



Stickfighters from the Talparo Gayelle dressed in full Kandal (traditional garb) clash during The Old Yard on February 8 at the Department of Creative and Festival Arts (DCFA) on Gordon St, St Augustine. The Old Yard is the DCFA's annual traditional Carnival event. This year's theme was "Bois".

"Kalinda, also known as stickfighting, is a martial art developed in Trinidad and Tobago by enslaved Africans brought from various regions of the continent," explains Keegan Taylor, champion stickfighter, kalinda instructor, and Creative Director and Founder of Kalinda Kollektive.

"It evolved into an effective yet highly ritualistic system of armed combat, used not only to train warriors but also to preserve African identity, cultural memory, and spiritual resilience. Practised under the watchful eyes of plantation society, Kalinda became both a form of resistance and a powerful expression of rebellion, survival, and heritage." PHOTO: ANEEL KARIM



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FROM THE PRINCIPAL

Investing in Inspiration

At the time of writing it is early February, and Carnival season 2026 is almost at its apex. Trinidad and Tobago pulse with the energy of this almost supernatural expression of our nation's culture. Our people, and the many guests from around the world who come to take part in the festival, are being treated to a nationwide exposition of creativity: music, performance, art, dance, and craftsmanship.

Patrons pour out onto the streets from open air nightspots. Mas-makers work well into the night, stitching and sewing costumes. Calypsonians get the crowds moving (and many times laughing) at the calypso tents. The sound of steelpan rings out at events and in competition. The weekends are filled with all-inclusive fetes, outdoor events that combine outstanding service to attendees with live music from leading performers in soca, chutney soca, and the other genres that have emerged from our ever-evolving culture. Carnival is culture, and creativity—and industry.

For decades now, academics, policymakers, and entrepreneurs in the Carnival industry, have recognised its potential and made strides in realising it. Scholars and educators right here at UWI St Augustine have played an important role in understanding and advancing the industry. Much of our output comes from the Faculties of Humanities and Education and Social Sciences, but Carnival and the cultural/creative industry in general has benefitted in sometimes surprising ways from the work of all our faculties.

This campus was a pioneer in the all-inclusive Carnival fete space. For decades, UWI Fete was a mainstay on the Carnival calendar and influential in shaping premium party events with food, beverages, live music, and every other aspect of event management. Most importantly, UWI Fete allowed UWI St Augustine to provide bursaries and scholarships for well over 4,000 deserving students.

Estimates place the value of T&T Carnival at approximately TT\$1 billion, and contributing between 4 percent and 6 percent of GDP. Earlier this month, it was revealed that the National Carnival Commission (NCC) is collaborating with the Inter-American Development Bank on a pilot study to measure Carnival's economic impact. The goal, the news report said, was to build “a



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methodology that the country can own and apply to future festivals, allowing policymakers and stakeholders to make evidence-based decisions around investment and growth.”

I fully support this initiative and other such moves with the goal of achieving the full economic potential of the creative and culture industries which have been valued globally as high as US\$4.3 trillion. Trinidad and Tobago has the creativity, talent, entrepreneurial genius, and academic expertise to claim a bigger piece of that pie. UWI St Augustine has been integral to this work from the beginning, and looks for opportunities to deepen its partnerships and engagement with these industries and the government to make T&T an international capital for the arts, entertainment, and tourism.

This commitment extends beyond Carnival. Trinidad and Tobago is blessed with a potent mixture of diverse cultural influences and a people naturally gifted and inspired to create art in many forms. UWI St Augustine's Department of Creative and Festival Arts (DCFA) trains professionals in many aspects of art and performance—on stage and behind the curtain, in the art gallery, and even in the rooms where business ideas are formulated and refined. The DCFA is a regional resource for the development of culture professionals.

Last Sunday (February 8), I was pleased to attend The Old Yard, DCFA's signature Carnival event/ The Old Yard is a festival and time capsule for traditional Carnival that simultaneously celebrates and preserves a cultural cornerstone that goes all the way back to the 19th century, gives students valuable experience hosting and performing at a professional event, and shows the revenue-generating potential of niche events.

It was a wonderful experience, interacting with the old time Carnival characters (played by students); spectating the stickfighting, moko jumbies, jab jabs, midnight robbers and pierrot grenade; listening to the live and recorded music; and above all else enjoying the community of culture lovers.

That, above all else, is the ultimate value of creativity and culture, the way it brings people together, activates their emotions, provides healing and guidance, and helps them understand themselves and their place in the world.

Rose-Marie Belle Antoine

Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine
Campus Principal



WAR OF WORDS: Extempo masters Winston “Gypsy” Peters (left) and Myron Bruce give the thumbs up after their entertaining verbal jousts during the Extempo Clash at The Old Yard 2026 on February 8.

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■ CAMPUS NEWS

Caribbean People Shaping Caribbean AI

UWI's AI Innovation Centre to drive ethical and inclusive development

BY KIERAN ANDREW KHAN



Dr Craig Ramlal, Executive Director of the AIIC

For decades, the Caribbean has relied significantly on digital technologies developed elsewhere, systems trained on foreign data, designed for foreign economies, and governed by foreign policies. The launch of the Artificial Intelligence Innovation Centre (AIIC) signals a deliberate shift away from that dependence.

Established at The UWI St Augustine campus, the AIIC was created to build local capacity in artificial intelligence research, ethics, and application, ensuring that emerging technologies serve regional priorities.

Redefining AI for the Region and Ethics for All

Leading this effort is Dr Craig Ramlal, Executive Director of the AIIC, whose work bridges advanced technical research with global policy development. For Ramlal, the centre's mission is urgent.

"We cannot drive sustainability or competitiveness without building our own AI systems," he says. "There is room for both external private enterprise AI systems and for local purpose-built systems. A common misconception as well is that AI is only software, but in reality it also includes hardware like robotics, drones and semiconductors."

He adds that across sectors such as tourism, agriculture and the creative industries, other regions are already using region-specific AI and autonomous systems to optimise performance and productivity.

"No one will build that for us, it is difficult for international private organisations to target all problems and needs, especially of smaller markets, and that's the gap we must address."

Global tools are needed because they bring productivity at scale, but the region must manage them carefully as imported tools can bring hidden costs.

"For systems not built to our contexts or trained with our data, we either deal with bad fits or pay extra to customise them, using foreign exchange we don't have," Ramlal says. For him, the point isn't to reject global tools, but to use them wisely.

More importantly, he warns of data dependence. "We have to be clear on the data terms. If we don't set strong rules for how our data is used and shared, we can lose control over information that should remain ours. We want to get the value of modern tools while protecting our interests."

This is why the AIIC is developing a Caribbean foundational AI model trained on regional data from scratch and optimised for automation.

"It won't be frontier model-scale or anything within that category" he clarifies. "But it will be purpose-built for our needs."

In a deliberate move, the centre plans to release the model freely to industry. "Use it. Sell with it. Build with it. No IP restrictions," he says. "This is a gift to the region."

Why give it away? His answer is simple: "As a university, our job is to solve problems for the people and the society we reside in."

Ahead of the Curve

In 2010, Dr Ramlal completed his undergraduate thesis focused on artificial intelligence, followed by a master's degree with a thesis in intelligent control systems. By the age of 23, he was publishing research on optimisation and control laws, work he describes as "a precursor to reinforcement learning, which underpins most modern AI training algorithms."

As his technical work progressed, Ramlal noticed a troubling gap.



Members of the AIIC team at the centre's launch in December 2025 at the Radisson Hotel Trinidad in Port of Spain.

Back row (from left): Daniel Goitia (Technical Officer), Jonathan Nancoo (Researcher), Lincoln Marine (Researcher), Dr Craig Ramlal (Executive Director), Ravi Deonarine (Project Manager), Dr Ken Sooknanan (Principal Investigator, Cyberanalytics), and Kevon Andrews (Project Manager). Seated (from left): Azim Abdool (Principal Investigator, SEMI), Matthew Mohammed (Member), Amanda Zilla (Principal Investigator, dreamLAB), Cade Coker (AMoS), and Prof Arvind Singh (Principal Investigator, intelliGrid). PHOTO: COURTESY ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE INNOVATION CENTRE.

There is room for both external private enterprise AI systems and for local purpose-built systems.

"In the region, people were doing AI research," he explains, "but it wasn't translating into the commercial space or industry."

That realisation led to the creation of the Intelligent Systems Lab (ISL) in 2018, an unofficial research group housed in the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering.

"We started with three members," he recalls. "All our meetings were in my office."

The early years were difficult. "Industry wasn't interested," he says. "In 2019, nobody wanted to use neural networks. Writing the term 'artificial intelligence' in most journals was also not well accepted. Supporting postgraduate researchers was hard. People just didn't trust these systems or their integration into their processes."

Still, he refused to abandon the effort.

The Turning Point and Global Recognition

A major turning point came in 2023 when Dr Ramlal contributed to drafting the CARICOM IMPACS Declaration on Autonomous Weapons Systems. During the same year, he was recognised as a preeminent AI leader by the United Nations and appointed to the Secretary-General's High-Level Advisory Body on Artificial Intelligence.

"That changed everything," he says. "Suddenly, UWI and the ISL had international recognition."

As part of that advisory body, he contributed to the governing AI for humanity guidelines and recommendations that were adopted by all member states at the 79th UN General Assembly in September 2024. Some of the recommendations were later advanced into implementation during the 80th UN General Assembly in 2025.

At UWI, Campus Principal Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine advocated for the lab to become a campus centre. Dr Ramlal was persuaded by her argument that artificial intelligence should not be confined to engineering alone.

"She said AI shouldn't be siloed. It has to cross all faculties. It has to be for everyone," he says.

In July 2025, the ISL was officially upgraded. "The Principal messaged me at 7:30 pm," he remembers. "It was my mother's

birthday. The whole family was celebrating."

Today, the AIIC has grown to 56 members, making it the largest AI research centre in the Caribbean.

"It's hard to ignore us now," he says.

AI Talent Exchange, Programmes of Study, and Ethics

Regional AI capacity building remains central to the AIIC's work. "We're building the Caribbean AI Talent Exchange," Ramlal explains. "Regional companies need a standard way to assess AI skills that right now doesn't exist and to do so from a trusted entity."

The centre also supports postgraduate programmes including PG Dip, MASC, MPhil and PhD pathways in AI, while launching a new interdisciplinary MSc for non-technical professionals.

"We are looking at AI and policy, AI and climate, AI and project management," he notes.

Ethics remains central to the centre's vision. "Ethics is usually qualitative," he explains. "But that doesn't stand up in court. Our researchers are developing quantitative frameworks for AI safety and accountability. We want systems we can explain, test, and very importantly, rely on."

Looking ahead, Ramlal envisions a future where the Caribbean stands at the forefront of artificial intelligence research and application.

"I want to see us at the frontier of innovation and technology," he says. "We have lost a major opportunity to capitalise on the last AI cycle, but we have the capacity within the region to research, build, govern and use AI systems that reflect our realities and solve the problems of our own people."

He continues, "We need to strategically focus on an enabling ecosystem now: we need collaboration among universities, government, public and private sector; we need to build the hardware and software of AI for our region, and then export our technology into external markets. This way we won't be watching the next AI wave pass by. We'll be shaping it."

■ CAMPUS NEWS

UWI ST AUGUSTINE AND ANSA McAL strengthen partnership with new MOU

UWI St Augustine and leading Caribbean conglomerate ANSA McAL have strengthened their partnership to endorse “a shared commitment to cooperate in talent acquisition, employer branding, academic collaboration, student development, professional training and research,” the campus has revealed in a statement to the press.

The two organisations signed a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in December 2025 at a ceremony held at the Office of the Campus Principal. Both institutions, the statement says, see the partnership as a strategic investment in the future of Trinidad and Tobago and the wider Caribbean, aligning with a mission to strengthen the region’s workforce and broaden opportunities for its people.

Calling the MOU a “significant step toward deepening industry-academic collaboration,” UWI St Augustine believes the agreement sets the stage for expanded joint initiatives that support talent development and innovation, to foster national and regional advancement. This initiative bolsters an already successful relationship between campus and conglomerate.

“The partnership between The UWI St. Augustine Campus and ANSA McAL spans approximately 15 years and has remained resilient through major socio-economic and environmental shifts,” the campus said. “It has provided numerous internships, employment opportunities, placements within the ANSA McAL Group, and the development of specialised training programmes, standing as a model of impactful and enduring university-industry engagement.”

ANSA McAL’s involvement with The UWI continues to evolve as industries transform, especially in response to changing workplace expectations and graduate competencies



FROM LEFT: Vanessa Smith (Talent Acquisition and Experience Manager) The ANSA McAL Group, Amy Lazzari (Chief People and Culture Officer) The ANSA McAL Group, Prof Derek Chadee (Deputy Principal of The UWI St Augustine Campus), and Dr Kathy-Ann Lewis (Manager of Careers, Co-Curricular and Community Engagement) Division of Student Services and Development at the MOU signing at the Office of the Campus Principal in December 2025.

in the post-pandemic era. Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and data analytics have reinforced the value of this long-standing relationship.

Speaking at the signing, Ms Amy Lazzari, Chief People and Culture Officer of ANSA McAL said that, “Through this collaboration, we gain direct access to one of the region’s most influential academic institutions. It accelerates our ability to

build robust talent pipelines for critical roles and enhance our employer brand on campus. Beyond talent acquisition, this partnership reinforces our core purpose of ‘Inspiring Better Choices for a Better World’, and represents the future of our region.”

This partnership has grown steadily, from early requests for data entry clerks to a wide range of vacation and graduate internships, entry-level positions, and the distinctive ANSA McAL Champions Programme. Increasing engagements with The UWI’s prestigious alumni network further signal ANSA McAL’s confidence in the hallmark attributes of UWI graduates.

Both organisations committed to revisiting and strengthening the relationship through the establishment of a formal MOU. After productive discussions led by UWI’s St Augustine’s Office of the Deputy Principal, the agreement has now been signed.

Deputy Principal Professor Derek Chadee said, “We are proud to work in partnership with forward-thinking institutions such as the ANSA McAL Group and recognise the value of leveraging our collective strengths in driving transformative change across the Caribbean. Ultimately this partnership aims to enhance academic excellence and research, and we thank ANSA McAL for the confidence and the opportunity in creating meaningful opportunities for students and the workforce.”

The campus believes the signing “marks a new beginning. Both The UWI St Augustine Campus and ANSA McAL anticipate that this MOU will serve as a platform for expanded initiatives, deeper cooperation, and more collaborations in the years ahead.”

Click to Start Foundation’s Robotics Pilot Programme STUDENTS LEARN, AND BUILD, THE FUTURE

BY REBECCA ROBINSON

When the Click to Start Foundation (CTSF) planned its Robotics Pilot programme, the strategy was well laid out.

“The original intent was to have the instructors build the robots and have the students learn to programme them,” says Sergio Mathurin, main facilitator on the project, “but that plan had to be readjusted when we realised they were more interested in building robots. Putting together the circuits and hands-on construction were the real fun and learning elements for them.”

Held in December 2025, in conjunction with Bishop Anstey High School and Trinity College East (BATCE), the CTSF’s Robotics Pilot programme was a week-long, camp-like experiment that gave students the opportunity to both learn about, and build, robots.

The pilot ran just after end-of-term exams. Ten students were selected to participate from Bishop Anstey and Trinity College East, so there were equal numbers of male and female students from forms three and four. The key criteria for participation according to Mathurin, who also designed the course, was basic physics proficiency, high enthusiasm, and (maybe) ideas about electronics.

“I had no idea how complicated it is to programme a robot to do the simplest of tasks,” says Anushka Wickham, a form four student at Bishops Anstey High School. “Now that I know, I will be using what I learnt in the course to complete my Information Technology SBA (school-based assessment).”

Working in groups of three, the students competitively built and programmed the bots to move and blink, and



Participants of the CTSF’s Robotics Pilot programme from Bishop Anstey High School and Trinity College East (BATCE) show their work during the December 2025 initiative. PHOTO: COURTESY CLICK-TO-START FOUNDATION.

complete simple tasks, such as turning a light on and off. One all-female group stood out for its high competency at wiring and construction. These tasks were followed up by them writing code and uploading it to the robots.

Mathurin, whose primary job is as an instructor at The UWI’s Department of Computing and Information Technology, has been volunteering with the Click to Start Foundation for the last decade. He designs and facilitates

courses for the CTSF that take technology learning to youth and underserved adults, and for partnership projects in Trinidad and Tobago where there is need. The CTSF was founded and is led by another UWI staff member, Abigail Wren, who works at the Campus IT Services.

The CTSF survives on corporate sponsorships to buy hardware, but the consistent donation of time and skills of a core group of volunteers keep projects running year-round. In December, they also hosted “Giving a Gift of Tech”, an annual event at the St Augustine campus that provides mentorship, support and gifts to youths under 16 from community organisations, groups, and homes in the East-West Corridor.

Principal of Trinity College East Ms Alana Harewood says that, “All students were eager to learn”, explaining that some were previously exposed to aspects of robotics through the school’s technology education curriculum and their X-Labs co-curricular clubs.

Speaking on the future of the programme, Mathurin says the CTSF will apply the lessons taken from the pilot to design a full-fledged robotics camp. He hopes to offer a longer and more technologically challenging programme to a bigger pool of students.

CTSF is always seeking new volunteers to improve its reach. “If you think you have skills that the Click to Start Foundation can channel or just a commitment to community volunteer work, and would like to join us,” they advise, “find us on any social media platform and introduce yourself.”

OUR CAMPUS

“In our ever changing world increasingly driven by artificial intelligence, mathematics will become even more important in the future for careers,” said Professor Adesh Ramsubhag, Dean of UWI St Augustine’s the Faculty of Science and Technology (FST).

Prof Ramsubhag was addressing faculty, secondary school students, and teachers at the opening of The UWI Math Fair 2026 on February 5, 2026 at Engineering Lecture Theatre 1 on the St Augustine campus.

“While AI can automate many tasks,” he said, “human reasoning, judgment, and interpretation, as well as quantitative skills such as data analytics, become more valuable than ever.”

The Math Fair, now in its eighth year, encourages secondary school students to learn and enjoy mathematics, teaches them about career opportunities in the field, and shows the indispensable influence of mathematics across industries. The fair is hosted by the Department of Mathematics and Statistics (DMS) within FST.

“This Ministry of Education–approved educational event complements classroom teaching while motivating learners through teamwork, creativity, problem-solving, and critical thinking,” a statement from UWI St Augustine read.

Themed “Island Innovators: Mathematics Powering the Future”, this year’s event looked at how the students of today could one day be the problem-solvers of tomorrow.

“Our region faces unique challenges such as climate change, food insecurity, and economic shifts,” said Prof Duraisamy Saravanakumar, UWI St Augustine’s Director of Graduate Studies and Research. “We need your logical, mathematical minds to solve them.”

Prof Saravanakumar expressed the hope that the experience would inspire them to study at The UWI and learn to become island innovators.

Throughout the day, 3,080 students explored the campus’s JFK Quadrangle, JFK Auditorium, JFK Lecture Theatre, and the Learning Resource Centre Greens, visiting some 30 booths and other displays. They came from schools all over Trinidad.

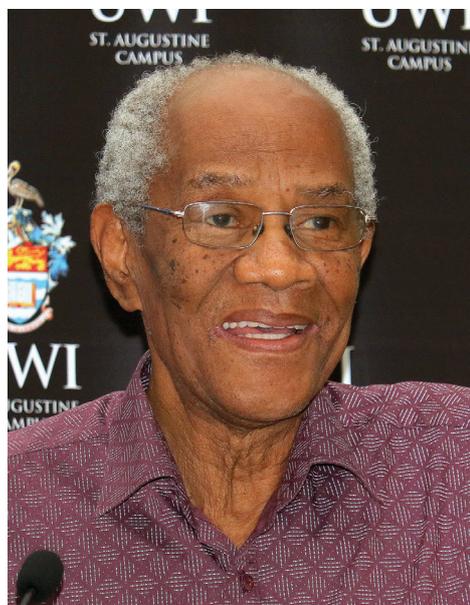
Inter-school competitions included the Math Quiz and Feud, Math Creativity Contest, Math Modelling, and the Teachers’ Game Design Challenge, allowing students to win prizes. The Math Feud competition was an event highlight. The winning team was The Limit Breakers, made up of students from St Joseph’s Convent, San Fernando, Caribbean Union College, and Naparima College. Team Pi-thons placed second with members from Holy Faith Convent Couva, Naparima College, and Parvati Girls Hindu College.

The students also conversed with faculty, event sponsors, and even current university students about opportunities for study and careers in mathematics and STEM fields. At The UWI Math Society booth, society president Royal Grant said the students showed interest in careers as well as the lesser known applications for mathematics in professional fields.

Adding to the Future

Over 3,000 students explore the possibilities at **UWI Math Fair 2026**

BY DIXIE-ANN BELLE



Mathematician Dr Philbert Morris during his feature address on the purpose and power of maths.
PHOTOS: ANEEL KARIM



Students play Jeopardy! and access a Ministry of Education portal on two monitors at one of the booths.



Themed “Island Innovators: Mathematics Powering the Future”, this year’s event looked at how the students of today could one day be the problem-solvers of tomorrow.

Young attendees at Math Fair 2026 conduct a science experiment. One of the fair’s greatest benefits is giving secondary school students experience with STEM subjects in a fun, informal environment.

OUR CAMPUS

Chief Education Officer of the Ministry of Education Dr Peter Smith told the audience at the opening ceremony that “mathematics is the quiet engine behind almost everything shaping our future”. Handling the anxiety many people feel for the subject, he said, involves “recognising that mathematics is not culture-free, but rather deeply connected to cultural, social and environmental context”.

Prof Sreedhara Rao Gunakala, Head of the DMS, described the opening ceremony’s featured speaker, Dr Philbert Morris, as someone who lives “at the intersection of abstract mathematical theory and practical reality in academia”.

A mathematician and lead of his own software transportation consulting firm, Dr Morris gave an insightful perspective on the purpose of mathematics.

“The idea of mathematics is not so much as a problem-solving tool, but as an abstraction for removing all the garbage,” he said. “And once you do that, you get something that you can then reapply to several different things. Think of using mathematics to look at problems in a way in which you abstract, simplify, and see the problem. Nothing else. You focus on the problem. And that is the strength of mathematics.”

The opening session also featured special presentations of plaques to scholars who have contributed to mathematics education. Dr Charles de Matas was recognised as a cornerstone of the DMS from 1996 until his retirement in 2025. He continues to do research which he shares on his YouTube channel. Prof of Physics Indra Haraksingh, recognised internationally for her work in renewable energy, has given decades of commitment to the Trinidad and Tobago Mathematics Olympiad and to coaching students for international competition.

Event sponsors for UWI Math Fair 2026 were the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (CIBC Caribbean), Unipet, Dominoes, Bermudez, and Optometrists Today.

For more information on The UWI Math Fair 2026, visit their site at www.uwimathfair.com



Peli, The UWI St Augustine mascot, poses for photos with campus visitors. The winged welcomer has been updated with a new look for 2026. (See article in this issue of **UWI TODAY**).

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

CAMPUS NEWS



FROM LEFT: Prof Derek Chadee (Deputy Principal of UWI St Augustine), Justice Winston Anderson (President of the Caribbean Court of Justice), Justice Nirala Bansee-Sookhai (Deputy Chair of the Judicial Education Institute of Trinidad and Tobago), Lynette Seebaran-Suite (President of the Law Association of Trinidad and Tobago), Stokeley Smart (Director and Senior Lecturer of the Actuarial Science Programme at UWI St Augustine), Justice Nadia Kangaloo, Kyle Rudden (Managing Director of KR Services Limited), and members of The Smart Tables® team, Anysha Thomas and Zara-Leigh Lewis, at the Main Salon of the Office of the Campus Principal.

SMART TABLES

A transformative tool for financial judicial decisions

BY TYRELL GITTENS

Personal injuries, loss of life—almost every day, judges are required to make rulings on a host of matters that involve financial compensation. In December 2025, a tool was launched at UWI St Augustine to make it easier for judges to fairly calculate these judgments: The Smart Tables®.

The ceremony was held at the Main Salon of the Campus Principal’s Office.

The Smart Tables® was developed after UWI St Augustine Actuarial Science Senior Lecturer and Director Stokeley Smart and High Court Judge Justice Nadia Kangaloo recognised the need for an accessible, localised tool to assist judges. They assembled a team of academics, professionals and postgraduate students that worked over eight years to develop The Smart Tables®.

The tool is a framework designed to be used by the courts to assist in quantifying the lump-sum valuation of loss of future earnings due to personal injury or death. A Caribbean Actuarial Association research grant of over US\$13,000 supported work on the project.

During his remarks, Smart explained, “The key inputs for the framework to render calculations on financial judgments are mortality, and interest rate assumptions. Therefore, it will look at factors such as age, gender and inflation, etc.”

Stakeholder organisations and representative expertise

“Given this, it was important for The Smart Tables® to be put together by a group that comprised representatives from stakeholder organisations with representative expertise.”

Members of the working group that refined the finalised framework included economist Dr Vaalmikki Arjoon, Simone Balkissoon of the Caribbean Actuarial Association, UWI Actuarial Science lecturer Brendon Bhagwandeem, High Court Judge Justice Christopher Sieuchand, Representative of the Law Association of Trinidad and Tobago Ramnarine Mungroo, and Ronnie Vinda Persad of the Assembly of Southern Lawyers.

Alumni of the UWI St Augustine Actuarial Science programme that contributed work to the development of the tables included Arianna Ali, Kristal Boodram, Valsson Tobias, Cyrus Lakhan, Chandini Gunpat, Zara-Leigh Lewis, and Shastri Singh Doodnath.

Other members of The Smart Tables® Team that also contributed to the development of framework are Tanya Carter, Amy Khan, John Noel and Anysha Thomas.

The tables were peer-reviewed by Chris Daykin and Justice Martha Alexander.

Smart added, “It really was a tour-de-force of multidisciplinary expertise.

“In parallel with the creation of The Smart Tables®, we also had to create the mortality tables input as they did not previously exist. So, that was something that went on in parallel that we synthesised from scratch as a critical input of The Smart Tables® framework.”

A publicly available website (thesmarttables.com) is the medium through which the framework has been made accessible to all. It includes a user-friendly calculator.

Presented to the Judiciary in 2024

Justice Kangaloo shared that a presentation on The Smart Tables® was given to the Judiciary of Trinidad and Tobago in 2024 at the request of former Chief Justice Ivor Archie.

She said, “I’m very enthusiastic about the methodology of The Smart Tables®. It gives me great pleasure from the perspective of a sitting judge, a practitioner of over 20 years’ experience, and just generally as a human being interacting with the court system, to be able to have The Smart Tables® in use.”

Kangaloo said the team will continue to take The Smart Tables® on a “roadshow”, as they did in 2023 in Australia and around the Caribbean, to show that it can be applicable to other jurisdictions, which expands the reach of and support for the tool.

During his remarks at the launch, Kyle Rudden, a Fellow of the prestigious Society of Actuaries and current Managing Director of KR Services Limited, who also worked on the tables, said The Smart Tables® are a welcomed asset to the local judiciary given that an analogous framework has been used in the United Kingdom since 1984, the Ogden Tables.

In 2023, the team did a presentation on The Smart Tables® at the International Congress of Actuaries in Sydney, and it attracted interest from stakeholders in several other countries.

“So, the methodology is one that can be applied in any common-law jurisdiction that does not have an existing framework,” added Rudden.

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

OUR CAMPUS



SWEET EYE? A fearsome Jab Jab gets in the face of a fearless audience member at The Old Yard.

In his work, **The Carnivals of Trinidad and Tobago: From Inception to year 2000**, author and historian Michael Anthony described the resurgence of J'ouvert in the 1960s as "vigorous and resplendent."

"All the old bubbling enthusiasm of the traditional jour ouvert came to the surface," he wrote, "and, strange to say, the masquerade even matched the old-time flavour of that first post-war jour ouvert of 1946."

Anthony was describing not only a return to traditional cultural expression, but a reclamation of energy and enjoyment. Every year, that same resplendent vigour of traditional carnival, is reincarnated at The Old Yard.

On Sunday, February 8, UWI St Augustine's Department of Creative and Festival Arts transformed its Gordon Street campus into a vibrant space of Carnival's past Old Yard 2026. Held from noon to 6 pm under the patronage of Campus Principal Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine, the event welcomed families, students, and cultural enthusiasts into a space where tradition was not only displayed, but actively lived.

Recognised by UNESCO as an International Best Arts Education Practice, The Old Yard recreates the atmosphere of historic communal yards. The grassy quadrangle beneath the DCFA's flamboyant trees was reimagined as a Gayelle through murals, tapestry, elaborate set design, and bleachers that quickly filled with patrons, including large groups of secondary school students.



A very patriotic member of Kaisokah Moko Jumbies combines balance, rhythm, and dance. These practitioners move with extraordinary skill on stilts as high as 15 feet.

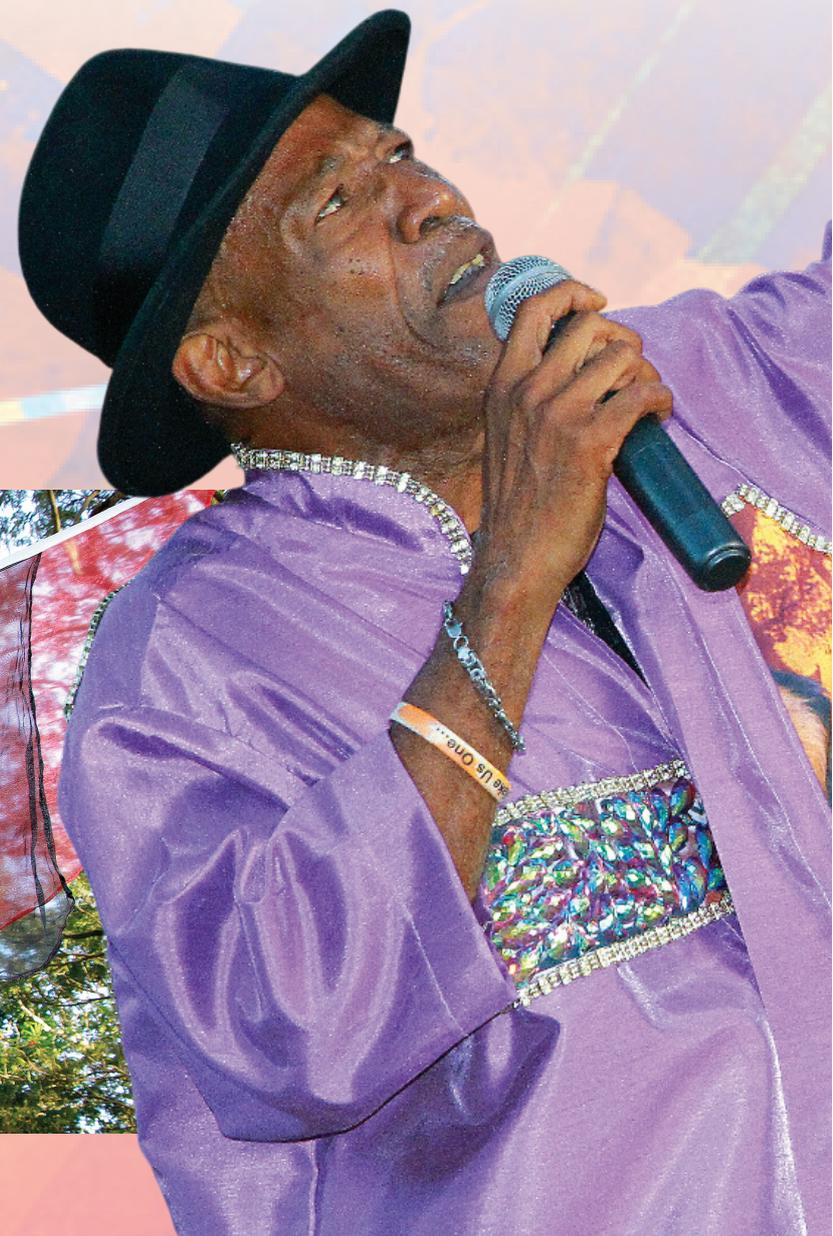


The Old Yard
presents
Bois!

Time in a Land Spe

DCFA's The Old Yard Draws Crowd
Celebration of Living Carnival

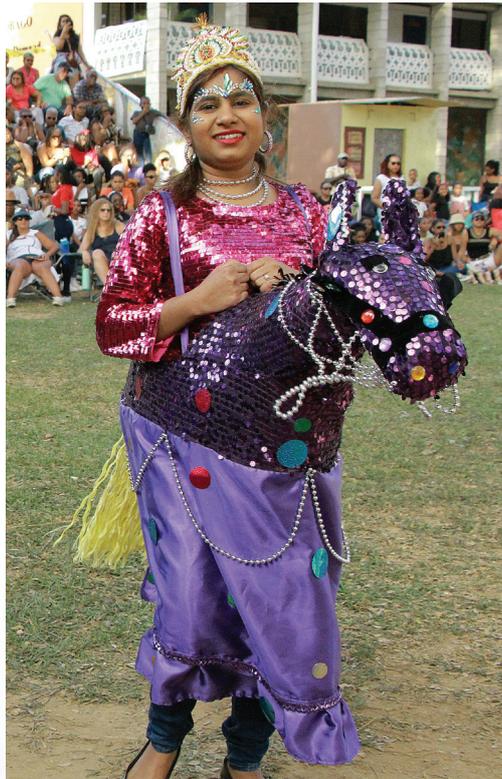
BY CHERISSE LAUREN B



Yard
2026Bottle
(Moon)Yards for Powerful
Cultural Heritage

BERKELEY

UP IN THE AIR! HIGHER THAN THAT! Soca legend Ronnie McIntosh showed the crowd he could still make both the older and younger generations move to the music.



A Sumari queen in resplendent colours trots through the yard. This form of mas, which depicts a horse and rider, originates from India and is closely related to the Kachchhi Ghodi and Poikkaal Kuthirai Aattam dances of Indian folk tradition.

Kaiso, Extempo, Mas

Audiences were greeted by classic kaiso selections and encouraged to sing along, setting a communal tone for the afternoon. A major highlight was the inaugural Extempo Clash featuring master wordsmiths Winston "Gypsy" Peters and Myron Bruce. Their lyrical exchanges blended humour, social commentary, and verbal agility, drawing enthusiastic responses from the crowd. Revered calypso icon Ronnie Mc Intosh added to the atmosphere with a special performance that celebrated the enduring power of traditional song.

Throughout the day, patrons encountered parades and performances of traditional mas characters. Familiar Sunday yard scenes transformed into interactive theatre as jammettes, baby dolls, sailors, police, and thief mingled with playful figures such as nurse, doctor, dog and lamp post. Performance collective Arts in Action dramatised the origins of Carnival, combining storytelling and movement to deepen the educational experience.

Special focus was placed on the art of bois or stick fighting, with demonstrations by renowned practitioners Keegan Taylor and Felix Defour. Their performances highlighted the discipline, rhythm, and historical significance of a tradition rooted in resistance and survival. The DCFA drummers added a powerful sonic backdrop, engaging the audience in call and response that echoed across the yard. Patrons also enjoyed local food and craft on sale, completing a multi-sensory experience grounded in community and tradition.

The 2026 edition formed part of DCFA's legacy celebrations, marking 20 years as a department and 40 years in existence. By honouring cultural custodians while inviting new generations to participate, The Old Yard reaffirmed its role as a vital bridge between heritage and contemporary expression.

However, The Old Yard is more than just an interactive event. It is an important teaching tool for students of DCFA's Carnival Studies programme who work with staff to plan and manage the festival, as well as students in others units such as Theatre Arts who reimagine and perform as traditional Carnival characters. Many of these students go on to become Carnival professionals both in front of and behind the curtain, ensuring not only that T&T has a human resource for the creative and culture industry, but also an information resource on the history and traditions of this vital aspect of our culture.

It is the living archive of the resurgence that delighted Anthony in his work. "This jour ouvert of 1965 revived many aspects of jour ouvert that were thought dead. Even tamboo bamboo bands were seen on the streets.... There was an abundance of rope-and-twine devils, moko jumbies, and many Dame Lorraine characters."

Today, over 60 years later, The Old Yard DCFA is giving new audiences a sometimes sweet and sometimes shocking, taste of traditional Carnival.

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



FIRE IN THE SKY: A member of the group Les Reines Djabbes performs a pyrotechnic wonder. These Jab Jabs are known as the "Home-grown Devils", as many of them are DCFA alumni.



WHO'S THAT LADY? A Dame Lorraine makes her way through the yard, demanding attention. With her bright dress, hat, parasol, and more curves than Lady Young Road, this traditional Carnival character is a beloved satirical performance of the European lady of the colonial era.

Under the mask is Shauntelle Jones, a Theatre Arts graduate from DCFA and Artistic Programme Manager of Arts-In-Action, the department's public education programme. She says her performance ensures that Dame Lorraine's "history, symbolism and social context is properly researched and represented not only from information found in books or the internet, but also from the persons who have been portraying the character for many years."

Traditional mas, she says, "is living history that teaches, challenges and celebrates who we are, preserving the stories of our ancestors."

Jones has been performing since primary school in student plays, motivated by her passion for the arts and disinterest in an eight-to-four occupation.

"The DCFA deepened my understanding of the arts, more specifically Trinidad and Tobago's art forms, and seeing them as transformative and also as a vehicle for cultural retention," she says of her student experience.

"Through Arts-in-Action, I see first-hand how creative expression empowers communities and builds bridges between what we are taught in schools and what we must learn from the community."

OUR PEOPLE

Dr Jo-anne Tull and the Architecture of Cultural Leadership

BY CHERISSE LAUREN BERKELEY

It's Carnival time, a time of great importance to Dr Jo-anne Tull. Like many Caribbean people, she engages in one of the region's most powerful expressions of culture. However, her connection to the national festival of Trinidad and Tobago and its cousins in the diaspora is much deeper. For decades, she has been a distinguished academic and consultant specialising in the creative and cultural industries.

Now she has embarked on a new professional journey, one that combines her sector-wide focus on the economic and developmental aspects of art and entertainment with the education and training of the artists, performers, festival managers, and creative entrepreneurs themselves. Dr Tull is the new Head of UWI St Augustine's Department of Creative and Festival Arts (DCFA).

"I want us to respond with agility to the needs of the Caribbean," Dr Tull says of her vision for DCFA. She is committed to strengthening DCFA's outreach, research relevance, and regional engagement. Her goal is to make the department a leader in cultural research and professional training, aligned with the evolving demands of the performing arts and creative sector.

It is a role that the DCFA is well-positioned to take. Established as the Creative Arts Centre in 1986 and becoming a full department in 2006, the DCFA provides an unparalleled combination of academic training and practice-based/performance pedagogy in several creative fields.

Students can attain degrees and certificates in Carnival Studies, Dance, Music, Theatre Arts, and Visual Arts. They also offer programmes and courses related to entrepreneurship and management in the creative and culture industries. In addition, as a department within an institution of higher education, DCFA faculty and students pursue research, support policy development, and provide outreach on a national and community level.

Collectively, the department is a valuable resource for the development of the arts in the Caribbean, particularly for some with Dr Tull's outlook.

Her career shows a commitment to building frameworks that support the creative sector at both institutional and regional levels. For her, culture is a critical site of economic activity, identity formation, and national development. She has spent more than two decades working within DCFA, contributing to the department's evolution and to the wider recognition of the cultural and creative industries as a serious field of academic and professional inquiry.



A proud alum of The UWI Cave Hill, Dr Tull studied Public Sector Management, where she developed a foundation in governance, systems thinking, and public accountability. She credits the influence of Professor Duncan and Professor Khan as formative in shaping her analytical approach. Her postgraduate studies in International Relations expanded her regional and global perspective, equipping her to engage with the intersections of culture, diplomacy, and development policy.

Her early professional focus on the business of copyright as doctoral research and simultaneously serving as research assistant to Dr Keith Nurse on the first ever region-wide study on music as an industry came at a pivotal moment in the Caribbean. As she reflects, "the creative industry was just solidifying itself in the region. People had begun to see and understand the worth and depth of our creatives."

This period informed her long-standing advocacy for the formal recognition of creative labour. It also positioned her among the early contributors to a field that was still defining its boundaries.

Throughout her tenure at DCFA, Dr Tull has occupied several key leadership roles. She has served and continues to serve as Project Lead of The Old Yard (*see article in this issue*), Coordinator of the Carnival Studies Unit, Coordinator of the Postgraduate Diploma in Arts and Cultural Enterprise Management, as well as Lecturer across these programmes, among many other responsibilities. Each role reflects her emphasis on linking academic research with industry practice and community engagement, ensuring that the department remains relevant to the realities of Caribbean cultural production.

Teaching remains central to her professional identity. She values the collaborative energy of academic environments and the intellectual exchange that shapes curriculum development.

"When I see our staff working together, with all hands on deck when we are in a crunch I'm happy to be a part of and fostering an environment where we support each other," she says.

She is candid about the realities of leadership within complex institutions. Aligning priorities, managing change, and sustaining momentum require adaptability and clarity. As she observes, "getting everyone on the same page along with adaptability and change management can be a little challenging but it is not daunting."

Her approach recognises leadership as an ongoing negotiation between vision and practical execution.

Beyond her professional responsibilities, Dr Tull maintains a commitment to life balance. A proud mother of two, including a DCFA Visual Arts graduate, she values the distinction between personal and professional life. Her guiding philosophy is succinct: "Inner positivity reflects outwardly, life is about balance." She sustains that balance through travel, time with loved ones, engagement with cultural spaces such as museums, galleries and festivals, and adequate rest.

As a pioneer in the academic study and administration of the cultural and creative industries, she has helped shape the intellectual and structural foundations of the field. Under her leadership, DCFA strives to continue as a critical site where research and practice converge, ensuring that Caribbean culture is not only celebrated, but rigorously studied, protected, and advanced.

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

UWIBDF holds campus blood drive on LRC Greens

On Thursday, January 29, The UWI Blood Donor Foundation (UWIBDF) held its Campus Blood Drive at the St Augustine Campus's Learning Resource Centre (LRC) Greens. The blood drive was a joint initiative with the North West Regional Health Authority and the Rotary Club of St Augustine, who sponsored the drive, allowing healthy people to donate blood to those in need. Ms Melissa Senhouse, President of the Rotary Club of St Augustine, also donated blood.

Voluntary blood donation is a crucial exercise that can help many patients and even save lives.

"A safe and reliable blood supply which is donated unconditionally and anonymously and used on a basis of clinical need would address the country's needs," wrote Dr Kenneth Charles, Senior Lecturer in Haematology at UWI St Augustine and Chair of UWIBDF, in the pages of UWI TODAY.



It would be used, he wrote, for "emergencies, planned surgeries, pregnancy complications, dialysis, oncology and haematology. It would improve the lives of patients who require repeated blood transfusions to stay alive and those, including foreign visitors, who have no relatives to donate blood on their behalf."

Based at the Department of Paraclinical Sciences (DPS) of the Faculty of Medical Sciences (FMS) at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex in Mt Hope, UWIBDF was founded in 2011 to raise awareness about voluntary blood donation in the community and the efficient use of blood by medical professionals.

■ **For those interested in more information on UWIBDF and its mission, visit them on Facebook at facebook.com/UWIBlood/, or Instagram at instagram.com/uwiblood**

Under Martí's Gaze

One Family's Journey from Cuba to the UWI St Augustine Campus

BY DR AMINA IBRAHIM-ALI

In 2009, five-year old Dayana Miranda Ortega said a tearful goodbye to her mother Daymara, a surgical nurse from Cuba who had responded to a call from the Cuban Nursing Council to work in Trinidad and Tobago for two years. Little Dayana would later follow her mother and, as a young adult, attend classes at UWI.

Daymara, vividly recalls the “well-organised” English for Medical Purposes programme which she and her colleagues completed upon their arrival. Between August 2009 and February 2010, three cohorts of Cuban medical personnel from 14 diverse specialities received 60 hours of English language training at The UWI's Centre for Language Learning (CLL), before they assumed duty at local hospitals and health centres.

She had acquired only “basic” English at high school. Despite having commissioned the services of a private tutor, she regarded the training provided at UWI St Augustine as a necessity. Daymara was impressed by the wide range of subjects, the strategic scheduling of evaluations, and she highly commended the incorporation of self-guided pronunciation.

Following a period of observation at health centres across the country, the Cuban nurse was assigned to Mount Hope Hospital at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, home of UWI's Faculty of Medical Sciences. She served as an operating theatre nurse until 2011 when it was time to return home.

Back in Cuba, Daymara longed to return to Trinidad and Tobago. She applied for a position with the Ministry of Health and resumed work at Mount Hope. That decision to return paved the way for her daughter, ten-year old Dayana, to make her own journey to T&T.

Dayana arrived in Trinidad with, she says, “just a few words” of English. Years of hard work followed as she became increasingly proficient in English with the help of a private tutor from the St Augustine campus who charted out a complete immersion experience for her.

Her tutor would later guide her through preparatory school, and at the end of three years, the school acknowledged that Dayana



FAMILY: Daymara Ortega Ricardo and her daughter, Dayana Miranda Ortega.

was ready for secondary school. In 2025, Dayana had her high school certificate in hand. Her tutor pointed her to UWI.

Dayana is currently pursuing a suite of courses in the Certificate in Humanities Programme which will, after one year, ready her for an undergraduate degree in the humanities.

Today, as she traverses campus, she is surrounded by close friends and supportive teachers. She finds UWI to be a welcoming place, where she can be herself, and where her Cuban culture is valued. She speaks excitedly of the day when, on the third floor of

the Alma Jordan library, she caught sight of the emblematic bust of José Martí and immediately snapped a photo for her mother. This bust forms part of the library's “Héroes de la Patria” collection dedicated to heroes of the Caribbean nations.

“Our Apostle! ...At UWI!” Daymara exclaims with pride. José Martí is revered as the Apostle of Cuban Independence. He was also a philosopher, essayist and poet, whose 172nd birth and 130th death in battle anniversaries were commemorated in grand style last year.

Daymara and Dayana hold their Cuban culture close. One of Martí's books of poems, a cherished item, travelled from Cuba to T&T with them. They speak of dishes like cassava, or yuca, with mojito—a garlic citrus sauce. But they also speak of pelau. Dayana was introduced to this quintessential Trini meal in her Food and Nutrition class in high school. When her mother tasted a sample, Dayana says, “...she fell in love with it!”

Today, Daymara works in neo-natal care, but she smiles and explains that, whenever she is needed, she works in the operating theatres. Mount Hope is like her home.

“Everybody knows me,” she says.

Dayana's father, a medical doctor in Cuba, wants her to be a doctor as well. She isn't so keen on the idea, expressing an interest in law. She is also thinking of interpreting or perhaps even teaching. However, what she knows for sure is that her favourite course is LARS0110: A Diasporic History of the Caribbean. She is fascinated by history.

The Certificate in Humanities programme will, no doubt, be her launch pad. In Martí's words, “To educate is to give man the keys to the world, which are independence and love, and to give him strength to journey on his own, light of step, a spontaneous and free being.”

Dr Amina Ibrahim-Ali coordinated and taught English as a Second Language for 17 years at The UWI St Augustine campus.

UWI St Augustine's Centre for Language Learning (CLL) is hosting a programme designed to give students an experience of foreign cultures to accompany their language studies. This culture programme, beginning in March, will expose students to foreign literature, games, food, craft, and even activities for mental and emotional health.

“We are redefining how language and culture are engaged,” says Ms Janine Lutchman-Nkouetang, a Chinese language tutor at CLL, “moving learning beyond the classroom and into the wider community.”

A key feature of the CLL cultural programme is the Foreign Language Book Club, running until June. Each session centres on a literary work by an international author, paired with an exploration of the author's country and cultural context.

For book club participants, the experience offers more than literary analysis. As Kelsie Lewis, a student from the Faculty of Food and Agriculture (FFA), reflects: “Travel isn't always about the flight; sometimes it's about the immersion. The CLL Foreign Language Book Club is a passport to new cultures, stories, and vibrant perspectives. It's a joy to ‘visit’ these countries alongside such a thoughtful group of readers.”

The next session, on March 27, will focus on the Central African nation of Cameroon.

The programme also includes The Language of Calm, a collaborative initiative with The UWI Counselling and Psychological Services Department (CAPS), that offers participants opportunities to de-stress through culturally inspired craft and artistic activities from around the world, highlighting the connection between language, culture, art, and well-being.

Lutchman-Nkouetang says these activities contribute to an experience that “invites curiosity, creativity, and cultural connection.”

Perhaps the ultimate example of this is the CLL Open House (scheduled for March 13 and 14), an event showcasing all languages taught at the centre. Activities will include interactive games, introductory language sessions, live food demonstrations, performances, and hands-on cultural workshops. A dedicated

CLL CULTURAL PROGRAMME takes students from language to living



A participant shows off her craftsmanship at the Francophone Sip and Paint event. PHOTOS: COURTESY THE CENTRE FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING.



Attendees of “The Language of Calm”, a joint CLL/CAPS initiative, share the results of a wellness exercise.

Friday session will be reserved for primary and secondary schools, giving younger students early exposure to language learning in an engaging environment.

Shabana Mayers, a lab technician at the Faculty of Medical Sciences and a frequent attendee, describes the open house as “a reminder that language learning is not merely about grammar and vocabulary, but also about culture, identity, and human connection.”

That's quite a range of activities, but the centre has plans for even more:

“We want to host creative, culture-filled events like Sip &

Paints with a twist, where participants can enjoy art, conversation, and cultural exploration in a relaxed setting,” says Lutchman-Nkouetang.

“Through this revised cultural programme,” she adds, “the CLL is showing our commitment to accessibility, cultural engagement, and community outreach. Language learning is not simply an academic subject. It is a cultural experience open to all.”

■ Schools, organisations, and departments interested in participating or hosting a session are invited to contact the CLL by email at (CLL.FHE@sta.uwi.edu).

RESEARCH

The Road to Resilience (Part 1)

Roxborough Early Warning System

UWI strengthens disaster preparedness

BY TYRELL GITTENS

Since 2024, The UWI and the Clara Lionel Foundation have been collaborating on a two-year project focusing on early-warning systems for disaster-prone communities. In this three-part series, the three project components will be explored. Part one looks at the community of Roxborough in Tobago, where early-warning flood monitoring equipment has been set up, and vetiver is being planted to reduce flood risks.

For UWI St Augustine Geography Department lecturer Dr Gabrielle Thongs, the disruptive effects of navigating a country vulnerable to persistent flooding are noticeable.

Like many other Trinbagonians, Dr Thongs knows all too well that flooding poses a risk to both lives and livelihoods, with a simple action like commuting to work becoming a deadly hazard if drivers get caught in a thunderstorm in a susceptible area.

In 2024, Dr Thongs, working alongside the Office of Global Partnerships and Sustainable Futures team, successfully sought grant funding from the Clara Lionel Foundation to lead a collaborative pilot project with The UWI. Aimed at improving early warning systems (EWS) in disaster-prone areas, she specifically chose to focus on a community at high risk for flooding, based on the documented frequency and density of past hazardous events.

But looking at the issue from a more strategic perspective, Dr Thongs also wanted to ensure the people in that community would benefit from the project, especially if they were in socially vulnerable positions.

Roxborough: social vulnerability and exposure to hazards

Building on her previous work, Dr Thongs utilised findings from the Caribbean Community Risk Information Tool—a partnership between The UWI and Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency—to select Roxborough. That earlier study had already categorised the community as high-risk due to its social vulnerability and exposure to hazards.

Additionally, with support from the Tobago Emergency Management Agency (TEMA), a comprehensive flood-susceptibility analysis for Trinidad and Tobago that integrates satellite imagery with local data was conducted, and it also identified Roxborough as highly susceptible to flooding.

Its relatively remote location in Tobago also made it an ideal site for implementing real-time monitoring accessible from anywhere.

Roxborough emerged as the prime location for the pilot project, representing a critical starting point for a newly enhanced EWS. This initiative is groundbreaking as it integrates four key pillars for the first time: a dedicated EWS mobile app accessible to anyone with a smartphone; rainfall and river gauges for precise data collection; a camera system for long-term visual monitoring; and the introduction of community-led, nature-based flood mitigation solutions.

By blending high-tech data with local nature-based action, the project puts the power of resilience directly into the hands of the community. It is not just an upgrade; it is a complete reimagining of how the Caribbean protects its own.

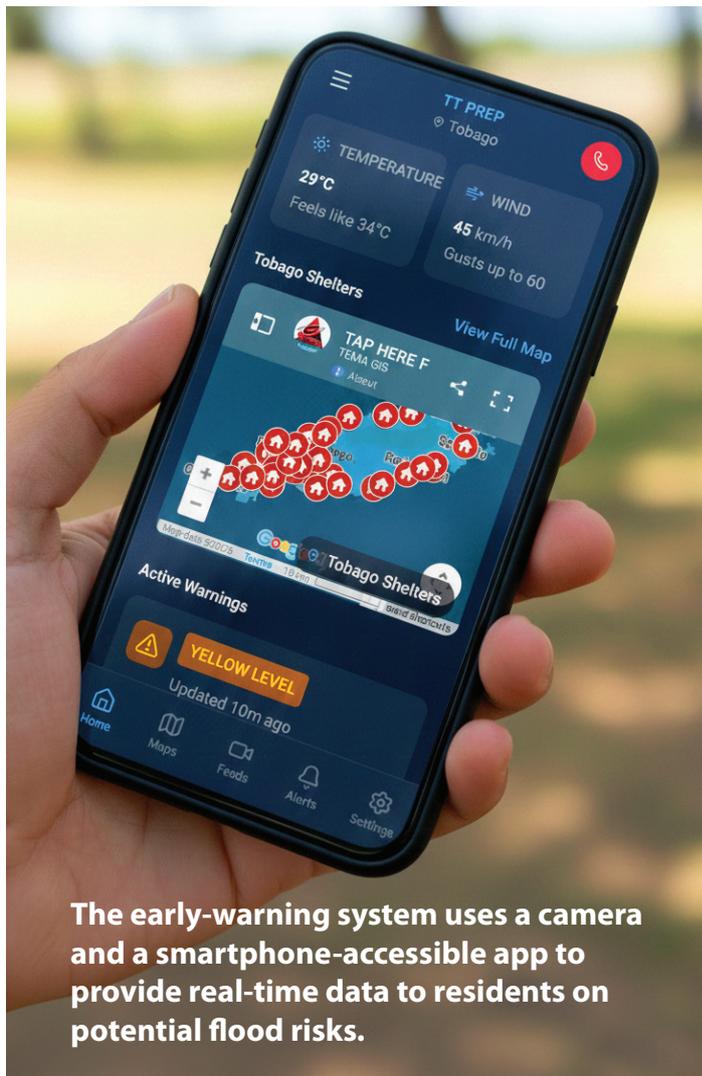
Real-time flood information

“Access to real-time information identifying flooded areas and passable routes is essential for effective response. An early-warning camera is now operational on the Roxborough River, with rainfall and river gauges presently under installation,” Dr Thongs established.

“The real-time camera allows all stakeholders involved, including residents, to have continuous monitoring of river conditions without being physically present, which is particularly valuable during heavy rainfall or extreme weather.”



PLANTING FOR PROTECTION: Staff and students of the Department of Geography with representatives of Vetiver TT in Roxborough, Tobago, in late 2025 to learn about and plant vetiver. Vetiver's dense root system helps to mitigate flooding and prevent erosion. PHOTO: TYRELL GITTENS.



The early-warning system uses a camera and a smartphone-accessible app to provide real-time data to residents on potential flood risks.



RESEARCH

Residents can monitor the river's status via a live feed available here: <https://www.traffictt.com/camera/traffic-camera/north/roxborough/roxborough-river/>

Once the set-up of the river gauge is completed, it will also give TEMA the capability to have precise, real-time measurements of water levels at the Roxborough River, which strengthens the agency's ability to identify rising flood risks and issue timely alerts via the EWS app to downstream communities.

Equipment for the system was purchased from the US\$225,000 grant provided by the Clara Lionel Foundation to the UWI for the project.

Founded by Barbadian global superstar Rihanna, the Clara Lionel Foundation is a nonprofit organisation that supports education, climate resilience, health equity, and emergency response.

All equipment was sourced from established local technology companies to ensure that solutions remain context-appropriate. The Water Resources Authority (WRA) is currently executing the installation of the monitoring equipment, and will assume responsibility for its long-term maintenance. This direct involvement by the WRA ensures that the systems remain operational and continue to provide consistent, reliable data collection for years to come.

Moving beyond the classroom to communities

For Dr Thongs, the development of a camera and gauge at the Roxborough River is a step in the right direction for Tobago and the wider country to fully embrace the technological capacities available to provide early warning insights.

Dr Thongs added, "Delivering real-time information empowers individuals to make informed decisions during flood events."

"This work represents our commitment as Caribbean academics to move beyond theory. We are dedicated to building a more robust informational framework that empowers citizens and disaster management agencies alike to make faster, more effective decisions when every second counts."

But the technological equipment is not the only method being used to reduce Roxborough's flooding risk.

Dr Thongs continued by saying "As a higher education institution, The University of the West Indies has a responsibility not only to strengthen resilience across the Caribbean, but also to transfer this knowledge to the next



generation of practitioners and decision-makers. Accordingly, a core component of this project was the active involvement of students in the installation of the nature-based solution at the Roxborough River site, ensuring that theoretical learning was reinforced through practical, hands-on experience."

Dr Thongs explained, "This nature-based approach not only enhances disaster mitigation but also offers additional benefits. For example, we are exploring the integration of this site into eco-tourism tours in Tobago."

"This dual approach allows the intervention to provide both environmental protection and direct economic stimulation for the community."

Vetiver, a nature-based solution to flooding

On November 25, 2025, undergraduate and postgraduate students of The UWI participated in a workshop at Roxborough, where they learned about the benefits of vetiver through a presentation by Vetiver TT. The workshop also included a site visit to the Roxborough River, during which students had the opportunity to actively participate in the planting of vetiver at the Roxborough site, gaining practical, hands-on experience with the nature-based solution.

Dr Thongs explained that being on-site enabled students to better understand the practical application of flood mitigation techniques. Vetiver TT led the implementation of this component of the project through the installation of vetiver grass along the banks of the Roxborough River.

Vetiver was selected for its effectiveness as a nature-based solution, providing a sustainable, low-cost, and practical approach to flood mitigation. Vetiver mitigates floods by forming dense barriers that slow water flow, trap sediment, and stabilise soil with its deep, strong roots, effectively reducing runoff and preventing erosion.

Dr Thongs selected vetiver for the project as it met the key criteria of being easily replicated in communities facing similar flood risks and of actively engaging local labour, ensuring knowledge transfer and fostering local ownership of the solutions.

For Dr Thongs, this practical application was the perfect antidote to traditional classroom learning. She explained that "Too often in the Caribbean, we focus on teaching students about problems."

She reflected, "This project allowed students to take ownership of a real, live case study. They weren't just observing from the sidelines; they were on the ground, actively contributing to the solutions that will protect this community. They became architects of the solution."

A practical application of green infrastructure

One of the students who participated in the Tobago site visit was Zoe Webb, a final year student studying a double major in Geography, and Environmental and Natural Resources Management.

Webb described the opportunity of seeing the vetiver system and helping to plant it as a moment she saw the practical application of green infrastructure, something she learns about from textbooks and journal articles.

Webb added, "The vetiver grass is not a new crop to me, but during the trip, I learned more about the extent of its properties, characteristics, and applicability to nature-based solutions for risk management."

"Learning beyond the lecture theatre within this three-tiered community project allowed not only myself but also the surrounding community, through their long-term participation, to increase their disaster risk awareness."

While this initiative represents a major breakthrough, executing such a complex, mammoth task was only possible through the deep collaboration of multiple agencies and a dedicated project team. The success of this pilot rests on the efforts of Dale James, Lisa Hamilton-Braithwaite, and Kevin Manning from the Office of Global Partnerships and Sustainable Futures, working alongside partners at Vetiver TT, TEMA, the WRA, Ultimate Solutions Ltd and Ms Sherise Gomez.

More than just a technical milestone, their work has secured a small but significant step toward regional safety, offering a truly Caribbean-led, designed, and implemented prototype for disaster resilience.

A Wing and a Prayer

BY JOEL HENRY

There's a new bird on campus. Peli, the mascot of The UWI St Augustine, has been updated with a fresh look. He introduced himself to students at The UWI Math Fair 2026, making friends, posing for photos, and giving visitors to the campus a very warm pelican welcome.

The new Peli joins Pete the Pelican (The UWI Mona campus mascot in Jamaica) and Chilly the Blackbird (The UWI Cave Hill campus mascot in Barbados) as the winged representative of the university in Trinidad and Tobago. The pelican has become a symbol for The UWI as it sits atop the university crest. University community members call themselves "Proud Pelicans".

As for the old Peli, he retires with pride, flying off to an undisclosed location (the Marketing and Communications Office at UWI St Augustine remains tight-lipped about his destination). During his time, he served the campus well, bringing life and warmth to countless graduation ceremonies, Open Days, and other activities. *Fly free and Godspeed.*



The elder Peli (left) welcomes the new Peli to the post of campus mascot. PHOTO: ATIBA CUDJOE

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

OUR GRADUATES

UWI graduates are everywhere – politics, business, the arts, and as public intellectuals. In the coming months, **UWI TODAY** will profile some of our high achieving alumni who have made or are making a positive impact on society.

Have you ever wondered who writes encyclopaedias? It takes an enormous amount of knowledge and scholarship. Trinidad and Tobago is home to an author whose knowledge of mangoes—one of T&T's favourite fruits—is so comprehensive that he has contributed to a massive, six-volume, 11-book encyclopaedia on the topic.

Evans Ramkhelawan—a local agronomist, tree crop consultant, weed scientist, and crop valuator—is the principal author of the chapter on mangoes in Trinidad and Tobago and the section on varieties of our mangoes in the *World Mango Tree Encyclopedia* published in 2016 by the Sultanate of Oman Royal Court Affairs (covered in the December 2025 issue of **UWI TODAY**).

A GIFT OF DRAGON FRUIT FROM MALAYSIA

While writing part of an encyclopaedia could be a peak accomplishment for most people, Ramkhelwan is also responsible for something else that is equally impressive. He is the person who introduced the red-fleshed dragon fruit, *Selenicereus costaricensis*, to Trinidad and Tobago.

This dragon fruit selection, also called pitaya roha, has a red outer skin when ripe with red to deep crimson flesh inside speckled with tiny, black edible seeds. The flesh has a sweet, mildly acidic flavour and juicy texture. When ripe, it can weigh around one third to one half of a kilogram.

It began with his visit to Malaysia in 2006 during his time as an agronomist at the Ministry of Agriculture, where he saw the exotic fruit being cultivated. On his return to Trinidad, he brought home plant cuttings. This was done, he emphasised, via the proper legal channels—having the correct import permit, and declaring the plant material to plant quarantine officials.

From there, the dragon fruit was propagated, and a small orchard was established at the Ministry of Agriculture's Central Experiment Station. Today, the fruit is widely enjoyed and even cultivated commercially in agro-processing (see the story of Anderson Bissoon in the April 2021 issue of **UWI TODAY** https://sta.uwi.edu/uwitoday/archive/april_2021/article6.asp).

For over 40 years, Ramkhelawan has worked to move the local agriculture industry forward. He was inspired by his dad, Rawle Ramkhelawan to become an agriculturist.

"I was raised in an agricultural community in the sugarcane belt of Williamsville," he recalls.

"My father grew up in abject poverty at the Brothers Estate barracks. He never had the opportunity to have a secondary school education, but was self-taught and eventually became a teacher, a graduate from Naparima Training College, and the Eastern Caribbean Institute of Agriculture and Forestry (ECIAF). He then became an Agricultural Extension Officer in County Victoria."

His own story, however, began in an entirely different industry. At the age of 20, he was trained and later employed in the chemical manufacturing sector at the Point Lisas Industrial Estate. It was this experience that made him realise that he wanted to do something different.

ENROLLING AT UWI ST AUGUSTINE

"I wanted to work with crops, not industrial plants," he says.

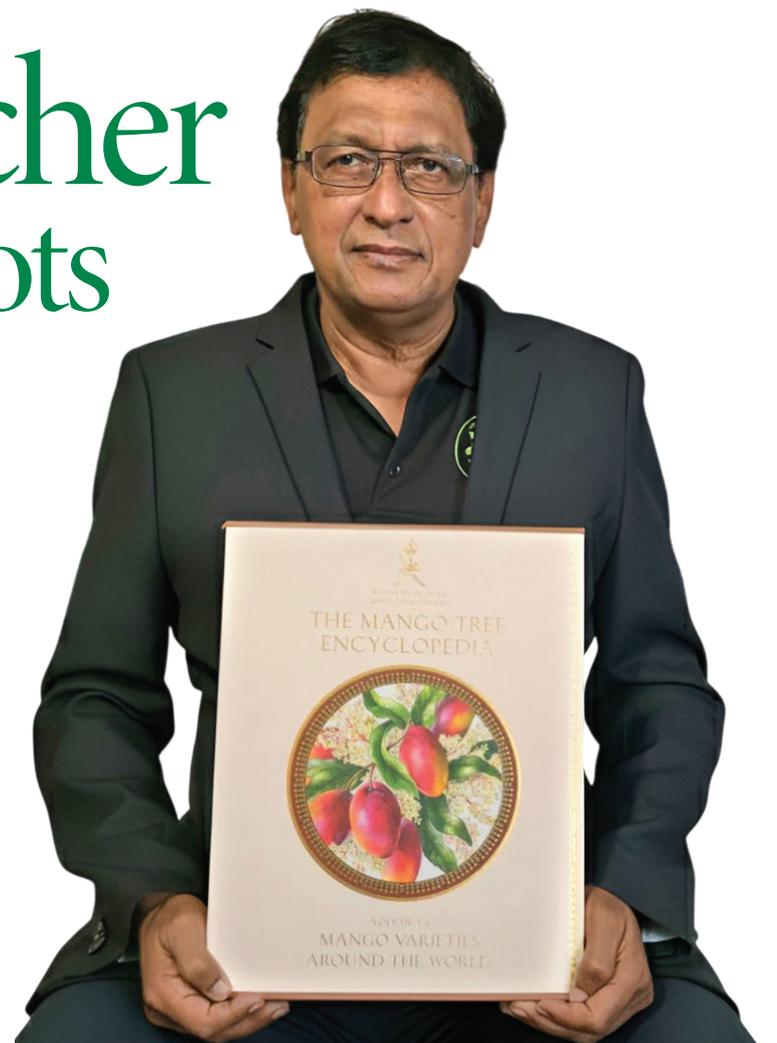
He enrolled at The University of the West Indies in 1977 and pursued a Bachelor's of Science degree in Agriculture. Wanting to build on his undergraduate education, in 1994, he completed a Master of Philosophy degree in Crop Science, also at The UWI St Augustine.

After graduating, he taught Agricultural Science at the secondary school level and then became an Agricultural Officer in the Agriculture Ministry's Horticultural Division. Ramkhelawan served on all four plant propagation stations for ten years. He also returned

Researcher of the Roots

BY SHEREEN ALI

In his 40-year career, Agronomist Evans Ramkhelawan contributes to mango encyclopaedia, introduces red-skinned dragon fruit to T&T, and supports local agriculture through research, writing, and outreach



Mr Ramkhelawan believes that there is still hope for agriculture to not just survive, but thrive.

to UWI, where he completed a Master of Philosophy degree in Crop Science in 1994.

As a man of agriculture and research, it is not surprising that some of his fondest memories from his time on campus involve the many green spaces, the beautiful trees, and the vast collections housed in the Alma Jordan Library. When the Mango Tree Encyclopedia was published, he returned to donate the work to the campus library.

His contribution to the institution's academic collections does not end there. As a researcher at the Central Experiment Station in Centeno he authored several research papers published in the Faculty of Food and Agriculture's Tropical Agriculture Journal. He has also written a number of articles on a range of horticultural crops in other journals and fruit newsletters. He has written three books—Production Guide for Sapodilla, Soursop and Pineapple, Growers Guide for Coconuts, and Coconut Production Technology Manual.

Of all the research he conducted, his most memorable ones were his publication on the integrated management of birdvine (*Passovia pedunculata*) in Citrus trees and the sustainable production of pineapples in Tableland, South Trinidad. Pineapple lands were being degraded and later abandoned as a result of unsustainable practices there.

COCONUTS, A LUCRATIVE AND BENEFICIAL CROP

After retiring as a director from the Ministry of Agriculture in 2016, Mr Ramkhelawan served at the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI) as the Agronomist and lead consultant for a regional project entitled "Coconut Industry

Development in the Caribbean" He shared his experience and expertise in coconut production technology by providing workshops and field training in nine countries.

"Coconut is a very lucrative crop with many health benefits," he says.

He believes that the coconut industry can be revived by the Ministry of Agriculture providing a dedicated team to manage the fatal Red Ring Disease epidemic which is widespread in Trinidad and Tobago.

"A programme should be developed to rapidly produce high-quality coconut plants in adequate quantities to replace the large acreages of senile, unproductive trees, and to expand acreage," he explains. "Growers should be provided with the recommended agronomic practices for sustainable production. Training for safe bottling of Coconut water should also be provided.

Mr Ramkhelawan believes that there is still hope for agriculture to not just survive, but thrive. As a practicing registered farmer for four decades who has worked to improve crop production, he continues to advocate for the conservation of rare/exotic fruits.

"I am always on the lookout," he says, "to identify superior planting materials for inclusion in germplasm collections for the benefit of farmers."

Evans Ramkhelawan believes that true food security isn't just about increasing the sheer volume of commodities. It should include food safety and systemic efficiency, utilising an integrated approach to ensure we are not just feeding the present, but actively safeguarding the future.

Shereen Ali is a writer, photographer, and a storyteller.

■ FROM THE ARCHIVES TO TODAY

UWI TODAY is pleased to share the first in a new series about UWI St Augustine students once featured in our pages that have moved on to excel in their professional or research careers.

The Irresistible Pull of Research

UWI Alum Dr Antonio Ramkissoon continues his work tackling antibiotic resistance in bacteria at Harvard

BY AMY LI BAKSH

Antonio Ramkissoon is no stranger to the pages of UWI TODAY

(April 2018 issue). It has been almost ten years since his work with antibiotics was covered by the paper—in some ways, his life now is very different. But some constants remain. Antonio is now a research associate at Harvard University's Department of Chemistry and Chemical Biology. He still works with antibiotics, but the nature of his research has changed.

"My work, through graduate school and now postdoctoral research, has always been antibiotic discovery and development," says Ramkissoon. "Essentially, it began with exploring natural indigenous bacteria from Trinidad, and the ability to produce antibacterial compounds. Then it progressed to isolating and identifying the antibacterials."

Although the overarching field of study remains the same, he has moved on to the next step in the research: figuring out how to apply what has been discovered to make it work for us. "My research now has evolved from discovery into development of antibiotics... it's an iterative process of medicinal chemistry coupled with drug development."

Research to bolster antibiotics

Research into antibiotics is incredibly important for the medical community and the world at large. "Antibiotics are essentially the foundation of modern medicine," he says. "Without antibiotics, every other medical procedure cannot be done."

The issue, however, is that the bacteria that affect humans are constantly evolving to work around the antibiotics we have to fight them. "Many pathogenic bacteria are resistant to almost every different type of antibiotic we use in clinics."



This is something called "multidrug resistance", and it is a huge issue for the medical field. But what Antonio and others in his field are working on are new chemical classes that target bacteria in completely new ways—ones that they aren't prepared to defend against. This work started for him in the labs at the St Augustine campus, and he is excited to be able to continue to the next stage of research.

From his time at UWI St Augustine's Department of Life Sciences to spending the last few years at Harvard, there were adjustments that had to be made. For him, one thing was a constant—the science.

"Academically, transitioning from UWI to Harvard was seamless... because the science doesn't change. Wherever you do the work, it doesn't change."

Once the work transition was sorted, he made sure everything else was in order. Of course, that meant finding a place where he could get a home-cooked roti. The only thing he hasn't figured out is where he can catch the latest cricket matches.

Antonio modestly describes himself as not being "anything special". But he talks glowingly about colleagues who have come out of The UWI and ended up in institutions across the world.

"A large expatriate portion of Trinidadians who go out into the world to contribute to a global society... they are often heralded as extraordinary. I think Trinis by nature, our mentality, our drive, our personalities, have something special. Like Kes said, 'once a Trini reach in your fete, is niceness.' I think once a Trini reach in your university, is niceness," he says with a laugh.



More support for basic research needed

Reflecting on the space he came out of, he says that he would like to see more funding and attention put into basic research (the study of existence without immediate practical applications).

"You may think basic research is nonsense," he says, "But what universities need to do is invest in basic research that will then eventually pay dividends in blockbuster discoveries."

He gives an example of a study done on anglerfish pancreas in the 1980s, which led to the breakthrough medication, the GLP-1 agonists that we commonly use today for treating diabetes. "You would think you're just studying fishes, right?" he says. But the research can go further than you ever imagined—with the right support.

In his own work, Ramkissoon hopes to wrap up the two main projects he is working on at Harvard, and see the antibiotic research to the point where it can begin clinical trials and be safe for human use. Being at the Harvard labs, experiencing the wealth of support and encouragement has been life changing for him. But ultimately, he hopes that he can bring that new experience back to Trinidad someday.

"I would love to become a professor and then use all the skills and techniques that I have gained over the years to start my own antibiotic development lab," says Ramkissoon.

For him, the phrase "no place like home" isn't just sentimental. It's also scientific.

"I still maintain that Trinidad, because of all the different niche environments that we have, like the pitch lake and salt pond, they hold maybe millions or billions of undiscovered compounds that could be used to treat different medical diseases," he says.

But one thing is true—whichever institution he chooses to go to next, it is sure to be niceness.

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

The UWI Calendar of Events | February-April 2026



**Warning! Pay Attention to Trust:
Exploring Trust Building and its
Preservation in Organisations**
February 23
Daaga Auditorium
St Augustine Campus

In an age of declining trust in public and private institutions, what can be done to restore the foundations of organisational trust? The UWI St Augustine's Department of Management Studies invites the public to this free and open lecture by Professor Rosalind H Searle examining trust and its violations, and outlining the critical leadership skills required to safeguard it and sustain strong, credible organisations. Professor Searle is a Professor of Human Resource Management and Organisational Psychology at the Adam Smith Business School, University of Glasgow.

For more information, email Dr Paul Balwant at paul.balwant@uwi.edu



**Green Innovators Challenge 2026:
Youth Leading Sustainable Solutions for Trinidad and Tobago.**
March 7

The Faculty of Food and Agriculture calls on the youth to share their vision for the future of agriculture, nutrition, and environmental sustainability and compete in the Green Innovators Competition 2026.

This competition is open to secondary school students nationwide in Forms 3 and above. Students will compete in two exciting categories. Join us in nurturing the next generation of agricultural innovators and environmental leaders as they reimagine a more sustainable future for Trinidad and Tobago. The competition is hosted by the Department of Food Production in collaboration with the Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension.

For more information visit <https://sta.uwi.edu/ffa/green-innovators-challenge-2026-competition/>

UWI St Augustine Campus Council Meeting 2026
March 25
ONLINE

The 2024/2025 academic year was one of business innovation, research, and outreach at The UWI St Augustine campus. Tune in to UWITV on their website and Facebook for the open session of the Campus Council meeting, where Principal Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine and other senior administrators will share the accomplishments, activities, and challenges of the institution during the period under review. The Campus Council meetings are an annual event for all five regional campuses, culminating with the University Council meeting at The UWI's Regional Headquarters in Jamaica.

To view the meetings, go to www.uwitv.global or www.facebook.com/UWITV

International Food and Nutrition Security and Sustainable Tourism Conference
March 31 to April 1
St Augustine Campus

The Faculty of Food and Agriculture in collaboration with Banwari Experience Limited is pleased to host this conference themed: "From Soil to Society: Advancing Food and Nutrition Security, Cultural Gastronomy, and Sustainable Tourism to achieve the SDGs". Join this timely discussion examining the vital role of culture in promoting planetary health, alongside food and nutrition security.

For more information, visit conferences.sta.uwi.edu/food-nutrition-security, email treasure.alcindor@uwi.edu or call (868) 662-2002 Ext. 82210. Register at <https://conferences.sta.uwi.edu/food-nutrition-security/>



Open Days 2026
March 28 and 29 | St Augustine Campus

Thinking about the possibilities in higher education? Come explore The UWI St Augustine campus with a guided campus tour. Discover the academic programme that will help you achieve your career and life goals. Chat with staff and students to truly understand the "UWI experience". Hear about the vast range of opportunities available to you while studying, and learn how you can finance your educational future. All this in two fun days of games, food, contests, dance, and music at Open Days 2026.

For updates, visit The UWI St Augustine website at sta.uwi.edu/, or on social media at facebook.com/UWISTA, twitter.com/uwi_staugustine, and linkedin.com/school/uwistaugustine/

To attend, register at <https://sta.uwi.edu/opendays/>



SAVE THE DATES

UWI OPEN DAYS 2026
March 28 & 29

Possibilities await.
REGISTER NOW!