Marquez, can be linked to the influential power of the advertising industry where, in the United States alone, a whopping US\$8.2 billion is spent annually on advertising tobacco-related products, including e-cigarettes.

He notes that many of these advertisements deliberately target specific vulnerable populations including the youth, young adults, and minority groups.

“The manipulation and deception that take place in the marketplace through advertisements influence decisions to use tobacco,” he says, “and by promoting the glamorous side of these products, by promoting feel good types of messages, and by sharing the message that ‘harm-reduction’ products are good for the youth, adolescents become users of these products.”

This, he explains, initiates a life-long addiction that “harms health and also carries other negative and social consequences”.

## Skeptical of the tobacco industry

His view of the tobacco industry stands in stark contrast to the apparent change of heart that major tobacco companies seem to have taken in recent years, with many now declaring that their new mission is to “unsmoke the world”.

However, Professor Marquez notes that, “There is much skepticism about this claim. The history of the tobacco industry provides ample evidence for skepticism, if not outright rejection.”

At a time when many believe that tobacco smoking is on its way out, and where many wealthier nations have put measures in place to mitigate its use, he cautions that

cigarettes are still being widely promoted and sold in low and middle income countries where fewer regulations and lower taxes make cigarettes and other tobacco-related products easily accessible to the general public.

In response to Mrs Ali-Sisbane’s question regarding the environmental cost of tobacco farming, Professor Marquez had this to say, “Nowadays, the devastating public health consequences of tobacco use are widely understood and documented, yet few people appreciate that tobacco also has a profoundly negative impact on the environment.”

Cigarette filters (made of cellulose acetate), for example, constitute the number one ocean plastic, more numerous than plastic bottles, bags, or straws. Disposing of e-cigarette cartridges, that contain plastic, electronic and chemical waste, is a growing problem. Regarding the farming of tobacco, Professor Marquez notes its environmental impact includes degradation of soil quality, deforestation due to land clearing to grow the crops and procure wood for tobacco curing, improper disposal of containers, runoff of pesticides and other chemicals that pollute the water supply sources of entire communities, and the generation of carbon emissions.

“When it comes to carbon emissions,” he says, “tobacco has a similar footprint to entire countries.”

More than just a re-hashing of the facts, the virtual discussion between Mrs Ali-Sisbane and Professor Marquez stands as a call-to-action to end tobacco use in all its forms, including the so-called “safe products” on the market which include vaping products.

Professor Marquez insists that the alarming statistics delivered during the discussion should serve as a wake-up call to continue the fight against tobacco use.

“The evidence is clear and should concern all of us,” he says, “all of us have a role to play by raising our voices and by promoting and disseminating information about the public health issues, the environmental degradation, and the high economic costs of tobacco use. At the end of the day, there is a societal cost that all of us are paying for.”



## ■ UWI IN SOCIETY

There is something supernatural about the North Coast. Driving alongside the sheer cliffs of North Coast Road, or taking the path through the hills and dense forest of Blanchisseuse Road, it's almost like entering another realm. It's like travelling back to an old world, a wild place, a place with a more equitable balance between man and nature.



## Creating a path for the N

BY CHERISSE LAUREN BERKELEY AND J

It's beautiful up there on the other side of the Northern Range, renowned for its beaches and greenery, waterfalls, and wildlife. And of course, there's the people, many of whom are warm and welcoming, who live in the coastal villages and rural settlements.

It must be a wonder to live with the vastness of the Caribbean Sea in your backyard, to enjoy cleaner air and fresher foods. But life on the North Coast is far from ideal. The same remoteness that gives their home its beauty also acts as a barrier of sorts for members of these communities to benefit fully from T&T's progress. They have limited access to economic opportunities, services, technology and interconnectivity, and higher education.

"Many students do not know of the opportunities available for furthering their education beyond the secondary level," says Mr Hashim Johnson, Principal of the Blanchisseuse Secondary School. "Very few of our students are motivated to pursue studies at the form six level."

UWI St Augustine, through an initiative led by the Office of the Campus Principal, is seeking to rectify this situation. This past June, they held an interactive open day at Blanchisseuse Secondary.

A campus convoy made up of personnel from its various departments made the journey north to the school. They set up interactive booths to provide information on programmes, careers, and courses. Many booths included games, demonstrations, and experiments which delighted both staff and visitors.

### A comprehensive look at what UWI has to offer

The Faculty of Science and Technology drew large crowds with interactive chemistry experiments, including the popular elephant toothpaste demonstration. The Department of Physics engaged visitors with games that brought smiles, laughter



FROM LEFT: Minister of Planning and Development and MP for Arima Ms Pennelope Beckles, UWI St Augustine Campus Principal Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine, and another woman at the open day. PHOTOS: CHERISSE LAUREN BERKELEY



CestLaVibe.com

# North Coast

DEL HENRY

Principal Johnson agrees, adding that the visit “makes a tremendous difference, as planning and facilitating transport for all the students and staff would be difficult”.

Both administrators noted that many students were particularly interested in agricultural studies, including hydroponics and grow houses.

The trip to the North Coast is one of several journeys undertaken by UWI St Augustine to reach out to rural communities. In April, a campus team went to Moruga on Trinidad’s south coast for their Community Day.

Most recently, in early July, they took part in the La Brea Economic Development Day in the southwest.

“We hope to do this in as many communities as possible,” says UWI St Augustine Campus Principal Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine. “Once the MPs are willing to have us, we are happy to be here.”

Principal Antoine, who has personally led all three community visits, adds, “I would love for us to go to Tobago as we are one country, and the Tobagonian community must not be excluded. It will surely take more planning and would be more costly, but I am definitely hopeful that we will take this initiative to Tobago in the future.”

Regarding support for rural students facing long and costly travel to attend UWI, Professor Antoine speaks on the importance of informing them about bursaries, scholarships, and other support available through the campus’s Division of Student Services and Development (DSSD).

“Often, people give up before they even start by thinking it’s not possible for them for various reasons, including lengthy commutes and funding. One of the most important parts of this endeavour is to give members of rural communities information about the financial aid that is available through the DSSD,” she says.

## A great opportunity for our students/community

Ms Reshma Mackoon, head girl at Blanchisseuse Secondary and youth councillor, says, “I think this is a great opportunity for our students to learn about education possibilities after leaving secondary school. Many of us aren’t aware of what we need to do to apply or qualify for UWI, so this event is very informative and helpful.”

Mackoon, who was busily setting up a barbering course for her schoolmates at the open day, found the event inspiring and appreciated the support of MP Beckles. “I genuinely like helping others, especially those in my community—a trait passed down from my grandfather. I hope to pursue a career in politics, so I learned

a lot about the [UWI] Political Science programme.”

Speaking of her pleasure in partnering with UWI to bring the campus to the students, MP Beckles says, “The first reason I agreed to partner in this initiative was understanding the benefit of knowing what UWI has to offer. By bringing UWI to them, it surely is a step in the right direction to empowering young people through higher education.”

Ms Beckles, who is a UWI alum herself, reflected on her own positive experiences at the university – experiences that one day students who attended the UWI event might have for themselves.

“Speaking with some of the students here today,” she says, “I can see their joy and excitement in gaining insight into the prerequisites and the best ways to achieve their career goals.”

The event also attracted community members who gathered information about programmes to further their careers or explore new opportunities. A recent graduate of the school who attended the open day said, “I wish they had done something like this during my time, but I’m grateful to have had the invitation extended beyond just current students.”

The initiative is an example of The UWI’s commitment to making higher education accessible and relevant to all parts of the country, not just urban centres. By bringing the campus directly to rural areas, the university is breaking down barriers and showing students and community members alike that higher education is within their reach.

## Plans to bring this outreach to other communities

The hands-on experiences and personal interactions with members of the campus community help demystify the process of applying to and attending university, making it more approachable and attainable.

Looking forward, representatives of the Office of the Campus Principal say they plan to continue this type of outreach. The positive feedback from both students and community members, they say, shows the importance of these activities in fostering educational aspirations and community development.

And who knows? With the opening of opportunities, and the benefits of personal and professional growth that higher education can provide, the people of the North Coast may enjoy the best of both worlds: more equitable access to opportunities, even while continuing to enjoy a harmonious relationship with nature.

*Cherisse Lauren Berkeley is a journalist, activist, mas-maker, and multidisciplinary artist.*

and, for some, moments of frustration. The Faculty of Sport encouraged participation in various sports, with Ms Bernadette Antoine from the St Augustine Academy of Sport even challenging Minister of Planning and Development and Arima Member of Parliament (MP) Penelope Beckles (Blanchisseuse is one of Arima’s constituencies) to a quick round of tennis, much to the delight of the crowd.

The open day was attended not only by secondary school students, but also by students from the nearby La Fillette Roman Catholic Primary School – the village of La Fillette is just after Las Cuevas and right next to Blanchisseuse – and other community members. They were given a comprehensive look at what UWI has to offer.

“Having the UWI come to us surely gives our students the opportunity to explore different avenues in education, and understand what is needed to achieve their career goals,” says Blanchisseuse Secondary Acting Vice Principal Camilla Neptune.



Beckles, head girl at Blanchisseuse Secondary School Ms Reshma Mackoon, head girl at Blanchisseuse Secondary School Ms Reshma Mackoon, head girl at Blanchisseuse Secondary School Mr Hashim Johnson





## ■ OUR PEOPLE

# A BUSINESS BUILT ON JOY

*Jamila Frank spreads happiness through Jollies Lollies*

BY AMANDA LEE

**“I wanted to provide a new experience in Trinidad and Tobago. I wanted to build on the ice cream industry and culture, and kind of force the country to generally improve on the quality of things that we give to people.”**

These were the goals that inspired Jamila Frank, UWI graduate and Events & Projects Assistant at the St Augustine campus's Marketing & Communications Office, to create Jollies Lollies in 2019, a handcrafted lolly business that focuses on quality and customisation.

Following her departure from her first job at an ice cream shop in Arima, she found herself referring to the principles of doing what she knows and meeting market demands. From her previous job, she knew there was a demand for lollies. From her own desires, she knew there was a demand for quality ice cream.

The choice to use the word “lolly” over the more globally recognised “ice pop” was deliberate. Frank knows that “lolly” is a word wrapped in childhood memories for many Trinbagonians, of men with carts visiting neighbourhoods and roaming beaches with the offering of their cold, sweet treats, bells ringing to signal their approach.

Instead of mass-manufactured products, however, Jollies Lollies' crafts are made-to-order, and suited to the tastes and needs of its clients.

“We have something for everybody, and there's no flavour that can't be modified to suit,” she assures.

Her flavour offerings include mocha madness, Bailey's hot chocolate, fruit punch, lemon lime gummy bear (a bestseller), and birthday cake (her personal favourite).



PHOTO: ATIBA CUDJOE

Each lolly starts with its base ingredients going into an ice cream maker to begin chilling and thickening. This, she says, is key to making sure that the lollies maintain a smooth texture rather than becoming too icy through freezing alone. Then, the flavour components are layered into moulds, all by hand.

Presently, Jollies Lollies is in a period of return following a hiatus caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, when dry ice supplies were unavailable to small non-essential businesses.

“We are in preparation for relaunch,” she says. “Part of that is working in Marketing and Communications. I've learned a lot. I still haven't learned enough, but I have a lot of people around me who are very excited to help.”

She intends to streamline her core list of flavours and use the supportive community around her to concretise branding and marketing strategies.

Jollies Lollies aims to have a presence at events where the lollies can become part of patrons' fond memories. Frank also hopes to expand her offerings to include, for one, her own take on ice cream sandwiches. To support her efforts, she's also applied for entrepreneurial grant funding.

Frank believes in the value of taking the first step as an entrepreneur.

“Honestly, just do it,” she says. “Stumble. Fall. Make it bad. Then make it good. Always listen to the feedback of others. You don't have to change your business based on it, but hear it and see how you can improve, and just keep building and building and building.”

*Amanda Lee is a publications and content specialist at The UWI St Augustine, linguistics graduate, user experience enthusiast, and traveller.*

## ■ UWI IN SOCIETY

# The Art and Science of Pension Mathematics

BY TYRELL GITTENS

**Worldwide, pensions give workers a much-needed source of income after their retirement.** And strong pension plans help companies and other organisations attract the workers they need. Globally, the pension sector is massive business.

From June 24-27, students of The UWI St Augustine campus had the opportunity to learn more about pension mathematics in a special workshop conducted by Professor Colin M Ramsey of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Having organised the workshop in collaboration with the Department of Mathematics and Statistics, and the Actuarial Science Club, Prof Ramsey told UWI TODAY that pension mathematics skills serve the billion dollar worldwide pensions sector, and as such, it is important for emerging actuaries in the Caribbean to be all-rounded.

“Actuaries are important in designing and ensuring the viability of certain types of pension schemes. For this workshop, we focused on defined benefit pensions. This is when employers promise their employees benefit structures,” he explained.

“For example, employers might have it in their company benefits that if an employee works for their company for 20 years, that can guarantee them a certain percentage of their salary as a pension after their retirement from the company.”

Born and raised in Guyana, Ramsey completed a BSc in Actuarial Science at City, University of London. He then went on to do his master's and PhD at the University of Waterloo.

He has been lecturing in actuarial science at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln since 1986.

Whatever pension scheme employers choose to offer their employees, Ramsey said, investing in good pension plans – backed by quality data – will serve the interest of businesses both hoping to attract new talents and retain quality workers.



Professor Colin M Ramsey

On the learners of the workshop, Ramsey said, “The students who participated in the workshop were receptive. While it's a steep learning curve with pension mathematics – as there is art and science in solving pension mathematics problems – the students are showing interest and talent.”

He added, “With more exposure to the field over time, students here can now have an edge as they can go to employers and show that they are equipped with these skills.”

With his Caribbean roots, Ramsey is grateful to have given back to the Caribbean through this effort and said discussions are underway with UWI St Augustine Actuarial Science Programme Director Stokeley Smart to create other opportunities for students interested in actuarial science.

The UWI St Augustine and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln are looking into the possibility of creating an MOU which will facilitate student exchanges and collaborative research.

Prof Ramsey has already agreed to be a co-author for two publications related to mortality table construction with the team at UWI St Augustine.

Smart, who played a key role in organising the workshop, told UWI TODAY that the Maths and Statistics Department continues its efforts to provide students with world-class learning opportunities.

“In Trinidad and Tobago, there are many state entities that have defined benefits pension plans valued in the billions,” he said. “So, there is the need for actuaries locally with skills in pension maths to not only serve the state but also guide businesses with their plans and policies.”

UWI St Augustine students were not the only ones who benefited from the workshop as the event was also made available virtually to students of other UWI campuses, and international universities like the University of Toronto, Morgan State University (Baltimore), and Heriot-Watt Malaysia University.

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



## ■ OUR PEOPLE



# AMBIKA MAHARAJ

## – Bridge Builder



Acting Principal of SWAHA Hindu College helps students across life's gulf of uncertainty to wellbeing, personal growth, and the possibilities in higher education

BY AMY LI BAKSH

When Ambika Maharaj walked into The UWI to begin her BSc in Biology in 2000, she had no idea that her academic journey would take her across a wide swathe of disciplines and eventually lead her to a teaching role at SWAHA Hindu College, where she is currently acting as Principal.

"Following [the BSc in Biology], I did my Diploma in Education, and also completed my Master's in Education in 2012," says Maharaj. In between learning about science and education, she also found time to pursue other interests on campus, like photography and yoga.

Now, this well-rounded background is informing her approach as an educator at the college, which provides a more holistic approach to helping students grow through academia and all facets of life.

### An advocate for well-roundedness

"The experiences at UWI were also defining moments for me," she says. She draws on her experiences as a tertiary student to now help her secondary level students "create a bridge" between what classes look like at the current level, and what they can expect from further education. But for her, it wasn't all about what happened in the classroom.

"It wasn't just about the content delivery," says Maharaj. She embraced the full experience. "I remember I would have done... even yoga, although I was seven or eight months pregnant," she says with a laugh.

Even that would become relevant while she was teaching at SWAHA, where students are encouraged to practice meditation and yoga as part of the school's push towards imparting health and wellbeing habits to them.

Although her background was initially in biology, Maharaj began her teaching journey teaching mathematics and Hindi.

"After I finished my degree, that's when I started my teaching profession, in 2003," she says. "When the opportunity presented itself for the diploma in education, I jumped at it." She is hopeful that she can also inspire her students to explore higher education, even if where they start is not where they may end up.

SWAHA Hindu College itself has had a unique journey. When the school opened its doors in 2001, its 90 students were being housed at the Tulsi Manas Mandir's compound in Sangre Grande. The school would be based there for the next eight years before construction on the current compound was completed.

### From UWI student to UWI partner

By then, Maharaj was a fixture, and in addition to teaching, she also encouraged a relationship with The UWI so that students could learn more about what options are open to them going forward.

"Over the years, we have been building on this relationship [with The UWI]," she says. "Our school initially did not start off offering Form 6 CAPE studies. But once we began that programme, we realised that it wasn't just about creating opportunities for the Form 5s, but also for career guidance – that transition from secondary to tertiary education."

By 2010, they had made the connection to UWI and were engaged in finding ways to help students learn about life on campus. From as early as Form 3, students are able to attend

campus tours organised by UWI St Augustine, where they are able to explore and learn about the different faculties, programmes and facilities the campus has to offer.

"UWI started outreach through our school's guidance office to see how they could give support in creating an awareness in our children on the programmes they offer and the application process. Within the last five/six years, that relationship has strengthened," says Maharaj.

By giving their students such early access to see what university life can be like, Maharaj hopes that they will have more time to figure out where their own journeys might take them.

"They have to reflect on their interests, their ambitions, their abilities, and their strengths, to start planning their careers," she says. "What we hope to achieve is that by feeding them this information, they can become reflective on their own personal growth."

At such a young age, the process of figuring out what you want to do can be daunting. But for Maharaj, it is important to let them know that these feelings are perfectly normal, and that there is a support system in place for them.

"That's a common experience," she says. "Children may feel self-conscious, or demotivated when they feel that they don't know what to do with their life afterwards. But we reassure them, because there's a process in transitioning and going along the journey. You don't always have to know."

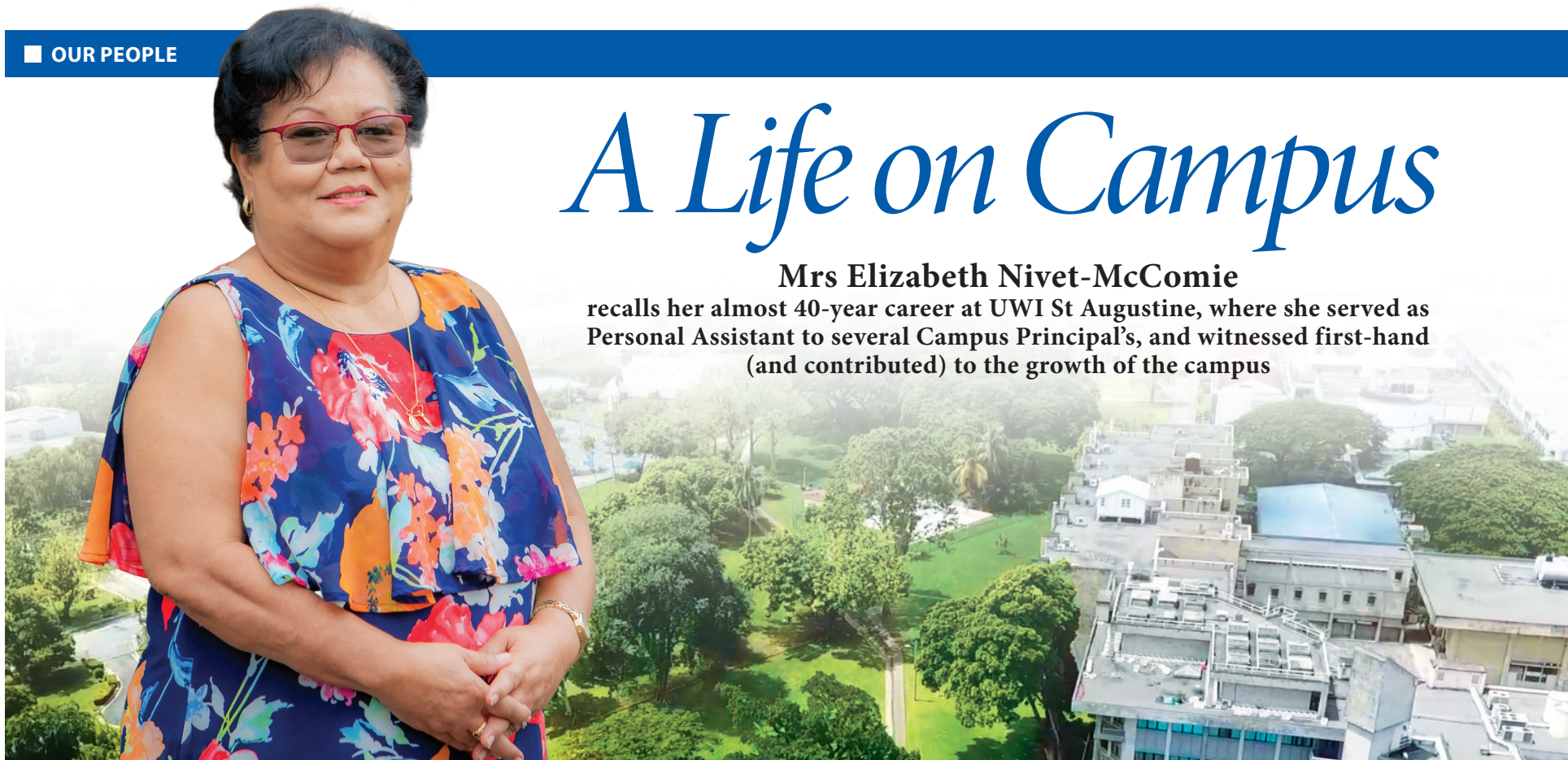
As someone whose journey has taken many different pathways, she hopes that students will allow themselves to explore all the possibilities and see what path really suits them on their own journeys.



Ms Maharaj with students: "Children may feel self-conscious, or demotivated when they feel that they don't know what to do with their life afterwards. But we reassure them, because there's a process in transitioning and going along the journey. You don't always have to know."



## ■ OUR PEOPLE



Mrs Elizabeth Nivet-McComie  
PHOTO: MOOKISH HARRYPAL

# A Life on Campus

**Mrs Elizabeth Nivet-McComie**  
recalls her almost 40-year career at UWI St Augustine, where she served as Personal Assistant to several Campus Principal's, and witnessed first-hand (and contributed) to the growth of the campus

BY JOEL HENRY

**"I lived on campus," says Mrs Elizabeth Nivet-McComie.**

She is speaking, quite literally, of her time as Warden of Trinity Hall, one of The UWI St Augustine Campus's Halls of Residence. But the Campus has been her home, even when she lived beyond its gates, for almost four decades.

"Betty", as she is known among members of the campus community in their many departments and offices, is not only one of UWI St Augustine's longest serving members of staff, she was at the very heart of its operations, acting as Personal Assistant to several campus principals and advisor to others. This past May, she retired after 39 years at The UWI.

"I feel light as a feather," she says in our interview over Zoom. "I am taking it easy. It's been almost two years of working to get where we are now."

These last two years have been in support of Campus Principal Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine, a leader Mrs McComie praises for her "energy" and "ideas".

"She has a vision for the campus, and she is someone who will really go for it," she says. "What principals try to do is push very hard. They only have a five-year term."

***'It's delicate work'***

And Mrs McComie, probably more than anyone else on the campus, knows how principals approach their work with the time they have.

She started working at the St Augustine campus in the 1980s as the secretary for Mr Anthony Falloon, then Senior Assistant Registrar, Examinations. At the time, Prof George Maxwell Richards, fourth President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, was Campus Principal. He would be the only Campus Principal up to today that Mrs McComie did not serve directly.

She was the Personal Assistant to Emeritus Professor Compton Bourne, Dr Bhoendradatt Tewarie, and Emeritus Professor Clement Sankat. She served as administrative officer for Emeritus Professor Brian Copeland, and then Personal Assistant again to Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine.

As Personal Assistant you are at the centre of everything and have the responsibility to gather information for the Principal as required for meetings, visits by persons from all walks of life. It is delicate work, most times.

And one of her assets in doing the job – indeed one of the defining aspects of her character – is her ability to build relationships.

Her outlook is that forming friendships requires more than smiling and shaking hands; it demands integrity, too. "Your 'yes' has to mean 'yes'. Your 'no' has to mean 'no'. Don't make promises you cannot keep. You have to sometimes say 'I cannot help you here'."

Mrs McComie's position not only made her privy to the ideas of the campus's leaders and their strategies to execute them, it also gave her a prime seat for the development of UWI St Augustine over several decades.

***'A colonial-type atmosphere'***

She characterises the campus in her earliest days there as "very much a colonial-type atmosphere", a small community where everyone knew each other. "The [Office of the Campus Principal] was Principal Richard's residence. He lived there. There were also senior academic staff living in homes on the campus."



FROM LEFT: Campus Principal Prof Clement Sankat, Chairman and Managing Director of Republic Bank Ltd Mr Ronald Harford, Mrs Nivet-McComie, Governor of the Central Bank of T&T and Chairman of The UWI St Augustine Campus Council Mr Ewart Williams, and President of the Student Guild and Deputy Mayor of the Port-of-Spain City Corporation Mr Hillan Moreau at a ceremony to donate funds to Haitian students following the devastating earthquake in 2010.



With energy sector specialist Mr Mark Regis (centre) and the late Mr Reginald Dumas, author, diplomat, public intellectual and chief public servant.



At her graduation ceremony alongside businessman, independent senator and Campus Council Chair Michael Mansoor; Mrs Maureen Mansoor; and Mr Williams.



Sharing a moment with Campus Principal Prof Brian Copeland.



Betty, as she is affectionately known on the campus, with former Deputy Principal Prof Baldwin Mootoo.



Presenting a painting to Campus Principal Prof Compton Bourne. Prof Bourne was the first of many principals to which she was the personal assistant.



Leaning into the conversation with Prof Copeland and Maltese economist and politician Prof Lino Briguglio on a visit to the campus.



“On any day,” she recalls, “you could see and hear the laughter of children playing in the yard.”

However, change would come soon. In the early 1990s, she joined the staff of Compton Bourne, who was then the Pro Vice-Chancellor of Planning and Programming. Their office was right across the street from the Office of the Campus Principal in the building that today is the headquarters for the Marketing and Communications Office (where UWI TODAY is produced).

Then, in 1996, Prof Bourne was appointed Campus Principal.

“We moved across the street,” she says.

She was there for the growth spurred by an Inter-American Development Bank (IADB)/ Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) funded infrastructure upgrade project that turned UWI St Augustine into a modern campus. She witnessed and took part in the work to develop the Faculty of Medical Sciences at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex in the early 2000s. This was a massive transformation in Caribbean tertiary-level education as medical training was previously carried out primarily at the UWI Mona campus in Jamaica.

Mrs McComie was a member of the team under Campus Principal Tewarie who had to navigate the enormous influx of students following the introduction of the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses (GATE) programme in 2004 and T&T’s strategy of encouraging the society to seek higher education.

She was on Campus Principal Sankat’s team as they went on an ambitious programme of capital works that transformed the campus through new buildings and public spaces for students and staff. And she was the Administrative Officer to Campus Principal Copeland during his thrust to develop UWI St Augustine’s innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem, an important economic strategy for both the campus and T&T.

Mrs McComie makes sure to mention the short tenure of Bridget Brereton, Emerita Professor of History, as Campus Principal.

“She was asked to take up the mantle when Dr Tewarie stepped down. Even though she only accepted the post for six months, she was a full-fledged principal. Because there was still work going on with the IDB, she needed to have full authority to settle everything on behalf of the campus.”

### **‘Very interesting and a bit terrifying’**

And she was there as well for periods of major upheaval – most notably the massive worker’s strike in 1998 and student protests.

“It was very interesting, and a bit terrifying,” she recalls of the labour unrest. “We had to get to work at 6 am and leave after 6 pm to avoid any difficulties.”

Being so close to power, one might assume that her greatest memories of her time at St Augustine involved these grand institution-shaping events or the meetings with dignitaries such as the late Colin Powell, former US Secretary of State and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Surprisingly, it is her involvement with students that she recollects most fondly, in particular, her experiences as Warden to Trinity Hall from 2000 to 2004, and as the Campus Events Coordinator responsible for the annual graduation ceremonies. She held the latter role for over two decades until 2016.

“I think it’s the teacher in me,” she says of her love for students.

Growing up on Jerningham Avenue in Belmont, one of four children, Mrs McComie went to work at a relatively young age, starting with assisting as English teacher to Spanish-speaking children of the Ambassador of Venezuela at that time, at the Andrés Bello private school (named after the Venezuelan humanist and diplomat), and the St Catherine’s private primary school in Port-of-Spain.

“We weren’t poor, but we weren’t rich. I enjoyed languages. I enjoyed teaching,” she says of those early years.

Her strength and interest in languages led her to work for international agencies such as the OAS, IADB, IICA, UNDP-ECLAC, which she did for eight years. During this time as well, she got married and had her son. Soon after, she would start at The UWI St Augustine.

Events seemed a natural addition to her work. A big part of her job was arranging the campus principal’s meetings with people. Arranging events is the same, but on a larger scale.

One of Mrs McComie’s significant life experiences was as Head of the 50th Anniversary Celebrations of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago (CBTT) in 2013-2015.



Mrs Nivet-McComie (right), at the opening of the Eric Williams Memorial Collection at UWI St Augustine, on March 22, 1998. From left are Campus Principal Compton Bourne, Prime Minister Basdeo Pandey, owner and curator of the collection Erica Williams-Connell, and United States Secretary of State Colin Powell.



With fellow UWI Halls of Residence wardens Dr Cheryl Anne-Marie Bennett (a senior lecturer and academic administrator at UWI Mona); President of the St Augustine Chapter of the UWI Alumni Association (as well as UWIDEF board member) the late Jerry Medford; and Dr Cassandra Rogers, a former lecturer in the Faculty of Engineering (and currently an advisor at the Inter-American Development Bank).



Speaking at Prof Bourne’s farewell ceremony.

“It was a tremendous honour to be asked to take up this significant milestone for the CBTT,” she says. “I felt proud to be asked and happy to be a member of The UWI St Augustine campus. Hard work and dedication does have its benefits.”

### **‘We really made the effort to give them a special experience’**

Graduation was especially significant. In the old days, graduation ceremonies were held outdoors at the JFK Quadrangle, but with the influx of students, new arrangements had to be made.

“We had to revamp the whole graduation,” she recalls. “Graduation gives students the feeling that they belong. We really made the effort to give them a special experience.”

The campus’s signature event was moved to The UWI Sport and Physical Education Centre [established in 2003].

Although the coordination of special events like graduation is now the responsibility of the Marketing and Communications Office, Mrs McComie played an irreplaceable role in the evolution of the ceremonies and other activities that bring the campus community and visitors together.

In fact, hosting events was so important to her that she completed the Events Management programme provided by the University of Georgetown, Washington D.C. through the Arthur Lok Jack Graduate School of Business in 2003. Through her work with SPEC, she was motivated to do the UWI/FIFA/CIES Diploma in Sports Management.

At 58 years of age, she pursued a Master’s degree in Business Administration (Tourism and Hospitality Management) with the Australian Institute of Business (AIB).

Professional advancement was very important to her. Mrs McComie was a member of non-academic staff, a group made up of hundreds that are essential to the functioning of UWI St Augustine.

“When you don’t have a degree, you can sometimes feel unimportant,” she says.

And although there has been improvement in advancement opportunities and recognition for non-academic staffers, she believes more needs to be done. In fact, she sees improving relations with them as part of the more pressing issue of staff morale.

“We need to build morale,” she says. “Despite everything, people do their work to the best of their ability, but I would love to see people come together again.”

She is very pleased that Prof Antoine has made the happiness of staff one of her priorities.

“[Principal Antoine] meets with staff. The other day she held a meeting with retirees. She is working hard to build morale,” says Mrs McComie.

For Betty, while she will not say the job has been easy, she still relishes the lifetime of experience.

“I loved what I did. I enjoyed what I did. I learned people. I learned to understand the system, and how I could help people, both staff and students. Not everything was great. But it was all part of the whole. It made me stronger.”

She adds, “my heartfelt thanks to all the people I have encountered over the past 39 years. You all left indelible pieces in my heart. My journey at The University of the West Indies has come to an end. Onto new adventures will the love and kindness of my colleagues. *God Bless you all.*”



## ■ OUR PEOPLE

# The PUBLIC INTELLECTUAL

*Professor Funso Aiyejina on retirement, writing and his university*



**EDITOR'S NOTE:** On July 1, Funso Aiyejina, Emeritus Professor at UWI St Augustine, passed away. Prof Aiyejina was born in Nigeria, however he was a true Caribbean man, and in his 75 years made an irreplaceable contribution to literary life in the region. He spent almost 35 years at the St Augustine campus as an educator and eventually Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Education, where he helped shape the minds of hundreds of students, myself included.

He was also one of the founders of the *Bocas Lit Fest*, one of the region's most prominent literary festivals and arguably a major contributor to the renaissance of fiction and poetry in T&T and the greater Caribbean.

On a more personal level, I have known Prof Aiyejina for more than 20 years, first as a student in his creative writing class (he was not particularly fond of my attempts at West Indian science fiction) and then, years later, as a willing collaborator on articles for **UWI TODAY**. I had the pleasure of interviewing him several times, most recently for a piece on a compilation that was published by the St Augustine Academy of Sport under his leadership.

**UWI TODAY** is pleased to republish a Q&A from 2014 with Prof Aiyejina that we believe speaks to his love and commitment to the university and society.

*Joel Henry*

**UT:** *Professor Aiyejina, what's the next step for you?*

**FA:** I'm going to return to my creative writing. I will still do some teaching for the Department (of Literary, Cultural and Communications Studies), such as the Creative Writing programme which I started in 2004 and I want to see continue. I'm back on post-retirement contract to keep that going. That and my own writing is what I will be doing.

**UT:** *So we can look forward to a new anthology?*

**FA:** Hopefully soon.

**UT:** *What is the vision for the Faculty of Humanities and Education?*

**FA:** We want to remain central to the intellectual, philosophical and cultural development of the community. As the Faculty of Humanities and Education, we see ourselves as the ethical centre of the society. We believe we should lead the way in making the community better able to assess itself, to understand the details of its identity they need to cultivate in order to develop as a multicultural society.

When you look at all the various disciplines within the faculty and their role in society you realise that while we may not be seen as a "dollar and cents" faculty like Engineering and Medicine and so on, without us the society would be empty. We would have all the material, but we would be lacking the ethical and intellectual understanding of what is of vital importance to the society.

That is just one area in which I am particularly happy with the kind of synergy between our faculty and the Faculty of Engineering for example. The dean of that faculty, Professor Brian Copeland is very aware that the best engineers are those who are culturally grounded. We are always talking about how we can collaborate. I don't know how many people know that in the development of the G-pan and the PHI [electric versions of the steelpan developed by Professor Copeland] he had the help of the Department of Creative and Festival Arts (DCFA). That synergy is very important. The more the society recognises that we should not have a dichotomy between the hard sciences and the humanities, the better we will be for it.

**UT:** *You spoke about the overall vision for the faculty, but I'm sure you as dean brought your own stamp to that vision.*

**FA:** You'll have to ask other people that (laughter). Everything I touched on before is in line with my outlook for

the faculty – which is in essence the centrality of the humanities to the development of society. When this country celebrated its 50th anniversary of independence, one of the things the History Department did was to take all the discussions to the various communities instead of keeping them on the campus. We were all over the country having seminars – Tobago, San Fernando, Caroni, Port-of-Spain. I always believe personally that any intellectual who wants to be effective has to be a public intellectual. Not a closet intellectual, not an ivory tower intellectual. And I have practiced that in my involvement with education all my life.

I started the Campus Literature Week, which has grown from strength to strength over the years. I started the (Master of Fine Arts in) Creative Writing programme. I am very involved with the Cropper Foundation's workshop for emerging writers. I am part of the team that started the Bocas Lit Fest. That is my way of taking the university out there and making the community feel the impact of what we do. It's not just a question of coming here and teaching students on campus. It is also about asking what do we as a university have that we can take out there to the community. In all these initiatives you will see a similar collaboration between the university and the larger world. My colleagues, such as Dr Merle Hodge, who has worked with me on the Cropper Foundation since 2000, understand the power of that collaboration.

If you want me to typecast my vision, it has always been that the university must always be relevant to the community it serves, what I call the "enabling community". The community out there enables us to be who we are and we must always be relevant to them. It doesn't mean that we will always do exactly what they want us to do. We are in a community of ideas and we have to work together to ensure that the ideas we go forward with are good ideas.

**UT:** *Are there things you would have liked to have done during your tenure that you were not able to do?*

**FA:** Oh yes. My greatest regret, my greatest sadness that I have in leaving the deanship is the fact that the Department of Creative and Festival Arts does not have a suitable home. It is something that we have tried over and over to get done. I wouldn't put it down as a failure; it is just something I could not get done because of the cost and the financial situation on campus at this moment. It is the saddest thing I

can think of that up to know we have not been able despite all the efforts of the faculty and the university that we have not found an appropriate home for the department. I would like to add however that we have not stopped. We are continuing, and the new dean is going to fight to get it done.

**UT:** *Retirement must be bittersweet for you.*

*You have been at The UWI for the last two decades.*

**FA:** I believe in process. The process is clear: I'm 65 and it is time to retire. So I was ready for retirement at 65. Anything other than that would be defeating the process. And retirement is not going to stop me from doing any of the things I do anyway. I did exactly the same things I did at the university that I did before I got to the university. I have always been in the arts. I was always about seeing how best to help other people. It doesn't mean now that I am retired that I can't be instrumental in the development of the arts. Not at all. The Cropper Foundation is outside of my university commitment, Bocas is outside of my university commitment and I will continue with them.

As a matter of fact, it means that I now have more time to devote to these things and more time to devote to my own creative writing. I haven't written any significant work for a while now. My last collection of poems would have been published in 2006 or so. It is time for me to go back do my own writing. Also, one thing that I am happy for with my retirement is thank God I have no more meetings to go to (laughter). We have too many meetings.

**UT:** *Professor Aiyejina, is there anything you would like to add?*

**FA:** Yes. I believe in The UWI. I believe UWI is a great institution. I think that anybody in a leadership position at UWI must always keep that at the forefront of their mind – this is a great institution that people have sacrificed to build and we have to make our own sacrifices to ensure that the future inherits something that is greater than it is now. I tell people all the time that the only constituency I have is The University of the West Indies. I do anything to make sure that that constituency remains relevant and self-respecting, that we do not prostitute ourselves for anything, because as an intellectual institution we must set the bar for others to follow. The moment we forget that, we are destroying a great legacy that has been given to us.





# La Festa IN GIARDINO

## TASTE OF ITALY, FEAST OF GIVING

BY JOEL HENRY



There was a wall at **La Festa in Giardino** where the people posed for photos. It was encrusted with flowers – orange, yellow, white, blue – countless flowers, so many flowers that I could guess at the painstaking labour to prepare them and put them in place. It was at once beautiful, but exhausting to imagine. What could inspire such detailed work? The students inspired it.

On July 7, all around us the campus grounds were transformed into a display of concentrated human endeavour - the brightest colours, the curving structures, cuisine and beverages from master craftspeople, and the performances. All of it was to raise funds to provide scholarships and bursaries to students from T&T and the region. All the splendour was to create opportunities for people who otherwise might not have a chance to pursue their dreams of higher education and advancement.

**La Festa in Giardino** was the second ever **UWI Garden Party**, a fundraising initiative created in 2023 by **The UWI Development and Endowment Fund (UWIDEF)**. In some ways, it is the descendant of **UWI Fete**, UWIDEF's flagship event and the innovator of all-inclusive events in Trinidad and Tobago. Through its events (up to 2023), UWIDEF has raised over \$22 million for students in 35 years, amounting to more than 4,233 bursaries and 77 scholarships.

On the Sunday in question, this ambition to support students came together for an event that was both Italian-themed and deeply Trinbagonian, Mediterranean and Caribbean in its look, feel, taste, and sound. It was a party with a purpose, filled with purposeful party-goers who came out in their most fashionable attire to enjoy themselves and make good memories.

And memorable it was, for those who attended the **Garden Party**, and the students who will benefit from the educational opportunities it will provide.





# The UWI Calendar of Events | August–September 2024

**First Year Experience (FYE) 2024/2025**  
**August 9 to September 5**  
**UWI St Augustine Campus/Online**

New students at UWI St Augustine, take part in the orientation/welcome programme designed just for you. FYE, an initiative of the Division of Student Services and Development (DSSD), supports new students through every stage of the orientation and transition process.

Upcoming activities include an information session and meet and greet for regional/international students, UWI Clicks (a guide for the campus's online portals), orientation for students with disabilities, as well as orientations for the respective faculties.

**For dates, contacts, and more information, visit the FYE site at [sta.uwi.edu/fye/](https://sta.uwi.edu/fye/)**



**UWI/Guardian Premium Teaching Awards**  
**September 27**  
**Teaching and Learning Complex**  
**UWI St Augustine Campus**

Join UWI St Augustine's Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) and Guardian Life of the Caribbean for their Premium Teaching Awards. The awards will recognise outstanding educators at The UWI. This year, under the theme "Empowering Educators, Enriching Learners: The AI Education Era", featured speaker Dr Mike Sharples, Emeritus Professor of Educational Technology at The Open University, UK, will explore AI's power to support educators and revolutionise the way we teach and learn.

**To register, visit <https://bit.ly/UWIGLPTA2024>.**  
**For more information, email [premiumeventcetl@sta.uwi.edu](mailto:premiumeventcetl@sta.uwi.edu)**  
**or go to CETL's website at [sta.uwi.edu/cetl/](https://sta.uwi.edu/cetl/)**

## Gardening at Night

**Soca artiste Aaron St Louis**, known by music lovers as **Voice**, keeps the party going well into night time at the St Augustine campus on Sunday, July 7. The occasion was **The UWI Garden Party 2024, La Festa in Giardino**. Hosted by **The UWI Development and Endowment Fund (UWIDEF)**, the Garden Party, along with the **UWIDEF Charity Golf Challenge** and the **IGNITE** benefit concert, were created to raise funds to provide scholarships and bursaries to deserving students seeking higher education at The UWI.

This year's Garden Party had an Italian theme, and included food, decor, and fashion reminiscent of Italy while also representing Caribbean culture in cuisine, style, and of course, performances. **To see more, go to page 15 of this issue.**

