



UWI TODAY

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES • ST AUGUSTINE CAMPUS

SUNDAY 1 DECEMBER 2024



Joy at the Journey's End



Graduation 2024

Camila Indriago (right), a graduate of The UWI's Institute of International Relations, embraces classmate **Carissa Benjamin** at their graduation ceremony on Friday, October 25, 2024 at the St Augustine campus. Held on October 24 to 26 at the **Sport and Physical Education Centre (SPEC)**, the ceremonies brought together the campus community, family, and friends to acknowledge the achievements of their graduates, and officially close an important chapter of their lives. "It was cathartic," Camila, a Venezuelan citizen who came to T&T in 2017, described her graduation experience. "Finally, I am here." PHOTO: JPETERS IMAGES



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■ FROM THE PRINCIPAL

To Prosper and Help Others

From mid-October to early November, a caravan of sorts has been winding its way through the Caribbean. This group, made up of some of the most senior personnel of The University of the West Indies, has been taking part in the University's graduation 2024 ceremonies on all of the Campuses.

Graduation is our single most important occasion. We celebrate our students, recognise our work as educators, share the output of the university with society, and reaffirm our regional character. It is a time of great resonance for us all, especially the students and their loved ones. It is an annual reminder of our mission and why it matters.

The greatest beneficiary of this graduating class will be Caribbean society itself. The UWI has unleashed the next crop of young professionals, business people, artists, academics, scientists, and patriotic citizens. We have helped to cultivate human potential that our collection of islands requires to sustain themselves.

At our graduation ceremonies this year at UWI St Augustine, I was particularly pleased that we were able to bestow honorary degrees on Mr Maniram Ragbir and Dr Patricia Rodney. These are not only experts in their field (plastic surgery and public health respectively), but outstanding CARICOM citizens who have been beacons of light, inspiring many others with their passion for social justice.

Mr Ragbir has educated many junior surgeons in T&T and the region, he has also taken part in humanitarian missions and performed free reconstructive surgery on people in several developing countries. As an expert in public health, Dr Rodney's work includes advocating for equitable healthcare across Africa. For many, she is known as the widow of assassinated Guyanese historian Dr Walter Rodney. However, in her own right, she has stood for equality and human rights.

Together, these honorary graduates are examples to our graduating class that they can operate at the highest levels in their fields, provide for themselves and their families, and still make a powerful contribution to humanity – not just their communities or countries.

This is an important counter message in an age where unfortunately, some of the most prominent voices, globally, focus on self-interest, personal enrichment, and power for its own sake. The UWI, apart from its mission to educate students, has always made instilling the values of good citizenship a priority.

This graduation was the first for our new Chancellor, Dr Dodridge Miller. He is, as the great Black Stalin sang, a "Caribbean Man" with more than three decades of experience as a leader in the world of insurance, banking, and finance. Chancellor Miller gave an outstanding address to the graduating class, advising them to think globally, and was an uplifting and inspirational presence at



FROM LEFT: UWI Chancellor Dr Dodridge D Miller, Education Minister Dr Nyan Gadsby-Dolly, UWI Vice-Chancellor Professor Sir Hilary Beckles, and UWI St Augustine Campus Principal Professor Rose-Marie Antoine at the 2024 Graduation Ceremonies. PHOTO: ANEEL KARIM

Graduation is our single most important occasion. We celebrate our students, recognise our work as educators, share the output of the university with society, and reaffirm our regional character.

the ceremonies. It was a pleasure to welcome him into The UWI's regional community and host him at the St. Augustine Campus.

However, the graduation ceremonies were bittersweet because of the departure of our last Chancellor, Mr Robert Bermudez who was a steady presence at Campus and university events. He is a man of great intellect and deep understanding of Caribbean society. He served The UWI faithfully during his tenure and we at the St Augustine campus community wish him well.

Most of all, we wish our new graduates, who now move on to the next stage in their lives, all the best. University life is very challenging, but it is also very structured. The institution provides the tools they need and the right road map for success.

The world outside the campus's gates might seem deceptively less onerous, and in some ways may be easier. Our graduates must choose their challenges and embrace strategies to achieve their goals and persevere. That can be daunting. However, I have faith in their ability to find their way, to prosper and help others. After all, the assets that The UWI have given them during their years of study are valuable beyond the campus as well.

On behalf of UWI St Augustine, I congratulate all of our graduates. I look forward to seeing their promise made manifest – for themselves and for humanity.

Rose-Marie Antoine

Professor Rose-Marie Antoine

Campus Principal

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MARCH 1964: Graduands at an outdoor ceremony in front of UWI St Augustine's Main Administration Building for the first ever graduation ceremony. PHOTO: COURTESY THE UWI MUSEUM



■ PRINCIPAL'S RESEARCH AWARDS 2024

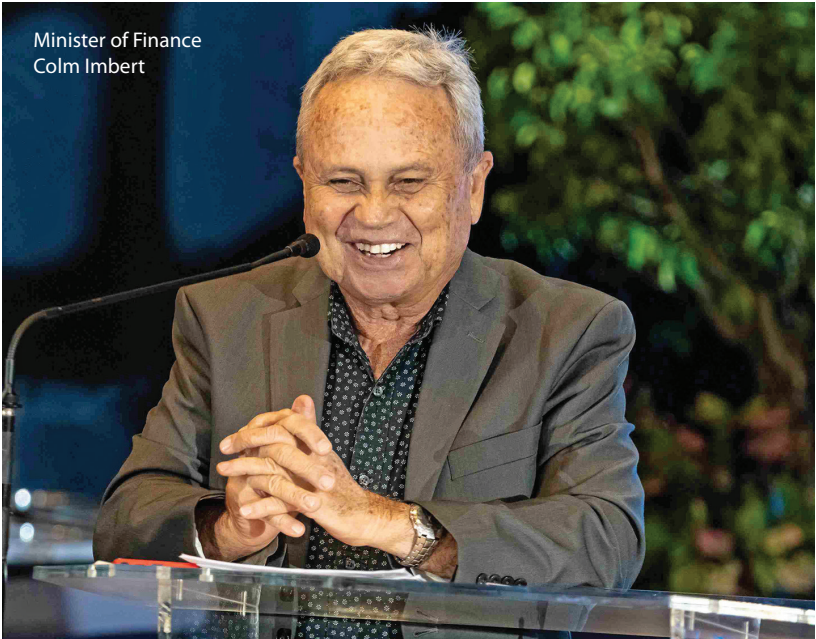


'RELEVANT RESEARCH PROPELS SOCIETY FORWARD'

St Augustine Campus Principal commends awardees as Minister Imbert announces \$10 Million funding for research



Principal's Award for Best Researcher 2024 joint awardees Professor Roger Hosein (left) and Professor Adesh Ramsubhag (right) with Professor Rose-Marie Antoine. PHOTOS: JPETERS IMAGES



UWI St Augustine held its 2024 Principal's Research Awards and Conference on November 14, 2024 celebrating outstanding contributions from its top researchers. During the event, Minister of Finance Colm Imbert announced a \$10 million investment from the government to fund research at the university, reinforcing their commitment to advancing academic and scientific pursuits.

"We know that the leading countries around the world have demonstrated the value of investing in research and development, which fuels creativity, entrepreneurship, and sustainability," said Campus Principal Professor Rose-Marie Antoine.

"Relevant research propels society forward. The percentage of GDP invested in research and development is key. The most successful countries in the world understand this formula and invest in research and development—South

Korea invests as much as 5.21 percent, and China and the USA are the highest spenders in terms of dollars. Similarly, with private companies, there is a direct relationship between the amount spent on RDI and success—Amazon, Apple, Huawei are listed in the top five."

Professor Antoine spoke on the importance of moving beyond traditional sectors:

"We need the private sector to recognise and grasp these opportunities for their own development as well. We must move away from the security blanket of an overly emphasised retail sector and move more assertively into investment in research, development, and innovation."

The evening ceremony highlighted UWI's exceptional researchers, with prestigious awards presented in several categories, including the Principal's Award for Best Researcher, which was shared by Professor Adesh

Ramsubhag from the Department of Life Sciences, Faculty of Science and Technology, and Professor Roger Hosein from the Department of Economics, Faculty of Social Sciences.

Professor Ramsubhag was recognised for his pioneering work in microbiology and biotechnology, which has had transformative impacts on health, agriculture, and environmental sustainability. Professor Hosein was commended for his impactful economic research and contributions to Caribbean development, particularly in the area of Small Island Developing States and disaster resilience.

■ For more information on the awards, visit: <https://sta.uwi.edu/researchawards/>
To view the awards online, visit The UWI St Augustine YouTube page at [youtube.com/watch?v=luo1Kox8KY0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=luo1Kox8KY0)





Principal's Award for Best Researcher (Joint)

- **Professor Adesh Ramsubhag**
Department of Life Sciences,
Faculty of Science and Technology
- **Professor Roger Hosein** – Department
of Economics, Faculty of Social Sciences

Principal's Special Innovation Award

- **Mr Nishan Rampersad** – Innovation:
"Human Resources Promotion Tracking
Solution", Campus Information
Technology Services (CITS)

Principal's Award for Most Impactful Community Research

- **Professor Shirin Haque**
Project: "Women in Science for Hope
Foundation"
Department of Physics,
Faculty of Science and Technology

Most Outstanding Faculty Researchers

- **Professor Michelle Mycoo**
Department of Geomatics Engineering
and Land Management, Faculty of
Engineering
- **Dr Ronald Roopnarine** – Faculty of Food
and Agriculture, Department of Food
Production
- **Professor Jerome De Lisle** – School of
Education, Faculty of Humanities and
Education
- **Dr Justin Koo** – Faculty of Law
- **Dr Shastri Motilal** – Department of
Para-clinical Sciences, Faculty of Medical
Sciences
- **Dr Richard Taylor** – Department of
Chemistry, Faculty of Science and
Technology
- **Dr Riann Singh & Dr Wendell Wallace**
Department of Management Studies &
Department of Behavioural Sciences,
Faculty of Social Sciences

Most Outstanding Researcher of the Centre/Institute/Unit

- **Dr Preeya Mohan** – Sir Arthur Lewis
Institute of Social and Economic Studies

Most Outstanding Graduate Researcher Award & Mentorship Award

- **Graduate Student:**
Dr Amanda Christine Ramdass
Supervisor: Dr Sephra Rampersad
Thesis: "Biochemical and Genomic Features of
Hydrocarbonoclastic Microbes in Trinidad"
PhD in Biochemistry with High Commendation
Department of Life Sciences, Faculty of Science and
Technology

Most Promising Early Career Researcher Award

- **Dr Preeya Mohan** – Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of
Social and Economic Studies
- **Dr Oshaine Blake** – Department of Chemical
Engineering, Faculty of Engineering

Best Team Research

- **Dr Ricardo Clarke & Dr Xsitaaz Chadee & Team**
Project: "Sustainable Futures: Building Resilient
Communities through Health, Infrastructure, and
Clean Energy"
Department of Physics, Faculty of Science and
Technology

Most Outstanding Regional/International Research Project

- **Dr Sandeep B Maharaj & Team**
Project: "Connecting Climate Minds"
School of Pharmacy, Faculty of Medical Sciences

Award Committee's Selection for Special Recognition – Most Outstanding International/Regional Research Project

- **Mr Andreas Antonopoulos & Ms Deboleena Paul** – Documentary Film *Cheenee*
Film Programme & Department of Creative
and Festival Arts, Faculty of Humanities and
Education

Most Productive Research Department Award

- **Department of Basic Veterinary Sciences**
Head of the Department Professor Venkatesan
Sundaram & Staff
Faculty of Medical Sciences

Most Productive Research Institute, Centre, or Unit Award

- **Seismic Research Centre**
Director Dr Erouscilla Joseph & Staff

Hurricane and Earthquake Alleviation Research (HEAR) Award

- **Dr Karla Georges & Team**
Project: "Regional coordination for disaster
preparedness and mitigation activities to
relieve animal suffering and safeguard the
agricultural and livestock sector"
School of Veterinary Medicine,
Faculty of Medical Sciences

Special Mention for Innovation under HEAR Award Category

- **Mr Manoj Kollam**
Project: "Earthquake forecasting models
through the Chaotic Chimp-Based African
Vulture Optimisation Algorithm (CCAVOA)
combined with CUDA-accelerated Levenberg-
Marquardt Backpropagation Neural Networks
(LM-BPNN)
Department of Electrical and Computer
Engineering, Faculty of Engineering

HEAR Award Certificate of Recognition

- **Khaion Maitland**
Secondary School Student,
Queens Royal College
- **Joshua Maraj**
Secondary School Student, Fatima College



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THE UWI ST AUGUSTINE GRADUATION CEREMONIES 2024

A Celebration and Call to Service

St Augustine’s graduating class enjoy their moment, but ready themselves to confront the challenges that beset us

BY AMY LIBAKSH



PHOTOGRAPHY:
GUYTN OTTLEY
JPETERS IMAGES
ANEEL KARIM



Every year, The UWI becomes a bustling hub of activity as Graduation approaches in October. Staff and students alike are connected in this mad dash towards the final goodbye to the graduating class of the year – writing speeches, coordinating every step of every day, and collecting robes. And then, it all comes together. And with a deep exhale, it is over.

This year, as the ceremonies unfolded from October 24 to 26, there was a deep sense of community across campus. The students of the graduating class may have all had wildly different experiences throughout their time at The UWI, but for a moment, they were able to come together and recognise

the unifying struggles and growth they had all experienced. While the stories of personal successes are always a mainstay of valedictorian speeches, there was a definite air of resolve about the proceedings as the speakers talked not only of their own journeys and futures, but also of the wider role the graduating class would have in the future of the Caribbean and the world. Lyan Lagan, representing the Faculty of Social Sciences, noted that, “We are the generation that must create ripples that will protect our planet and leave it better for those who follow. We are the leaders this region needs to intensify Caribbean development, and to ensure the West Indies remains resilient against the forces of

globalisation, resilient against the impacts of climate change, and resilient in our determination to succeed.” Melissa Edwards, valedictorian representing the faculties of Science and Technology and Food and Agriculture, also echoed this call to face the myriad regional and global challenges ahead. “Let us prove that we are a generation like no other, prepared to tackle the world’s most urgent challenges,” she said. “Whether it’s addressing food security and sustainability or driving innovation through new technologies, we are equipped to lead, ensuring our islands not only survive, but thrive for future generations.”



This year, as the ceremonies unfolded from October 24 to 26, there was a deep sense of community across campus.





The topic of sustainability was on everyone's lips – regardless of the field the students were stepping into. There was a sense of urgency to change the way we treat the world around us.

For Koffi Paul, representing the faculties of Engineering and Law, this was an opportunity to declare, “As lawyers and engineers, we will be the ones driving legislation, producing innovative designs and propelling the Caribbean towards sustainability. We will be the next inventors and the ones creating avenues for sustainable and renewable energy to flourish in the Caribbean.”

For those three days, in every corner of the room was a graduate who could make a difference to the region by focusing in on their passion and how that could be utilised for the wider community. Dr Patricia Rodney, who was conferred with the Doctor of Laws, honoris causa, spoke of her own journey in service to the communities she has been a part of, and gave the graduating cohort the advice of being passionate about their callings and becoming servant-leaders in their communities.

It seems as though the new graduates are acutely aware of their social responsibility and filled with a fire to take it on.

For the past few years, students on campus have faced challenges like no other generation before. Antoni Mannette, representing the Faculty of Social Sciences, reminisced about their “days on Zoom”, hoping for strong Wi-Fi connections to make it through class, and then re-adjusting to life on campus after the days of isolation during the height of COVID-19 lockdowns.

These students have seen the way changes across the world can deeply affect their own lives, and how vital it is to have strong and resilient communities. As Mannette put it, “Whether your background is in economics, political science, management, social work, or psychology, the one thing that unites us is an understanding of the immense beauty found in human potential explored and expressed collectively. What we yearn for is a Caribbean community filled with individuals operating at their highest capacity.”

Now that this chapter of their lives is over, some may feel that they have a clear path to follow, while others may have a vaguer idea of where they hope to end up. But as Dr Rodney noted, plans are just plans, and life may turn out differently than expected. But once they hold on to their passion and find their way to how that passion can make the world around them better, these bright-eyed graduates can weather any of the storms ahead, and find that where they end up could be exactly where they were meant to be, even if it was not where they thought they were headed.

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

New Academic Dress for a New World institution

When one thinks “fashion forward”, a university might be one of the last places that come to mind. Centres of the cerebral, they invest greatly in tradition and ceremony. Yet, at this year's graduation ceremonies, UWI's most senior personnel came with a fresh look. Graduation 2024 unveiled a new collection of academic regalia (gowns), significantly redesigned for the first time in seven and a half decades.

The purpose for this redesigned regalia was much more than an aesthetic upgrade.

“UWI celebrates its Caribbean legacy and continued evolution as an independent university as it takes one step closer to a complete break from colonial ties,” a statement from the university said.

“The redesign reflects a consultative process that engaged the university community, ensuring that the gowns resonate with the spirit of contemporary Caribbean society. They now feature vibrant, eye-catching designs as a tribute to the region's colours, textures, and culture with the creative input of staff members Dr Rajeev Venugopal and Dara Jordan-Brown, who conceptualised and sketched the

pattern, and a talented Jamaican fashion designer, Tonycia Jarrett who designed the full suite of regalia.”

The regalia were manufactured by Jamaican fashion designer Donald Mirander through his Rednarim brand and uses, according to the statement from UWI, “fabric that is more suitable to the tropical climate”.

UWI Vice-Chancellor Professor Sir Hilary Beckles, speaking on the new gowns, said “The story of The UWI's academic dress parallels its history. We celebrated our 75th Diamond Jubilee anniversary, knowing we were entering a significant new era. It is one where we stand proudly Caribbean. The new regalia is both symbolic and significant. We have stripped off another layer of the cloak of colonialism.”

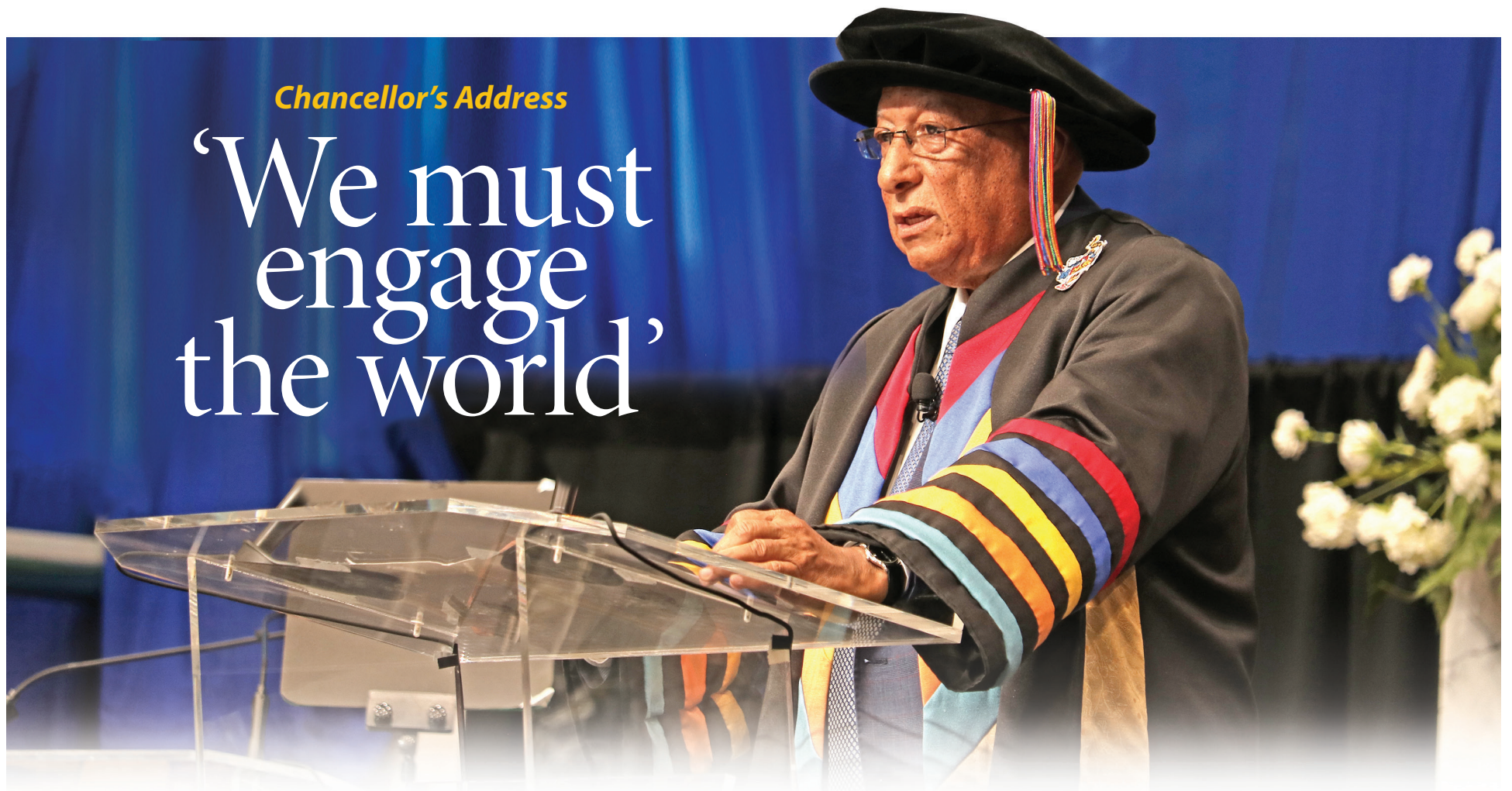
When The UWI came into being in 1962 under the Royal Charter and Statutes, there was a need for its own distinctive academic dress. The university adopted the Chancellor's gown as its first official academic dress, first worn by Princess Alice, Countess of Athlone, The UWI's first Chancellor. The collection of regalia for its principal officers that followed has served to the present day.

The new regalia is both symbolic and significant.
We have stripped off another layer
of the cloak of colonialism.

UWI Vice-Chancellor Professor Sir Hilary Beckles



■ THE UWI ST AUGUSTINE GRADUATION CEREMONIES 2024



UWI TODAY is pleased to share the address by UWI Chancellor Dr Dodridge Miller at The UWI St Augustine Graduation Ceremonies 2024.

Good morning/afternoon, Class of 2024. Congratulations!

Today, you stand here with fellow graduates, family, and friends to celebrate a significant milestone in your lives. Completing your course of study showcases not only your academic prowess, but also your commitment and resilience. Many of you began this journey during a global health crisis, and your presence here today is a testament to your strength of character in overcoming significant challenges.

As you embark on this new and exciting chapter, you will encounter numerous opportunities and, undoubtedly, some challenges. Embrace the opportunities and use the skills and knowledge you've gained to navigate the complexities of the world.

The knowledge you've gained at The University of the West Indies has prepared you to meet these events with confidence, whether they originate locally or are influenced by global circumstances.

Dream big and think with an open mind. Throughout your academic journey, you've been exposed to information that allows you to see the world through a broader lens. The examples and illustrations you've encountered during your study are not just theoretical props designed for the purpose of obtaining a degree; they reflect a real, interconnected world, the afterglow of the consciousness of millions of people going about their daily lives. Your local environment is part of this larger global space, where events and decisions made thousands of miles away can have a significant impact locally. Be assured that the knowledge you've gained at The University of the West Indies has prepared you to meet these events with confidence, whether they originate locally or are influenced by global circumstances. Approach issues from a broad perspective, even as you plan and act locally.



‘The necessity of global thinking’

I was recently asked why The University of the West Indies pursues a global strategy when there are enough local problems to address. This question isn’t new. In a different setting, while discussing the merits of global thinking with local executives, a similar question arose: “Why not focus on our local circumstances since we are not competing globally?” To answer, I borrowed from a distinguished US university professor who shared a perspective with his business class on the necessity of global thinking.

He suggested: “Consider that in this interdependent global space, an American might drive to work in a car designed in Germany, assembled in Mexico by Daimler-Chrysler from components made in the US and Japan, fabricated from Korean steel and Malaysian rubber. He may fill the car with gasoline at a BP service station owned by a British multinational company. The gasoline could have been pumped from a well off the coast of Africa by a French oil company, transported to the US in a ship owned by a Greek shipping line.

While driving, the American might talk to his stockbroker on a Nokia cell phone designed in Finland, assembled in Texas using a chipset produced in Taiwan, designed by Indian engineers working for a firm in California. He could instruct his stockbroker to purchase shares in Deutsche Telekom, a German telecommunications company transformed into a global entity by an energetic Israeli CEO.

“He may turn on his car radio, which was made in Malaysia by a Japanese firm, to hear a popular song composed by a Swede and sung by a group of Danes in English, who signed a record contract with a French music company to promote their record in the US. The driver might pull into a drive-through coffee stall run by a Korean and order a latte and chocolate-covered biscotti. The coffee beans come from Brazil, the chocolate from Peru, while the biscotti were made locally using an old Italian recipe.”

This, the professor contended, was the essence of a globally connected world. This was the world in 2004, and while much has changed in the two decades, it remains the world we live in today. Nokia is no longer the mobile phone of choice, Chrysler has been spun off from Daimler which has since rebranded to Mercedes, and our taste in music may have evolved. However, the need to view the world as a large interconnected global space is as relevant today as it was then.

**Embrace this moment,
stand tall in your
achievements, and let
your resilience and success
light the path forward for
future generations.**



**Throughout your
academic journey,
you’ve been exposed to
information that allows
you to see the world
through a broader lens.**

‘The world is forever evolving’

The often-used statement “think global, act local” is good advice. The UWI, even with its limited resources, cannot afford to view the world only as a local or regional construct. To do so would fail its graduates and the region. We must engage the world and participate in important research and conversations on matters of global consequence. By doing so, we will continue to produce graduates with the academic competence, and critical and strategic thinking to operate in any environment of their choosing. You, the members of the graduating class of 2024, are the beneficiaries of this global thinking.

The world is forever evolving. On that point of evolution, I note that, coinciding with this year’s graduation ceremonies and the theme, “*Celebrating Caribbean Legacy: A Kaleidoscope of Resilience*”, new and modern academic regalia has been introduced for the Principal and campus officers to wear at formal ceremonies.

The academic regalia at UWI was first introduced in the 1960s. The most recent design was decades old, and after consulting with our university community, these redesigned gowns you see today better represent our Caribbean identity and symbolise yet another break from colonial ties.

I hope this initiative inspires you and reinforces that you are part of a vibrant heritage that refuses to accept the status quo. Embrace this moment, stand tall in your achievements, and let your resilience and success light the path forward for future generations.

Your journey of growth and learning doesn’t end today. It merely evolves into new chapters. As your alma mater, we are committed to supporting you through every phase of this continuous evolution. Carry forward the spirit of resilience and innovation, and know that we look forward to witnessing and contributing to your future successes.

Stay curious and continue to seek knowledge and personal growth. Above all, use your talents and abilities to make a difference. Go forth and make us all proud.

Congratulations again on your significant achievement, and may the light continue to shine from the West. Well done, class of 2024. Thank you.



The UWI ALUMNI Pledge



As a graduate of
The University of the West Indies,
I commit myself to uphold the
ideals and goals of my
alma mater.

My conduct and voice shall
reflect the commitment to
excellence of the
“Light Rising from the West”,
as I fulfill my social and
professional responsibilities and
serve my community and region.

I will strive to ensure the
UWI’s place as a Caribbean
icon: the catalyst for Caribbean
development and leadership. It is
a legacy that I will proudly help
build for future generations.

The UWI –
First in our hearts and
first in our region!



THE UWI ST AUGUSTINE GRADUATION CEREMONIES 2024



Mr Maniram Ragbir

A common conundrum: choose the path of higher education, or surrender to the sport you're passionate about. If you've come from rural Charlieville, where your parents toil in the sugar cane industry and the prospects are precarious on the cricket field, you really don't have much of a choice.

For Maniram Ragbir, who had won a national scholarship while at Presentation College in Chaguanas, it was still a huge decision. When he finished A-levels, he was school captain, and that year, they won the national competition. He knew his family couldn't afford much, and had applied to do accounts at UWI St Augustine, but the scholarship opened doors, and he was encouraged to teach for a year at Presentation College while he pondered his options. He decided to study medicine, and went off to UWI Mona. He hadn't given up his cricket; he was actually involved in national trials while he was a junior doctor, but he knew what he had to do.

"Since then, all I have done is medicine and teaching. I really love teaching, so I couldn't think of anything better that I could do other than teaching medicine."

Happily, his cricket never suffered.

"Everywhere I've been in the UK, I've played cricket," he says, reflecting that he has probably played more cricket as a doctor, than he would have had it been his professional career.

As tempting as it is to turn this into a cricket tale, it really is more the story of a man who took a leap – as many of his generation did – to travel into the unknown, determined to work hard, to excel, and to pass on his knowledge in the hope of encouraging others to do the same.

As he turns 60 in November, he has become a globally respected doctor, specialising in plastic surgery, specifically the reconstructive arm, which treats people affected by accidents, burns; congenital conditions such as cleft lip and palate; and head, neck and sarcoma reconstruction surgery.

Renowned internationally, a secret at home

He is the current president of the British Association of Plastic, Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgeons (an ethnic first for BAPRAS), and in 2018, chaired the Specialist Advisory Committee for UK plastic surgery, and was responsible for the national selection for its training.

A look at his qualifications and his track record makes it surprising that his public profile in the land of his birth is negligible outside of the medical profession. Fortunately, his credentials were presented to The UWI, and there was

While hard work
is important,
support from
your community
– however you
define it –
is vital.

no hesitation about conferring him with the Doctor of Science, honoris causa, on October 26, 2024.

Apart from his impressive surgical skills and extensive training, The UWI recognised him for developing its postgraduate plastic surgery programme and his mentorship. His alma mater also noted that he "conducts humanitarian missions, providing free reconstructive surgeries in countries like Guyana, Tanzania, and India," and that "he is the Clinical Lead for the North of England Bone and Soft Tissue Tumour Service and is dedicated to training future surgeons".

That dedication is real.

Although he's lived in the UK for decades – he has been a consultant plastic surgeon at the Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust since 2006 – he has regularly returned to Trinidad to conduct training sessions.

From October 23 to 26, a regional plastic surgery conference called CAPRAS was held in Jamaica, which he organised as head of BAPRAS. It was managed by Dr Rajeev Venugopal, a plastic surgeon as well at The UWI Mona campus. When we spoke, it had not yet happened, but Dr Ragbir said the intention was to try "to build up reconstructive surgery in the Caribbean. We're hoping to show people what can be done." (He had to miss part of it to attend the graduation ceremony at St Augustine.)

The Honorary Graduates

Putting lives back together

Mr Maniram Ragbir
builds community while
healing and teaching

BY VANEISA BAKSH

'Nobody gets where they are alone'

This sense of community is at the core of his lifestyle. "Nobody gets where they are alone," he says. While hard work is important, support from your community – however you define it – is vital.

His personal community includes his immediate family. His Welsh wife, Midwife and Burn Specialist Nurse Belinda, runs a service called Camouflage, which helps people to recover mentally and physically. It is not difficult to imagine what a powerful bond it is between them. They have two children whose names represent their parents' culture. Amba, the elder at 25, was named for a version of the Hindu goddess Parvati, but her middle name is Rhiannon, reflecting her Welsh heritage. Eashan (22) reflects Shiva, and his middle name is Owain.

While it has been difficult for Mani (as he prefers to be called) to maintain the Hindu lifestyle the way he had in Trinidad, he has not let go of his homeland's culture. In an online interview with the PMFA Journal, he was asked to name one book or paper he would recommend for every plastic surgeon to read. His answer? *"The Multi-Cultural Cuisine of Trinidad & Tobago & the Caribbean: Naparima Girls' High School Cookbook."* What better example of his commitment to culture and community?

When we had spoken about his emphasis on mentoring, he had talked about how his Trinidadian upbringing, family, and community contributed to that, citing Professor Vijay Naraynsingh and Dr Terry Ali as two people whose work inspired him. Hard work, too.

"Hard work doesn't have to equate with sadness. You can actually work hard and enjoy what you're doing. You don't always need someone to teach you; you need someone to inspire you."

Asked what this UWI honour means to him, he says, "A lot more than you might think. It's all well and good to get recognition all over the world, but to have it from your own people... if you believe in family, these are the people you want to be proud of you. It means more to me to be recognised by UWI than any other university."

Vaneisa Baksh is an editor and writer.
Earlier this year, she released her book *Son of Grace*,
a biography of cricketer Sir Frank Worrell.

THE UWI ST AUGUSTINE GRADUATION CEREMONIES 2024



Dr Patricia Rodney

The Honorary Graduates

Humanity's Resilient Advocate

Dr Patricia Rodney has dedicated her life to finding justice, for others and herself

BY AMY LI BAKSH

As a child growing up in pre-Independence Guyana, Patricia Rodney knew she wanted to see the world. Although her first job out of high school was as a teacher, she soon realised that this profession wouldn't allow her to follow her dreams of travelling. And so, when she came across a recruitment drive for student nurses in England, she leapt at the opportunity. It was in London that she would observe the social inequality that was being faced in many parts of the world, and where she began to cultivate her resolute sense of justice.

"At that time, in London, I not only saw the racism in general, but I saw how Black people were treated within the healthcare system," says Dr Rodney.

She resolved to try and change the healthcare sector, and has spent much of her life working towards more equitable conditions for marginalised communities both working in and being served by healthcare systems across the Caribbean, Africa, and North America.

Her next port of call was Tanzania. Having married fellow activist and scholar Walter Rodney in 1965, she and her firstborn, Shaka, would join him the following year as he relocated for his appointment as lecturer at the University of Dar es Salaam. Here, her experience in healthcare would be much needed.

Confronting shortages and scarcity

"When we got to Tanzania, there was a shortage of public health nurses," says Dr Rodney.

She got a position with the city council's school nursing programme, where she was engaging mostly with schools and the issues facing the children of the community.

"I also saw during that period that the kids needed more than just treating a sore, or something. A lot of them were malnourished.... At that time, there wasn't any connection between what we were doing in the schools, and what was happening in the home."

It was a light bulb moment for her, seeing the limitations of the healthcare system working within a silo, disconnected from the rest of the lives of the people they were serving.

With her husband now taking up a post at his alma mater, The UWI's Mona campus, the family made their way back to Jamaica for a brief stint.

"I started working immediately at The UWI hospital, and I worked within the prenatal ward," says Dr Rodney. Again, her instinct for engaging more deeply with her patients led her to see the wider social problems facing these mothers outside of the hospital space.

"I saw where nursing was confined to a hospital setting, but then you have all these social problems that people face when they come into an institution... nursing didn't fill some of those gaps that I was seeing."

She decided to begin studying social sciences at The UWI, but her time there was short-lived. Her husband's work, engaging with inequality on the political front, led to the Jamaican government banning him from the country and the student-led demonstrations known as the "Rodney riots".

After another period in Tanzania, where she was in charge of the Vaccination Centre, focusing on early childhood vaccinations, the family now of five (with the younger two children, Kanini and Asha, being born in Tanzania), would finally return to Guyana. With no jobs hiring in healthcare, Dr Rodney began working in childcare instead, bringing her experience to foster a more well-rounded early childhood education for the children in her care by also engaging with parents and childcare staff on a more holistic level. She completed her diploma in social work at the University of Guyana, and then went on to spend a year in Mona completing her undergraduate degree at The UWI's Mona campus.

A life-altering tragedy

She was optimistic that she would soon find employment in the field of healthcare, having widened her pool of skills. But the hostile political climate against her husband's work left them both unemployed for eight months, with any opportunities being blocked from higher up the chain. When a colleague received a grant to hire with a budget external to the university in 1980, Dr Rodney was hired as his research associate, and it seemed the employment embargo was finally over.

"He hired me in May," says Dr Rodney. "In less than one month, in June, my husband was assassinated."

Their children, at the time, were 14, 11, and almost 9 years old. Their lives would never be the same. For Dr Rodney, she had no choice but to keep moving. Relocating to Barbados, she found that her degree in social work had become more vital to their survival than ever. With no family in Barbados, the inconsistent hours required for a nursing career would not have allowed her to be as present for her children. She held three jobs during her time in Barbados, continuing her work and doing what she refers to as "consciousness raising" – a term referring to engaging with communities to help increase awareness of social issues that was popularised in the 1960s.

For the next decade, she continued her work tirelessly, but began feeling that a change was needed. "I felt that I had to leave the Caribbean," she says. "In the Caribbean, I was always seen as Rodney's wife. I was never seen as a person, or for what I was doing. I needed space."

In 1989, she joined her mother and sisters in Canada, where she completed her PhD in Sociology with a minor in Adult Education from the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. Her thesis drew from her work in Barbados, and then in Grenada, becoming published in 1998 under the title "The Caribbean State Health Care and Women: An Analysis of Barbados and Grenada". In it, she analysed the healthcare policies in socialist Grenada during the 1979-1983 period with those in capitalist Barbados.

Scholar, activist, and inspiration to others

She eventually became a research fellow at the Canadian Advisory Board on the Status of Women, as well as taking on the role of the Program Coordinator of the International Task Force on Literacy at the International Council for Adult Education. In 1995, she joined the faculty at Morehouse School of Medicine, where she remained for another 15 years, becoming the Programme Director for the Department of Community Health and Preventative Medicine, and then the Inaugural Assistant Dean for Public Health Education.

Alongside her own wide-spanning career, Dr Rodney established the Walter Rodney Foundation in 2006, to honour her husband's legacy and help continue his work. In 2021, after intense lobbying headed by Dr Rodney, the Government of Guyana was found responsible for Walter Rodney's death by a Commission of Inquiry.

In 2011, Dr Rodney also established Partners in Health, Education and Development, an international organisation to advocate for more equitable healthcare with a focus on Africa. On October 24, 2024, she was conferred with the Doctor of Laws, honoris causa, by The UWI St Augustine campus. Her work continues to inspire a new generation of activists in all fields, to look beyond the silos of their own spaces and see the wider stories of people's lives that can help create more equitable and just communities for all.

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

THE UWI ST AUGUSTINE GRADUATION CEREMONIES 2024

Faculty of Science and Technology

Held on October 17 at the Daaga Auditorium, the Faculty of Science and Technology ceremony “welcomed over 400 guests to celebrate the dedication, resilience, and academic excellence of our outstanding students”, a statement from the faculty said. Prizes – many of them sponsored by prominent companies and other organisations – were given in categories such as the Dean’s Prize, departmental prizes, and Best Overall Performance. The feature address was given by Mr Irwin Williams, Head of Software Development at iGovTT.

For more info, visit <https://sta.uwi.edu/fst/annual-prizes-and-awards-ceremony-2023202>



Professor Brian Cockburn, Dean of the Faculty of Science and Technology, presents an award to a student.

Faculty of Law

Hosted under the theme “Encouraging Excellence in the Law as the Foundation for Regional Progress”, the Faculty of Law (FoL) ceremony took place on October 18 at the Teaching and Learning Complex. The event brought together students, staff, and members of the legal community. Justice Winston Anderson, Judge of the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) and Chairman of the CCJ Academy of Law, gave the feature address. Prizes were given in categories such as Dean’s Honour List, Special Awards, LLM with Distinction Awards, and First Class Honours Awards.

For more information on FoL and its events and activities, visit them at <https://sta.uwi.edu/law/>



Master of Laws (LLM) with distinction graduates at the Faculty of Law ceremony.



Dr Alicia Elias-Roberts (left), Dean of the Faculty of Law, gives a prize to a student.



Dr Acolla Lewis-Cameron (right), Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, presents an award to a student.

Faculty of Social Sciences

Faculty members and students gathered at the Learning Resource Centre for Evening of Excellence 2024, the Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS) prize giving ceremony. Themed “Through Resilience, We Rise”, the October 21 ceremony awarded Campus Prizes, faculty nominees for University Prizes, First Class Awards, awards for Most Outstanding Students, and others. The featured speaker was Vice President of Franchise Operations and General Manager Caribbean at Coca Cola Mr Muhammad T Abdullah.

For photos of Evening of Excellence 2024, visit the FSS Flickr page at [flickr.com/photos/201688857@N04/albums](https://www.flickr.com/photos/201688857@N04/albums)



A dramatic performance at the Faculty of Social Sciences awards ceremony.

Faculties Prizes and Ceremonies

October is the start of graduation season and the St Augustine campus’s faculties host the achievements of their students and even some of their alumni. The 2024 prizes and awards ceremonies that include prizes – for outstanding academic achievement – make these prize giving events a reality, the faculties bring together alumni and other private citizens, industry, private organisations, state agencies, and the business community. The ceremonies differed due to the specific character of the respective faculties, they all shared one function.



Faculty of Social Sciences
The Faculty of Social Sciences awards ceremony was held at the Learning Resource Centre. Winners of the campus prizes, faculty nominees for University Prizes, First Class Awards, awards for Most Outstanding Students, and others were presented with their awards. The featured speaker was Vice President of Franchise Operations and General Manager Caribbean at Coca Cola Mr Muhammad T Abdullah.

For more information on the Faculty of Social Sciences awards ceremony, visit the FSS Flickr page at [flickr.com/photos/201688857@N04/albums](https://www.flickr.com/photos/201688857@N04/albums)

Shine at Awards Ceremonies

at The UWI, but it is also the time when their own celebrations to recognise the members of staff. All eight faculties held a range of prizes – including monetary awards, research, and service and outreach. To the faculties received great support from UWI professional organisations, non-governmental business community. And although the various characters, programmes and purposes of the fundamental trait: *recognition of excellence*.



Faculty of Food and Agriculture

The Faculty of Food and Agriculture (FFA) held their prizes and awards ceremony on October 21 at the Daaga Auditorium. Awards were given to FFA's First Class Honours graduates, Faculty Prize winners, higher degree graduates, and recipients of professional awards in areas such as Tropical Aquaculture Production. The address was given by Ms Diana Francis, Representative of the Caribbean Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) in Trinidad and Tobago.

For more on the FFA, visit sta.uwi.edu/ffa/

Food and Agriculture Dean Professor Mark Wuddivira (left) and Deputy Dean of Studies Dr Marquitta Webb (right) share a warm moment with a student.

Faculty of Sport

The UWI's Faculty of Sport (FSP) is the university's youngest faculty. It is also the only multi-campus faculty. FSP is represented on each campus through its Academies of Sport, and in T&T that is the St Augustine Academy of Sport (SAAS). They held their awards ceremony on October 22, at the Sport and Physical Education Centre (SPEC). Prizes were given to students for their outstanding work in either academics or sports. On the academics side, this included graduates of the BSc Kinetics and the Certificate in the Art and Science of Coaching programmes, as well as First Class Honours achiever and valedictorian Alexandria Douglas (read about her in our graduation coverage). In sports, awards were given in areas such as Coach of the Year, Team of the Year, and Sportspersons of the Year, which went to para-athlete Johann Biput and national netball player Maikaea Bramble. Gold medal track and field star Jehue Gordon gave the feature address.

For more on the FSP, go to <https://uwi.edu/sport/>
To learn about the SAAS, visit facebook.com/UWISPECSAAS/



Professor Bhesem Ramlal, Dean of the Faculty of Engineering, presents a prize.



Dr Anand Rampersad (right), Head of the St Augustine Academy of Sport, presents an award to a student from The UWI's Faculty of Sport.



Professor Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw, Dean of the Faculty of the Humanities and Education, addresses the audience at their awards ceremony.



Dr Amina Ibrahim-Ali, Instructor in the Academic Literacies Programme at the Department of Modern Language and Linguistics within the FHE, presents a prize to a student.



Students from the Department of Veterinary Medicine reciting their oath.



Professor Hariharan Seetharaman, Dean of the Faculty of Medical Sciences, speaks at one of the faculty's oath-taking ceremonies.

Faculty of Engineering

The Faculty of Engineering (FoE) held their award ceremony on October 22 at Lecture Theatre 1 in Block 13 of the Max Richards Building. Themed "Professionalism and Ethics in Engineering: Progress in Action", the students received a welcome address by Mr Fazil Khan, President of the Joint Consultative Council. "Prizes distributed included cash and membership in professional organisations. The prizes were funded by local, regional and international institutions and organisations, Faculty of Engineering staff and individuals affiliated with the Faculty, and most notably, for the first time, The UWI," a statement from FoE said.

For much more on the FoE awards ceremony, visit their site at <https://sta.uwi.edu/eng/prize-awards>

Faculty of Humanities and Education

"Forge your own Destiny" was the theme of the 2024 Faculty of Humanities and Education (FHE) awards ceremony held on October 23. Described by FHE as "a night of inspiring performances and recognition of achievements in academics and community service", awards were given in categories such as Most Outstanding Student and First Class Honours students. The Popo Elahi Sankarl Community Service Award was given to Theater Arts graduate Emmanuel Ansolia. The featured speaker was Mr Selwyn C Lewis, Founder and President of developmental organisation The Barcam, and an FHE alum.

For more on the FHE ceremony, visit them on Instagram at [uwistafhe](https://www.instagram.com/uwistafhe)

Faculty of Medical Sciences

As part of their initiation into their respective medical fields, graduates of the Faculty of Medical Sciences (FMS) are required to take part in oath-taking ceremonies. These are also occasions for prize giving and celebration. FMS had oath-taking events for all of its schools and programmes, including two for the Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) in February and June, Dentistry in April, Nursing in August, Optometry in September, and Pharmacy and Veterinary Medicine in October. A message to graduates from the School of Veterinary Medicine captured the spirit of all the ceremonies: "We are incredibly proud of your hard work, passion, and commitment that brought you to this moment!"

For more on FMS, visit <https://sta.uwi.edu/fms/>



Graduates in their own words

NATALIE FRANCOIS

Love of Learning, and UWI St Augustine, brings her back

As a child, I gazed out of the car window, my eyes wide with wonder, every time my father drove me and my sister to Tunapuna. There it was, showing from the highway — the UWI sign with the green plants peeking out from a wire mesh. That place, a promise of knowledge and discovery, fascinated me. I vowed silently, “One day, those hallowed halls will be mine.”

My journey to UWI was deeply personal, marked by my father’s sacrifice of his own university education to support our family when I was born. This legacy fuelled my determination to not only attend UWI, but to excel there. In August 1994, my father dropped me off at Trinity Hall, where I spent the next few years forming meaningful friendships with students from across the Caribbean. Life at T-Hall was vibrant, filled with fun, pranks, and friendly rivalry with Canada Hall, including playful confrontations like my near-dunking into the campus fountain.

As an undergraduate in Natural Sciences, I specialised in Chemistry with Analytical Chemistry. Despite academic challenges, including a tough Mathematics (M10A) course with Dr Morris, I persevered. Influential professors like Dr Maxwell, Dr Maharaj, and Dr Richard Thompson shaped my learning. Paying for my degree meant failure wasn’t an option, and I only failed one chemistry course in my first semester. Who could forget the lecturers’ strike in our final year? However, exams proceeded as scheduled. Talk about stress.

‘Despite the challenges and stress associated with teaching, I returned to UWI in 2001’

In my final year, a World of Work seminar inspired me to pursue an International MBA, but financial

With God and
good support,
success is always
possible.

constraints led me to follow my father’s footsteps into teaching. Despite the challenges and stress associated with teaching, I returned to UWI in 2001 for a Postgraduate Diploma in Education. This demanding programme required perseverance, and I met Dr Susan Herbert, my influential chemistry supervisor, who would be instrumental later in my UWI story.

As if I did not have enough torture, in 2008, with financial assistance from the Government’s “Dollar for Dollar Programme”, I finally registered for the IMBA programme. By this time, I knew that I had become an addict to this institution called UWI. This programme was demanding but rewarding. I valued its collaborative nature, which helped me gain the confidence and skills that have shaped my teaching career. This experience left a lasting impact on me. I later encouraged my son to attend the Arthur Lok Jack Global School of Business to pursue the BISB programme in its inaugural year.

In 2015, I began the most challenging Master’s in Education (MEd) programme with a focus on Curriculum. Despite personal and professional challenges, including the theft of my vehicle days before first-year, I excelled. I took some time off next semester

to get my son through his final CAPE exams and obtain a vehicle.

The journey took a more emotional turn when my father passed away on September 30, 2016, profoundly affecting my sense of purpose. The loss led to a temporary hiatus from the MEd programme. I eventually returned, completing all exams in 2020. I had my thesis seminar on February 18, 2020 which I passed, but the COVID-19 pandemic further delayed my progress. As the country came to a crashing halt, so did I.

‘Graduating in 2024 demonstrates that no obstacle is too large’

Despite frustration and doubt, my “keep moving forward” philosophy, inspired by the cartoon movie *Meet the Robinsons*, and support from friends and faculty kept me motivated. Graduating in 2024 demonstrates that no obstacle is too large, and with God and good support, success is always possible.

My journey highlights the value of perseverance, friendship, and supportive lecturers. Key figures like my childhood science teacher and then lecturer at UWI School of Education, Professor Jerome De Lisle, and university lecturers Dr Susan Herbert, Dr Beulah Mitchell, Dr Benignus Bitu, Dr Sharmila Harry, Dr Madgerie Jameson-Charles, and my supervisor, Dr Joanne Nazir, played crucial roles in my success and strengthened my resolve to continue teaching.

This journey was long and challenging, but it left me with lasting memories, friendships, and a profound sense of accomplishment. (PSST. I have never collected my caution money because I know I always keep coming back.)

*Ms Natalie Francois graduated with a Master’s in Education from the School of Education,
Faculty of Humanities and Education.*

Graduates in their own words

GARVIN TAFARI PARSONS

A Ten Year Journey to his Writer's Destination



Since childhood, I have been captivated by stories—whether through books, television, movies, song lyrics, or sharing personal tales with family and friends. Though I kept it to myself for fear of being pushed toward a more conventional career path, I always dreamed of becoming a writer of novels and television scripts. After completing my first degree in Spanish and History, I decided to pursue this dream by enrolling in the Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in Creative Writing at UWI St Augustine.

The MFA programme, designed for part-time students, required two years of coursework followed by two years to complete a manuscript. My first two years were magical: I learned the craft of storytelling, developed my writing skills, and connected with other creatives who helped me grow. I also had the honour of meeting esteemed writers like Kei Miller and Merle Hodge, whose insights shaped my writing journey. In particular, Kei Miller taught me that self-awareness is one of the greatest tools a writer can have.

A meaningful conversation with the late Professor Funso Aiyejina, the programme's former coordinator, inspired me to write stories grounded in my personal experiences—exploring identity, self-discovery, and otherness as a young black man in Trinidad and Tobago. This shift in focus led to my manuscript: a collection of seven short stories, each dealing with themes of sexuality, acceptance, and identity formation.

'Financial struggles soon overwhelmed me'

With my coursework completed by May 2016, I set a goal to finish my manuscript within the next two years. However, life threw several curveballs. My contract job wasn't renewed, and I returned home to live off

Although I initially planned to complete the degree in four years, the journey took ten.

savings, hoping to dedicate myself to writing. But instead of making progress, I spiralled into depression. The freedom employment had offered was gone, and financial struggles soon overwhelmed me, forcing me to take leaves of absence from the programme.

Eventually, I found a job at a call centre, which allowed me to pay off my tuition and return to my manuscript. My mother played a crucial role during this period, reading my work, staying up late with me, and offering endless support through late-night tea sessions with homemade snacks. By March 2021, I was ready to submit.

Tragically, my mother's health took a turn later that year when she was diagnosed with gallbladder cancer

that had spread to her kidneys. She passed away on September 30, leaving me shattered. As the elder son, I had no time to grieve—I had to organise her funeral, manage household responsibilities, care for my family, and support my grandmother. At the same time, I juggled building my Spanish tutoring business and fulfilling my duties in Rotaract.

Grief and new responsibilities made it difficult to focus on my manuscript corrections, which I received in August 2022. Each time I tried to work, the weight of everything I had lost made it impossible to concentrate. While I didn't want to use my mother's death as an excuse, I had to acknowledge the profound impact it had on me. The person who had been so pivotal in my creative process was gone, and I needed time to grieve.

'My mother would not have wanted me to abandon my dream'

Eventually, I realised that my mother would not have wanted me to abandon my dreams. I knew that if she were still here, she would have continued supporting me every step of the way. With this in mind, I found the strength to push forward, and submitted my manuscript corrections in April 2024. Finally, I was cleared to graduate.

Although I initially planned to complete the degree in four years, the journey took ten. But I have no regrets. The obstacles I faced taught me resilience and perseverance, and I now know that the love and the support that my mother gave me will remain with me always. This journey has been as much about personal growth as it was about academic achievement—and crossing the graduation stage will prove that no matter how long it takes, I am capable of finishing what I start.

■ For more graduation stories in students' own words, visit medium.com/@uwisocialmedia

Garvin Tafari Parsons graduated with a Master of Fine Arts – Fiction from the Department of Literary, Cultural & Communication Studies within the Faculty of Humanities and Education.

THE UWI ST AUGUSTINE GRADUATION CEREMONIES 2024

Graduate Stories

How one young Faculty of Law graduate overcame harsh circumstances through hard work, excellence, and a determination to succeed.

Vishal Persad
Attorney-at-Law

VISHAL

Attorney-at-Law

BY SERAH ACHAM

For Vishal Persad, status matters. Raised by a single, alcoholic father, his was a childhood marked by tragedy and challenge, one in which stability was fleeting and respect hard to come by. Today, the **UWI Faculty of Law** graduate, 2024 winner of **The Edward Albert Collier Prize for Excellence in Conveyancing**, and newly-minted attorney-at-law, stands at the wide-open doorway of a promising career path – one that he dug, largely for himself, starting when he was just 15.

Vishal's story, however, really begins about a decade earlier, when, one New Year's Eve, his mother walked out of their home and never returned. He was barely five years old. This, he says, is one of the reasons he chose a career in law. Despite reports to the police, his mother was never found and there was no follow-up from the authorities. It made him curious. "I always wanted to be in some part of the law to see how it really works, first-hand," he shares.

The other reason was "status... to have some sort of respect, because [people] used to look at me like I was a nobody".

'No one ever had respect for me'

Because of his family's circumstances, in particular, his father's drinking, which saw him moving from "house to house, from my grandfather, to my grandmother, to my father", young Vishal was stereotyped by those in his orbit who deemed him destined for failure.

"No one ever had respect for me," he says.

Instead of falling victim to his situation and the naysayers around him, Vishal found motivation. It was rough. His house shifting sometimes meant he had to change primary schools, but it was in high school, he says, that his challenges really began.

His father's drinking got worse. The older Persad was quarrelsome, sometimes becoming violent, and rarely gave his son money for school. Vishal knew he had to do something to help himself.

"I started to work when I was 14, 15 years' old," he shares.

He got a job at a grocery store, which gave him some comfort financially. "It wasn't much," he admits, but he had enough for school. He also started taking kickboxing lessons, which helped build his confidence and make him "a little more tough". Then one day, Form 5 fast approaching, he and his father had a falling out and he left.

"I went by my grandmom," Vishal says, sharing that, although his grandmother didn't have enough money to support him fully, he was able to have his meals there.

He also had the support of his grandfather, who lived elsewhere and also had little to give, but would "pass and drop food or give me a little hundred", even helping him with his school fees sometimes. "Which I appreciated," he says. "He was the only one who gave me any sort of assistance."

School during the day, work on evenings and weekends

Vishal went to school during the day, and worked evenings and weekends. He wrote CXC and did well, then took it upon himself to enrol in CAPE. Next was UWI. He signed up for Law, and Criminology and Criminal Justice, but only got through to the latter. Despite his disappointment, he registered for the Criminology and Criminal Justice degree, and in 2019, graduated with First Class Honours – all while still working at the grocery, as well as in construction with his grandfather on weekends, at one point even picking up a nightshift job cleaning floors.

His ambition knowing no limits, Vishal wanted to apply to the Faculty of Law again. He took a year off to



make the money to pay for what would be his second degree, working at his friend's Chinese restaurant, as well as in construction. He saved up and was able to pay for the first semester – this time he was successful, and this being his second degree, was admitted to the programme through the direct entry route.

Then, the new law student added the title of Salesman to his portfolio, selling electronics for another friend's business. Knowing that after completing his LLB (Bachelor of Laws), he'd need to sign up for the LEC (Legal Education Certificate) at Hugh Wooding Law School, he soon accepted an opportunity extended by that friend to work at and invest in his business.

"When I started to invest with him," Vishal says, "I started to make the money to pay for Law. I even bought a second-hand vehicle" – something he was proud to share with his grandfather. "He had seen potential in me," Vishal shares, adding that his grandfather, Roopnarine Persad – "I always used to tell him he has two last names", Vishal jokes – always encouraged him to finish his education and get a good job.

Help, friendship, and an example of strong motivation from his grandfather

The grandfather shared his grandson's strong ambition and motivated Vishal to keep pushing in spite of his challenges. "We always used to have little bets," Vishal says. By the time he was 34 years' old, Roopnarine Persad had built his house, bought his car, and had money in the bank. "So, I used to tell him I'm going to achieve everything before 34." Vishal was 23 when he bought his car and he recalls, "I was really happy to go and show him I bought my car with my own money."

In 2022, Vishal graduated with his LLB and First Class Honours, and entered the Legal Education Certificate (LEC) programme at Hugh Wooding – the final step on his journey to becoming an attorney. These would have been more big accomplishments to share with his grandfather. Unfortunately, Roopnarine Persad passed away before his grandson could graduate.

Too soon after, just as he began his LEC, his grandmother passed away. Then, right before his exams, his father had a stroke.

Vishal pushed through, excelling at his studies while he worked and now helped with his father's care.

"I always used to think 'you have to do what you have to do'. Everyone who knows my story would tell me I went through a real hard life... and I know, but I just used to keep pushing. I never really used to sit down and feel sad. If I know I have to get something done, I would get to it." Vishal simply tried his best to manage his time and set goals.

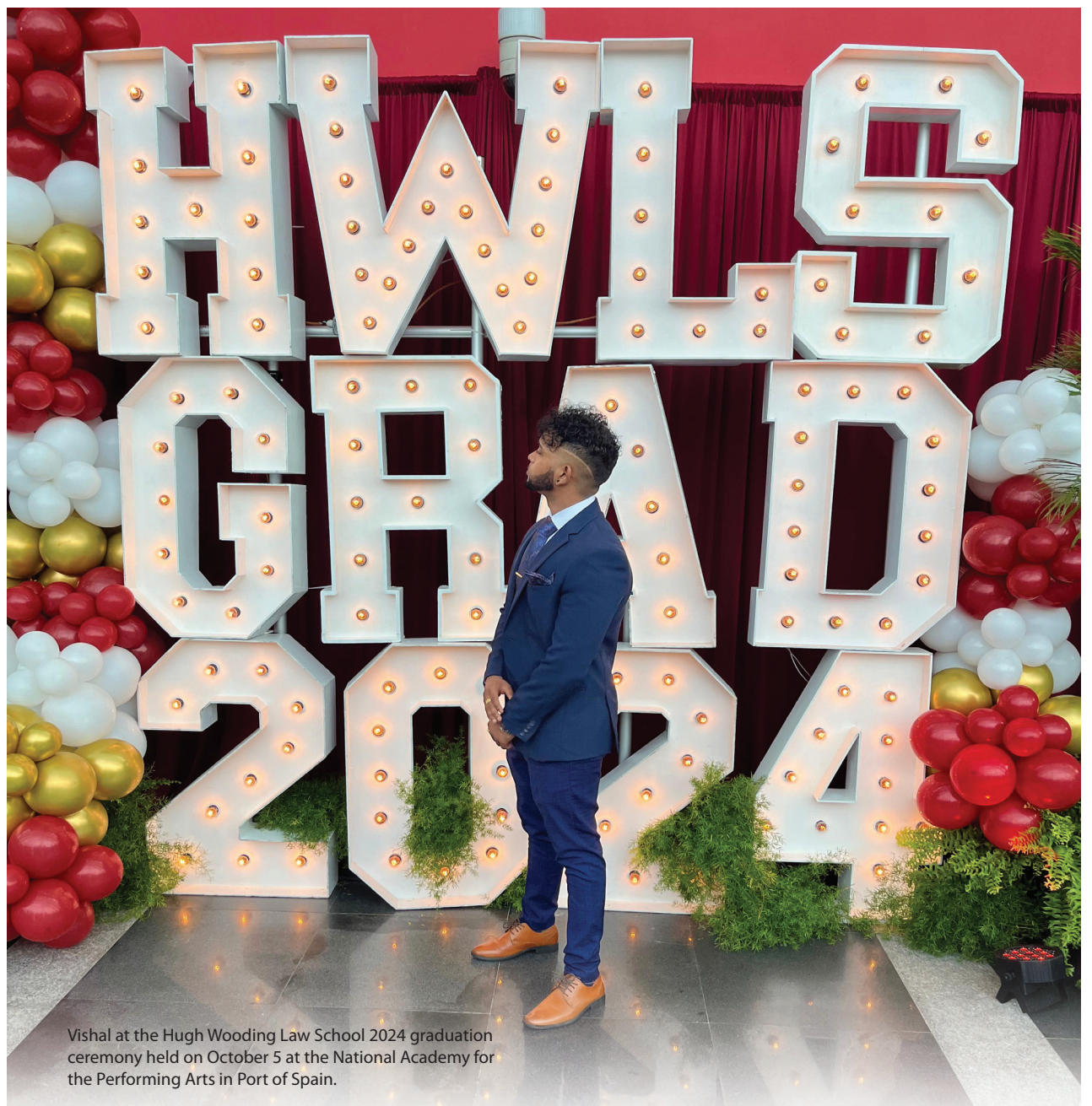
"I would set small goals for myself," he shares. His ultimate goal was to become an attorney, so he took it assignment by assignment, then broke that down even further by deciding how much of each assignment he wanted to accomplish each day and, "I would make sure and finish it, until I reached that final goal." Vishal admits that he never actually thought that he would be successful. "I always used to doubt myself, but... I still put my best foot forward and try."

A brilliant mind

Although he may not have seen his own potential, others did. "Vishal is the sweetest, most charming, also brilliant mind," announces his friend and classmate, Melanie Richards, who also claims him as her adopted son. A mature student with a 15-year career in the oil and gas industry and a family of her own, she enrolled in the LLB programme at the same time as Vishal, and like him, was granted direct entry.

Their introduction was shaky. Melanie recalls her first encounter with him where she found herself in Zoom class – their cohort coincided with the COVID lockdowns – "with a bunch of kids" and one of them, Vishal, said something that she found "so inappropriate".

Then, she started to interact with him. "I realised it's a generational thing," she admits, and "[that] this guy knows his stuff."



Vishal at the Hugh Wooding Law School 2024 graduation ceremony held on October 5 at the National Academy for the Performing Arts in Port of Spain.

"I started to make the money to pay for Law. I even bought a second-hand vehicle" – something he was proud to share with his grandfather, Roopnarine Persad



Vishal with classmate and friend Melanie Richards.

"He has a really uncanny ability to remember and recall information... like amazing," she asserts. "He would think and he would make connections that oftentimes, I wouldn't make. He would make connections between courses... between different parts of the law, and I thought 'this guy really has so much potential!'" He asked questions, clarified and challenged, and was a pro at finding cases. "Nobody could find a case like Vishal could find a case... and sometimes the lecturer hadn't read the case," says Melanie. "I think Vishal is going to be a brilliant attorney."

Called to the Bar

In November 2023, he celebrated his graduation and call to the Bar Association of Trinidad and Tobago, an experience he feels fortunate to have shared with his close friend.

Though he thought of his grandfather as he was preparing for graduation, he found solace in the knowledge that he would have been overwhelmingly proud.

To those going through their own struggles, Vishal tells them the same thing he told himself: "This wouldn't last forever. It's up to you to remove that problem. Set logical goals, and you will achieve."

Serah Acham is a writer and editor.

The Valedictorians

‘Be Well, Be Strong’

BY JEANNETTE GAWAI

Six high-achieving students to represent eight faculties as class valedictorian is the remit of The UWI St Augustine each year. However, if you asked the six individuals chosen for this year’s class if they would describe themselves this way, the answer might surprise you. Upon receiving such a high accolade, they were all overcome with varying degrees of shock, honour, and humility. After all, three years ago, they were the first cohort to start their first year fully remote due to the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. But with great uncertainty came fierce adaptability and the courage to forge ahead. **The Class of 2024 valedictorians** opened up about the hidden stories behind their big accomplishments, and why they believe their class could not have done it without tons of support, camaraderie, long hours, and yes, perseverance.

valedictorian (n.) “student who pronounces the oration at commencement exercises of his or her class,” 1832, *American English*, from valedictory + -ian.

valediction (n.) “a farewell, a bidding farewell,” 1610s, from past participle stem of Latin valedicere “bid farewell, take leave,” from vale “farewell!,” second person singular imperative of valere “be well, be strong”



MELISSA EDWARDS

Faculties of Science and Technology
& Food and Agriculture
Bachelor of Science in Biochemistry
& Biology | First Class Honours

Melissa Edwards’s connection to nature and animals started in childhood. Growing up in the countryside of beautiful Cedros made her closely connected to the outdoors, and that passion sparked the moment she entered campus. “One of my favourite UWI moments was on my first day when I became surrounded by my loves: animals! At orientation, there was a tent with eagles and owls, and my favourites, snakes.”

Throughout her time as a student, she met some amazing humans, too, friends who made the campus feel like home. “Although UWI was really far away from home, it provided me with the best opportunities, and the distance exposed me to new things.”

Her love of living things made studying biology a no-brainer; though pursuing biochemistry made her unsure. “Over time, it grew into something I enjoy. The constant challenges kept my mind engaged, and I’m grateful I stuck with it.” Melissa credits her parents as a source of strength, and the backbone of success behind her role as valedictorian both in primary school and at her alma mater, Vessigny Secondary School. Her future goal is to be an advocate for those special creatures closest to her heart: reptiles. “I aspire to educate others and reduce the fear surrounding these incredible animals.”



KOFFI PAUL

Faculties of Engineering & Law
Bachelor of Laws | First Class Honours

When asked to summarise his UWI experience, Koffi Paul believes “some things you can’t quantify”. A self-proclaimed “hot mouth who liked to prove a point” since his Queen’s Royal College days, Koffi’s passion for advocacy and speaking on behalf of others made him fall in love with the law. Yet to truly represent his future clients, he decided he had to manoeuvre around his introverted inclinations and into leadership roles like Faculty of Law Guild Representative and President of the Law Society. This allowed him to make friends and connect with his Caribbean roots.

“My parents are from Grenada, and I have family all over. I’m very pro-regionalist, so I was happy to experience the different cultures on campus.”

Although Koffi faced a tough daily commute from Chase Village to St Augustine, he used it as an opportunity to spend more time on campus and represent his faculty to the fullest, like he did at UWI Sports Day. “We’re one of the smallest faculties, and we came in second place – just because we’re small and typically bookish lawyers doesn’t mean we can’t dominate in sports!”

Koffi is most excited about continuing to work with his non-profit organisation, MADE T&T, and fulfilling his lifelong dream of becoming a lawyer, but he’s open to all possibilities. “I don’t have a mantra; I just live with an open mind, never feeling that I can’t learn from someone or that I know everything. I simply always try to give of my best.”



LYAN LAGAN

Faculty of Social Sciences
Bachelor of Science in Economics (Major),
Environmental Economics (Minor),
International Relations (Minor),
First Class Honours

“I think a lot of people hear the word economics and immediately think the study revolves around money or finance, but it’s much more than that; it’s about the way of life.” Lyan Lagan has been interested in economics since her time at St Augustine Girls High School, and wanted to delve deeper into the relationship between the economy and the environment. As an aspiring economist attuned to the vulnerability of developing countries, Lyan chose UWI because she wanted a learning environment that was rich in diversity and reflected Caribbean regionalism.

When confronted with a heavy academic schedule, she accepted the challenge: “UWI taught me about the importance of school-life balance. I could always finish an assignment and go to a party the same day. I’m proud I don’t limit myself.”

Her self-confidence stems from her older sister Amy Lagan: “She’s one of the main reasons I am who I am today. She’s my biggest inspiration and always encourages me to take risks and get things done.”

Lyan aims to engage in work that will strengthen the country’s, the region’s, and the world’s resilience to climate change and its impacts, and travel to experience new cultures, places, and cuisines.



ANTONI MANNETTE

Faculty of Social Sciences

Bachelor of Science in Psychology (Special) | First Class Honours

“I think my boldness in practising my faith on campus grew as I grew.”

To call Antoni Mannette a devout Catholic would be an understatement. “During my time at UWI, I’d spend every day at church. I would go to mass at 5:45 am, then go to work for 8, then come back to UWI for evening classes.” Her steadfastness wasn’t a secret for her friends, but sometimes she would find herself holding back: “In classroom discussions, people would bring up examples where they felt mistreated by the Catholic Church, and I wanted to say, ‘That should not have been your experience,’ but I felt like I couldn’t contribute.”

Learning to navigate complex experiences and emotions is something Antoni felt compelled to understand and help others do the same, which is why she chose to study psychology. As her time at UWI advanced, Antoni found her “personal oasis” in small moments like bonding over finals with her psych buddies or rushing over to The UWI Chaplaincy in-between class with other members of the Catholic Students Movement to have guitar sessions with Sister Sandra.

“I never felt hampered by my faith at UWI; I knew that as long as I was gentle but also honest in my discussions, others would be as well.” Antoni looks forward to “seeing all the ways God will call me to serve others throughout my life”.



ALEXANDRIA DOUGLAS

Faculties of Humanities and Education & Sport

Bachelor of Science in Sport Kinetics | First Class Honours

Alexandria Douglas has been involved in sports since age five, but as the Faculty of Sport’s first ever valedictorian, she wants to make one thing clear: “We don’t literally play sports for our degree. A lot of us do play sport, but in Sport Kinetics we learn about sport science, human anatomy, and physiology.”

Also, she’s a proud Trinbagonian from Trincity. “People used to ask where I’m from; I don’t know why,” she recalls. But Alexandria welcomed all questions because her goal was to live campus life to the fullest. And she did, from becoming captain of the football team and Faculty of Sport Guild Representative, to participating in dance battles at campus mixers.

Taking up residence at Sir Arthur Lewis Hall, she considers it one of her most memorable UWI experiences: “I commuted to campus for my second year and lived on hall for my final – it changed everything for me. The depth of relationships you make are invaluable. We helped uplift each other through everything. When three of my biggest supporters, my great-aunts, passed away in my final year, it was difficult, but my friends were there for me.” Alexandria plans to try her best in the future and remain open to all possibilities in the field of sport.



SELENA DEOCHAND

Faculty of Medical Sciences

Bachelor of Science in Pharmacy | Upper Second Class Honours

“I didn’t choose pharmacy; pharmacy chose me. One day I walked into a pharmacy, and had the strongest gut feeling that this is what I was supposed to do.”

With such conviction, Selena Deochand excelled in the sciences at Naparima Girls’ High School, and entered her first year ready and excited. However, the COVID-19 pandemic took her in a new direction. “It forced me to embrace the unknown. I became a problem-solver, critical thinker, and lifelong learner. I taught myself graphic design and digital marketing. Now, I use those skills as a graphic designer and social media manager for the Caribbean Sepsis and AMR Alliance daily.”

Now, having spent a few months into her internship as a practicing pre-registration pharmacist, she misses UWI already. “I miss Medical Sciences Student Council football and cricket matches, the conversations from Mt Hope to main campus, the ole talk with my lecturers, singing in the car with my friends – I wouldn’t change that for the world.”

Still, she proudly advocates for the pharmacy field, and encourages young people entering medicine to consider joining. Outside of pharmacy, Selena loves baking, reading, and watching sports, and calls her parents her biggest supporters. She is not sure what her future may hold, but is focused on her immediate goals of completing her pre-registration pharmacist period and becoming the best pharmacist she can be.



Graduates from the Faculty of Sport (FSP) Third from left (standing) is Dean of FSP Dr Akshai Mansingh, and to his right is Dr Anand Rampersad, Head of the St Augustine Academy of Sport. Third from left (sitting) is Valedictorian Alexandria Douglas with her classmates.

The Faculty of Sport Celebrates Its First Ever Valedictorian

“It is a euphoric occasion for the St Augustine Academy and the Faculty of Sport,” states Dr Anand Rampersad, Head of the St Augustine Academy of Sport. Since its establishment in August 2017, the Faculty of Sport celebrated its first ever valedictorian this year, Alexandria Douglas, who represented the faculties of Humanities & Education (FHE) and Sport (FSP) at the Graduation ceremony on October 26.

According to the Faculty Dean, Dr Akshai Mansingh, Alexandria represents “one of our outstanding students engaged in activities in and out of the university”.

Graduating with a First Class Honours Bachelor of Science degree in Sport Kinetics, Alexandria thrived during her time on campus and was honoured to become valedictorian and represent her faculty. “We’re small but great! I’m proud to represent my faculty and my family.”

As the newest faculty at UWI, the Faculty of Sport’s relevance is rooted in responsiveness with its mission to “provide high-quality education in sports with emphasis on application via research, and development of sports and athletes of the region to maintain their prominence on the world scene”.

Dean Mansingh says that seven years since its inception, this remains the faculty’s goal. “We’ve produced over 75 sports medicine physicians and sport physiotherapists. This is being supplemented by students pursuing their MPhil and PhD degrees in various aspects of sport, those specialising through MSc degrees in Sport and Sport Business Management, as well as many students pursuing degrees in Sport Coaching, Sport Kinetics, and Sport Sciences. Through multiple grant-aided studies, research on many aspects of sport in the region has been done, often leading to curriculum or policy changes.”

The St Augustine Academy of Sport is devoted to fulfilling the faculty’s mission. About his role as Head, Dr Rampersad says, “I am responsible for ensuring the faculty objective of holistic student development through teaching, research, public engagement, and excellence in athletic performance is achieved. Additionally, the Academy has a role in positively impacting the national sport ecosystem through research, consultancy, and collaborations with the Ministries of Sport and Community Development, Health, Education, and national sporting organisations.”

These joint efforts are best epitomised by graduates like Alexandria. In her valedictory speech, she encouraged her fellow FHE and FSP graduands to note that “Sport is more than just the Olympic stage; it is the soil of change, where seeds of science, strategy, and innovation grow. It can be the future of a country.”

Dean Mansingh, too, shares this hopeful sentiment for the future of sport and the faculty: “Sport is now a multi-billion dollar industry. No one becomes a champion without a support team of specialists in all aspects related to performance, mainly based in science and medicine as well as data analysis in particular. The region punches above its size in sport and must produce the support team as well. This is what the Faculty of Sport aims to provide, and therefore, the future is bright.”

Jeanette G Awai

THE UWI ST AUGUSTINE GRADUATION CEREMONIES 2024

A Three Day Celebration

From Thursday, October 24 to Saturday, October 26, UWI St Augustine’s Sport and Physical Education Centre (SPEC) was decorated in robes of blue and red and black as graduates crossed the stage to receive their canisters. The campus held six ceremonies in all, two per day. It was a rigorous, labour-intensive exercise for all, but the participants would have it no other way.

Day One
Thursday 24 October, 2024
Faculties of Science and Technology, Food and Agriculture, Engineering, and Law



THE UWI ST AUGUSTINE GRADUATION CEREMONIES 2024

Day Two
Friday 25 October, 2024
Faculty of Social Sciences and the
Arthur Lok Jack Global School of Business



Deputy Governor of the Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI) Ms Anya Williams (centre, in red) with six graduates from The UWI's Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies (SALISES). The graduates are all employees from the Turks and Caicos Statistics Authority that were sponsored by the government of TCI to study at the St Augustine campus.



THE UWI ST AUGUSTINE GRADUATION CEREMONIES 2024

Day Three
Saturday 26 October, 2024
Faculties of Humanities and Education,
Sport, and Medical Sciences



THE UWI ST AUGUSTINE GRADUATION CEREMONIES 2024

Graduation is about Family
Whether parents, siblings, spouses, children,
or found family such as friends and classmates,
graduation is a family affair.



To see more of The UWI St Augustine 2024 Graduation Ceremonies, go to [youtube.com/@uwistaugustine](https://www.youtube.com/@uwistaugustine) | [facebook.com/UWISTA](https://www.facebook.com/UWISTA), [instagram.com/uwi_staugustine](https://www.instagram.com/uwi_staugustine) | [flickr.com/photos/theuwi/albums](https://www.flickr.com/photos/theuwi/albums) [medium.com/@uwisocialmedia](https://www.medium.com/@uwisocialmedia)

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