



## UWI ST AUGUSTINE 2020 GRADUATION

## Graduation Story

“The things I do, the stories I tell, these things I do to help recreate that atmosphere of the old days when we were all one people, one family, storytelling,” Paul Keens-Douglas said years ago during a performance. One of our region’s greatest storytellers, grandmasters of spoken word, and cultural exponents, he was recognised this January with an honorary degree at UWI St Augustine’s 2020 graduation event.

Normally held in October, this year’s graduation ceremonies were rescheduled to January because of COVID-19. The pandemic also required the ceremonies to be held virtually. It was a very different kind of graduation, but still captured the essence of what makes the ceremonies special. They recognised and celebrated the achievements of students. They provided a satisfying conclusion to the university experience. And, although the ceremonies were virtual, they brought the campus community and their families together, like a master storyteller.

PHOTO: ATIBA CUDJOE

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## FROM THE PRINCIPAL

# Reflecting on “Capitol Wednesday”

The following is an address to the 2020 graduating class of UWI St Augustine by Campus Principal Professor Brian Copeland.

After the events of early January, and I speak here of what many are calling “Capitol Wednesday”, I am moved to make some very brief comments to our UWI Graduating Class, who we celebrated this month, and the wider national community.

You are graduates of The UWI in a truly historic time. You came through even as the long drought of a recession came to the fore in the years preceding the pandemic and continues to this day. You persevered in continuing your studies during the lockdown, even as staff and student alike struggled to engage in teaching and learning online. It seems to me that you have the mettle of the kind of citizen our nations need at this point in time. Indeed, your participation in the online delivery makes you pioneers for a new UWI – a target that we have been shaping for all the years of my tenure as Campus Principal.

As graduates of The UWI, you are beneficiaries of a public spend that covered some 80% of what it costs to educate you. I repeat my plea to you to use your experience not just to develop yourself in your chosen careers but, even as you do so, that you do all you can to continue the fight of forming a society that better addresses the problems we face today.



The ceremonial mace of the St Augustine Campus.  
PHOTO: ATIBA CUDJOE

We cannot survive without land, air and water – yours is the collective challenge of addressing the critical issues to their preservation.

Our society cannot survive without a robust economy – yours is the collective challenge of leading the creation of the network of net foreign exchange earning enterprises that will dominate our economic landscape. I have challenged you before to start doing so by 2034.

Our society cannot survive if it implodes on itself because of an impossibly large income gap, runaway poverty, or even the level of bigotry and hatred we saw on display last Wednesday at the US Capitol. Yours is the challenge of fashioning a more emotionally mature and just society.

In keeping with these sentiments, I share with you a song that is very popular here in Trinidad and Tobago. While it is nationalistic in nature, I offer it as well to the non-Trinidad and Tobago citizens in our midst – to all Caribbea.

*I wish you all success and prosperity.*

*Brian Copeland*

**PROFESSOR BRIAN COPELAND**

*Campus Principal*

## God Bless Our Nation

*By Marjorie Padmore*

God bless our nation  
Of many varied races  
May we possess that common love  
That binds and makes us One.  
Let it be known around the World  
That we can boast of Unity  
And take a pride in Our Liberty.

God bless our isles of tropic beauty rare  
Of flaming Poinciana  
And shady immortelle  
The warm and sparkling waters  
That beat upon our shores  
Beat out a tune that seem to tell  
We take a pride in Our Liberty.

God bless our leaders  
Give them grace to guide  
Bestow on them thy judgement wise  
To rule our land aright  
To keep the flag of freedom high  
That we may sing most lustily  
We take a pride in Our Liberty.



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## ■ CAMPUS NEWS

# BE VIGILANT, BE PREPARED

## UWI Seismic Research Centre on La Soufrière

A view of the dome at La Soufrière  
PHOTO: RICHARD ROBERTSON, UWI-SRC

BY JOEL HENRY



*Listen to official sources, familiarise yourself with emergency protocols, and be prepared – if necessary – to evacuate.*



Dr Erouscilla Joseph, Director of  
The UWI Seismic Research Centre

**These are the recommendations** from The University of the West Indies Seismic Research Centre (UWI-SRC) to the people of St Vincent living with the potential risks from the ongoing eruption of La Soufrière volcano.

UWI-SRC, the official source for information on earthquakes and volcanoes in the English-speaking Caribbean, says that although the current eruption at La Soufrière is, at the moment, localised

close to the crater itself, the volcano does have the potential for more powerful activity, and residents in the hazard areas should be vigilant.

Dr Erouscilla Joseph, Director of the Centre, said that the eruption at present was effusive, not explosive, however that could change given the historical activity observed at La Soufrière.

"Magma is gently oozing out through a vent and forming a dome," said Dr Joseph. "The possibility of this type of eruption going from effusive to explosive does exist. This volcano can show both types of eruptions. At this time, based on the information we have, the definitive timeline of this happening, or if it will happen at all, cannot be answered."

La Soufrière, which has had several violent eruptions throughout recorded history as far back as 1718, was exhibiting low level seismic activity in early November 2020. More activity was recorded in December and, on the 27th of that month, a hot spot was detected by satellite imaging monitored by UWI-SRC staff. On December 29, the Soufrière Monitoring Unit (SMU) of St Vincent and the Grenadines National Emergency Management Organisation (NEMO) reported a lava dome growing on the south west side of the crater.

Presently, a team from UWI-SRC and the Montserrat Volcano Observatory (MVO) is on the ground in St Vincent (MVO is also made up of UWI scientists), working with NEMO to strengthen the monitoring network and conduct scientific measurements at the volcano.

Dr Joseph said that at present the danger is limited to gasses issuing from the dome, for those working on the summit. There is, she added, some risk that depending on the wind direction, gasses could possibly spread downwind to the surrounding communities. A report has been received of yellowing vegetation on a nearby farm, which is likely a result of acidic gases dissolved in rainwater, which then falls on the vegetation.



Volunteers and local community members support the team from UWI-SRC during the installation of seismic stations at the summit of the volcano.  
PHOTO: ST VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES NATIONAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT ORGANISATION

The danger level will change dramatically should the eruption become explosive.

"A hazard map has been developed which shows the areas that could be affected by an explosive eruption," said Dr Joseph. She outlined several emergency measures:

"The public should familiarise themselves with the hazard map and their evacuation routes. Coordination for this is being handled by NEMO. They should have emergency kits prepared and a family evacuation plan in place."

The UWI-SRC Director stressed the importance of information from official sources such as NEMO and the Seismic Research Centre. Inaccurate information of an evacuation had already been spread in the press.

"It is crucial for people to keep track of what is happening through social media, specifically through official sources, such as NEMO and SRC," said Dr Joseph.

"Globally, there has been an increase in volcanic activity."

UWI-SRC was born from a colonial development and welfare project established in 1952 to monitor volcanic activity in the Lesser Antilles and train scientists. Over the years its role expanded to monitoring seismic and volcanic activity throughout the region.

"We monitor from St Kitts and Nevis all the way down to Trinidad and Tobago," said Dr Joseph, who has been with the Centre for almost 20 years. "We also play a part in tsunami monitoring efforts for the Caribbean."

They manage the MVO, one of the region's important institutions with scientific and technical expertise for monitoring volcanic activity.

"A lot of the tools, techniques and expertise in dealing with eruptions resides with the staff at the MVO. They have been very much involved with the ongoing operation at La Soufrière and leading certain aspects of the monitoring efforts," the UWI-SRC Director explained.

The Centre also advises regional governments and institutions on earthquakes and volcanoes, and supports disaster preparedness efforts through their education and outreach programme. Their work is now more necessary than ever.

"Globally, there has been an increase in volcanic activity in recent years. And certainly, regionally, we have seen an increase. The plate processes -- which cause earthquakes and volcanoes -- are dynamic and they happen all the time. So we need to be prepared for both seismic and volcanic activity," said Dr Joseph.

The Director, who became the head of UWI-SRC in November 2019, has taken up the post during a challenging time.

"Well, first COVID-19 and then the volcano," she laughed. "It has been challenging but rewarding. I have a very strong and supportive team. We work well together, especially because of the type of agency we are -- one that responds to emergencies where people's lives are at stake. When it comes to crises we all get together and do what we need to do."

A geochemist and UWI St Augustine's first PhD graduate in Volcanology, she said there are many career paths for those interested in studying and working in the field of seismic and volcano monitoring and study.

"There are many avenues and possibilities for a career in earth sciences. At SRC we have technical, electronic and scientific skill sets. If you want to understand earthquakes, process data, be involved in monitoring, risk communication, and education and outreach, there are a wide variety of opportunities available for study," she said.

UWI-SRC, however, is primarily a monitoring (not a teaching) institution, and although they offer graduate programmes in seismology and volcanology, they only accept a limited number of students.

Even so, the Caribbean will always need trained professionals to help the region better understand and protect itself from these fascinating and dangerous phenomenon that can be unpleasant and unavoidable parts of life.



## ■ CAMPUS NEWS



Professor Christine Carrington



Dr Nikita Sahadeo

A team of researchers from The UWI St Augustine has embarked on a project to analyse coronavirus genomes from infected individuals. The exercise will enhance Trinidad and Tobago's capacity to identify different lineages of the virus and monitor mutations in order to track the virus' spread, distinguish between local and newly imported cases, and to better understand the virus and our immune system's response to it.

"The important thing," says project lead Christine Carrington, Professor of Molecular Genetics and Virology at The UWI St Augustine's Faculty of Medical Sciences, "is that whole genome sequencing of the virus can provide epidemiological insights that can inform public health responses. The Nanopore sequencing technology we are using is very rapid. The data is available in real-time, so the insights gained are actionable."

Titled "COVID-19: Infectious Disease Molecular Epidemiology for Pathogen Control and Tracking (COVID-19: IMPACT)", the project involves extracting and sequencing genomes of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-COV-2) from patient samples. Genomes are the "hereditary blueprint" of all living organisms, including viruses, written on a strand of ribonucleic acid (RNA) in so-called RNA viruses like SARS-COV-2. RNA viruses frequently undergo mutation and, by tracking these changes, scientists are able to gather important data about diseases and their spread.

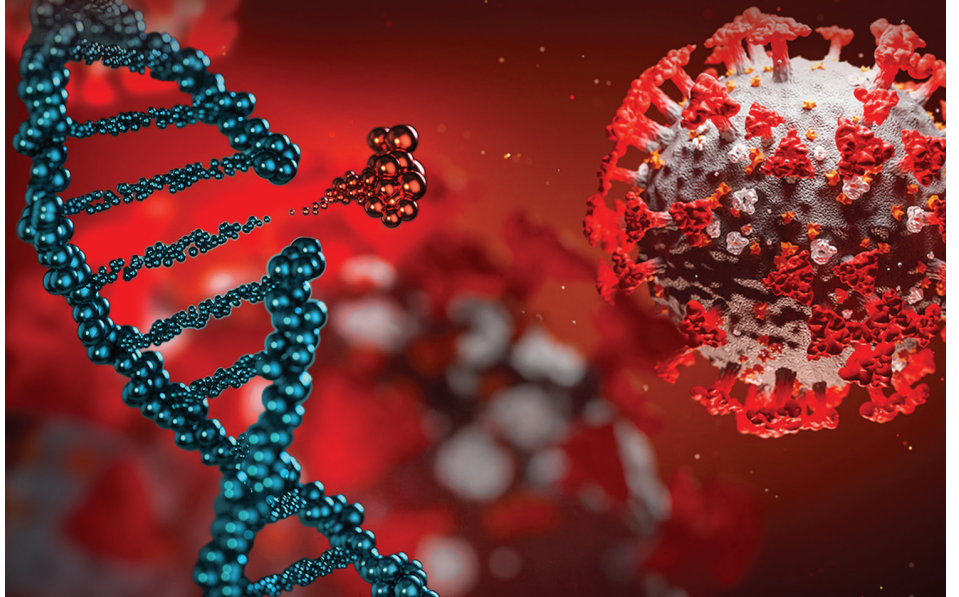
The data, Professor Carrington says, has many uses: "You can use it to determine whether a group of cases are linked to each other. For

example, if you detect a number of cases in a workplace, you can address questions such as, 'Are these infections related to each other? Has there been spread within the workplace? Or did each of the affected individuals acquire the infection independently, outside the workplace?'"

This project, which is funded by a grant from the UWI-Trinidad and Tobago Research, Development and Impact (RDI) Fund, can make an important contribution to the national COVID-19 response as Trinidad and Tobago seeks to balance public health with the need to boost economic activity. The research team includes investigators from UWI, Trinidad and Tobago's Ministry of Health, the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA), the University of Oxford, and the University of London.

Professor Carrington says the data will also be very useful when Trinidad and Tobago has access to a COVID-19 vaccine: "We will need to assess the impact of the vaccine. These molecular approaches can be used to monitor levels of viral diversity in the country and to estimate changes in viral population size."

## UWI researchers begin CORONAVIRUS GENOME SEQUENCING PROJECT



COVID-19: IMPACT is still in its early phase. Dr. Nikita Sahadeo, postdoctoral researcher on the project, has just generated the first five SARS-COV-2 genomes from Trinidad and Tobago. The project will expand, Carrington says, "to get baseline data on the coronavirus lineages that have circulated in Trinidad and Tobago, the level of diversity we have, and how it has changed over time". The project team will also analyse what is happening across the rest of the Caribbean with CARPHA facilitating this. "There are now hundreds of thousands of SARS-COV-2 genomes publicly available, but the vast majority is from the UK, and the Caribbean region is very under-represented."

"Once we have that data," says Professor Carrington, "we will be in a position to better answer questions that public health bodies might have. The aim with the establishment of this local capacity for rapid whole genome sequencing is to be able to respond to the public health bodies, not just with COVID-19 but also other infectious diseases in the future."



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**OUR PELICAN PRIDE**  
Celebrating 60 years of the UWI St. Augustine Campus





## ■ OUR STUDENTS

# “The lives of the people in my society matter”

*An interview with Makandal Daaga Scholarship Winner Suana Sookdeo*

Late last year, it was announced that **Suana Sookdeo**, a community activist and National Youth Awards nominee from Chaguanas, was the winner of the **2020/2021 Makandal Daaga Scholarship in Law**. The scholarship, named in honour of the political activist and leader of the Black Power Movement, is awarded by UWI St Augustine Faculty of Law to a student with a record of advocating for positive social change through tangible action. Suana, with her community work and advocacy for issues such as ending gender-based violence, is exactly the kind of recipient the scholarship was created to assist.

UWI TODAY had a chance to interview this conscientious and driven young person.

**UT: Can you tell me a bit about yourself?**

**SS:** My name is Suana Sookdeo. I'm currently 19 years of age and I am from Chaguanas. I grew up with a very spiritual and culturally rich background, where my mother was a strong figure in my household. She instilled in me good morals and values, and taught me humbleness and kindness is key to positive change, and I should always have trust and faith in God.

**UT: What first drew you to activism, and what contributed towards your activism?**

**SS:** My mother was the first person who got me actively involved in charity and helping the less fortunate at around 7 years old. I accompanied her to homes, orphanages and communities, and witnessed the adversities that so many in our society faced. That ignited a passion within me. I was exposed to two major societal problems: domestic violence and the abuse of children. I began hearing the stories of the suffering they endured. I was compelled to advocate for their justice.

**UT: You have a focus on women's issues and domestic violence. Why?**

**SS:** Intimate partner violence and domestic violence are raging concerns within our country and have left numerous women and their children in precarious situations. Many of those situations lead to my other primary concern, child abuse and neglect. Families are left struggling to survive mentally and physically. It is frightening to see within the media the increasing number of DV cases, missing women, and a rise in the murder rate of women.

As a young woman living in this society, it hurts me to see people facing these challenges. It's truly alarming. More initiatives have to be put into action to solve this issue. Women and children are so important to communities, and solutions to alleviate their burdens should be a main priority.

**UT: You have an interest in the arts as well. What sparked this?**

**SS:** I was drawn to the arts from very young. Writing poetry felt natural to me. I put pen to paper and wrote about anything that was persistent in my mind. What sparked my interest was the fact that I could use poetry as a form of expression—just writing those feelings and thoughts down connects me to the essence and meaning of not only my experiences, but those of others as well. That resonated with me. It became a way to break out of my shell as I was very timid. Having that passion, I channel issues I see in society into my writing and give it different perspectives.

**UT: Apart from poetry, you are (or were) involved in many other things. Can you tell me about them?**

**SS:** By advocating against domestic violence, I have worked with the Ministry of Gender and Child Affairs, taking part in several activities through the National Children's Forum. That allowed me to use various platforms to reach a wide audience and engage with communities of children from different backgrounds. We were involved in articulating child policies and programmes, in collaboration with the UN, which doubtlessly improved our lives.

I was also nominated for the National Youth Awards in 2015 under The Ministry of the Arts and Culture, where the Director of Youth Affairs acknowledged my community and charitable work. I was also presented with a Certificate of Recognition by the Office of the Prime Minister (Gender and Child Affairs) in 2016.

I've participated in spoken word events such as The 2cents Movement. I also participated in the forum “Age to Engage”, as well as the “Children Who Inspire” segment under the OPM, all of which was published by various newspapers.

The Chaguanas Borough Corporation also recognised my service to the community, and I worked with the SFAS [Sixth Formers' Association Services] where I tutored students academically and informally. Additionally, I became Club Committee Director of the Interact Club where we executed several environmental and social projects at my high school.

My parents and I regularly visit retirement homes, orphanages and those in need to help out in any way that we can. I also like to participate in charity drives throughout remote villages, visiting families and bringing them any necessary items that I can provide for them. I volunteer in an individual capacity as well as through NGOs or anyone that is willing to work within communities, and, on weekends, I enjoy going around surrounding areas to feed stray animals.

**UT: How did you find out about the Makandal Daaga Scholarship, and what was your reaction on discovering you won?**

**SS:** I first found out about the scholarship through UWI's website and I decided to apply, considering my background in activism and charitable work.

When I first found out I was the recipient of the scholarship, I was shocked and ecstatic. It was truly an emotional experience for me and my family because it felt like a dream come true. When I was younger, I would think about what I would become when I was older and, here I am, living that dream through this scholarship. I will forever be grateful to the University of the West Indies for granting me this opportunity as they have made it possible for me to take the first step towards making my dreams a reality, and further into achieving my goals through the Makandal Daaga Scholarship.

**UT: After you have completed your studies and become a lawyer, how will you use what you have learned to further your goals?**

**SS:** This scholarship allows me to pursue my dream of becoming a lawyer. Therefore, through this righteous gateway, I will be able to use my law degree to further assist the less fortunate, especially abused women and children. I will render my services to my society and my country at large for those that need representation for equality and justice, and eventually I would like to play a key part in the enforcement of stronger laws and policies, and found an association to offer legal advice and guidance. I want to make changes; the lives of the people in my society matter. I want to be an agent working towards the promotion of justice within an egalitarian society.



Suana Sookdeo  
PHOTO: ATIBA CUDJOE



## UWI ST AUGUSTINE 2020 GRADUATION

*Moment in the Sun*

BY JOEL HENRY



PHOTOS: ATIBA CUDJOE

It's been almost a year now since Trinidad and Tobago was forced to reckon with the pandemic. Like a long Alaskan night, the society has dealt with enforced distance, its institutions shuttered. Yet the work had to continue. It continued for UWI St Augustine, despite the severe disruption to classes and exams. The campus community -- especially the students -- soldiered on.

"They have risen above," said UWI Vice-Chancellor Professor Sir Hilary Beckles, "tested not only by their professors but by the pandemic."

The VC was speaking to the students themselves, as well as their loved ones, and everyone else involved in their education at what he called "their moment of triumph", Graduation 2020.

Held on January 11 and 12, 2021, it was a very different graduation to previous years. The ceremonies are normally massive affairs, held in late October, on the campus itself. The COVID-19 restrictions forced the event organisers to move to a virtual format and reschedule the ceremonies to this year.

For many students and their loved ones, this was far from ideal. Yet the campus team worked within the limitations that were imposed upon them and produced an outstanding event. In the same way that faculty and staff adapted in the first months of the pandemic to online teaching, examinations and student support, the event managers created an entertaining and stirring graduation experience.

Shot at various locations on campus, with prerecorded messages from across the Caribbean, the ceremonies included the academic procession; addresses from UWI's leaders, honorary graduates and valedictorians; and musical performances. Every graduate had their name called to receive their diplomas. Graduation 2020 was a fully produced show.

The feeling of togetherness that a large gathering brings was not there. There was no cheering crowd or mass of hugs, kisses and well-wishes. Above all though, there was recognition and celebration of the accomplishments of the students, and the sense of pride in their achievements and the university that molded them. Despite the long night of the pandemic, this was their moment.



The UWI Arts Chorale performs on the campus greens.



Valedictorian for the Faculties of Food and Agriculture and Science and Technology Richard Ali giving his address in front of the Main Admin Building.





## UWI ST AUGUSTINE 2020 GRADUATION

# Ups, downs and an unforgettable experience

## *The 2020 Valedictorians reflect of their time on campus*

BY ARYANA MOHAMMED

**“It’s not about becoming a valedictorian. It’s about enjoying your UWI experience,”** says twenty-four-year-old, Chikara Mitchell.

It is commonly known that tales of the UWI experience have been whispered in the ears of many teenagers across Trinidad and Tobago who are likely to become prospective students of the prestigious institution. However, what defines this highly sought-after UWI experience? Perhaps it is those moments of solitude while traipsing to class, or attending your faculty’s karaoke night with your friends, or maybe it is those lasting memories that will forever remain a secret. Still, this coveted experience is not identified by any constant feature; rather, it is ever-changing, and unique to each person who enters the university.

This is exemplified by UWI’s five exceptional valedictorians for the class of 2020. They are: Chikara Mitchell for the Faculty of Social Sciences; Suraj Sakal for the Faculties of Engineering and Law; Richard Ali for the Faculties of Food and Agriculture and Science and Technology; Keitjé Greaves for the Faculty of Humanities and Education, and Shaquille Trotman for the Faculty of Medical Sciences. The dynamic environment and diverse opportunities afforded to these valedictorians by the UWI have shaped and molded each graduate both positively and differently.

A true testament to Chikara’s statement is the experience of her fellow valedictorian, twenty-two-year-old, Suraj Sakal. The years Mr Sakal spent studying for his Bachelor of Laws at UWI is by no means characterised by “beating books”. Instead, Suraj recalls pounding the pavement up and down College Road for a total of approximately four thousand hours during his time at UWI. “Everything happened on that road,” Suraj chuckles. From “hustling drops” and partying with strangers, to long, late-night conversations, everything really did happen on College Road. Nevertheless, those hours were not wasted. It was all to “lime” with his friend, Alan Rambharose, who worked as a security guard at night and attended UWI during the day. Alan led by example, encouraging Suraj to be successful. Suraj confesses, “In terms of hard work, dedication, and fearlessness, that man definitely is a role model to me.”

While several students may flock to the university because of its touted campus experience, others see it as an opportunity to attain self-fulfillment through both academic and personal progress. In the case of forty-one-year-old, Richard Ali, who left Trinidad and migrated to the USA in the 1990s, he says, “Coming back home and having



Chikara Mitchell, Valedictorian of the Faculty of Social Sciences



Richard Ali, Valedictorian of the Faculties of Food and Agriculture and Science and Technology



Suraj Sakal, Valedictorian of the Faculties of Engineering and Law

to do Caribbean Studies really helped to reinforce my identity as a Trinidadian”. As a working man and father, Richard’s experience at UWI differed greatly from that of his younger peers. Regardless, the decision to pursue a second Bachelor’s degree, a Human Ecology Special, was another step forward on his path to self-actualisation. An advocate for taking risks and living without regrets, Richard advises, “It is important that you give yourself a second chance in life. If there is something that you want, irrespective of your age, you go ahead and you pursue it”.

To the common observer, a valedictorian’s journey may appear to be smooth sailing, but twenty-five-year-old Dr Shaquille Trotman quickly dispels that illusion. His experience is encapsulated in the wise saying, “Delay is not denial”. Unfortunately, Shaquille was deferred for a year before starting his medical degree. However, UWI, in collaboration with the On-The-Job Training Programme, provided an avenue for deferred students to work in the public hospitals. Appreciatively, he says, “We got a head start in the medical field while we waited”. Although Shaquille was placed in the medical records department, he explains, “It is not as easy as a doctor may think. Medical records are a lot of work behind the scenes.” As a result, this experience assisted Shaquille in becoming a more patient and understanding doctor.

It would be remiss not to mention the most unexpected challenge experienced by the class of 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic locked the physical doors of the UWI, forcing the student population into an indefinite period of online learning. For Chikara Mitchell, this time of uncertainty affected both her home and school life. Even so, confidently, she proclaims, “Human beings are very adaptable.” Still, the bubbly socialite could no longer study with friends at the library or pop into the UWI Afrikan Society to play the drums. Telling her story about online examinations, she laughs, “My laptop decided that it was time to die. Pandemic. I’m out.” Despite feeling demotivated, in the end, her positive attitude triumphed. Chikara graduated with a BSc in Psychology (Special) and a minor in Human Resource Management.

Undeterred by the changes imposed upon them because of the pandemic, these five graduates accepted their nominations for the title of valedictorian. It was the final test of their mettle, their final UWI experience. Subsequently, each candidate sent in their background information to be assessed. Then, selected persons were invited



## UWI ST AUGUSTINE 2020 GRADUATION



Keitje Greaves, Valedictorian of the Faculty of Humanities and Education

Shaquille Trotman, Valedictorian of the Faculty of Medical Sciences  
PHOTOS: ATIBA CUDJOE

to participate in an interview process where they would deliver a two-to-three-minute speech on what it meant to “be UWI”. Twenty-eight-year-old, Keitjé Greaves, a graduate of the Bachelor of Arts in Musical Arts (Special) degree, discloses that he was nervous to present his speech. However, his fears were soon allayed. He beams, “They all smiled at the end of the interview. I could have told that I did a good job.” Keitjé hails from the island of St. Lucia. Proud to represent the Faculty of Humanities and Education, he states, “In the 21st century, it is the Faculty that trains the persons who are going to mould the very identity of our new Caribbean civilisation, our post-COVID Caribbean civilisation.” With such a strong conviction, surely the Faculty staff continues to smile at Keitjé even now.

So, what really defines a UWI experience? The students, their choices, and what they make of it. Chikara suggests, “Make time to explore yourself and find out what you love to do.” The beauty of the UWI experience lies in the combination of those three factors which without fail will produce an unrivalled story every time. So, no pressure. To the current UWI students and even the future ones, how do you plan to enjoy your UWI experience? After all, the next story is yours to tell.

# St Augustine Honors HOMEMADE HEROES

BY ZAHRA GORDON

The UWI St Augustine Campus conferred four honorary degrees during The UWI 2020 Graduation ceremonies. Masters in the fields of music, story, science and leadership, their success is even more praiseworthy because it is centred in service to Caribbean society.

## STEELPAN INNOVATOR

As a young steelpan player, Len “Boogsie” Sharpe, said he intended to promote the national instrument and culture globally. Four decades later, Sharpe can safely call the steelpan an internationally recognised instrument and himself an esteemed composer, arranger and performer. According to Sharpe, the honorary Doctor of Letters (DLitt) is the highest award he’s received in his career.

The Phase II Pan Groove founder made history in 1987 when his band became the first to win the Panorama competition with his own composition, “This Feeling Nice”. Sharpe would go on to win over 20 titles. He has worked with bands both locally and internationally, with compositions and recordings in multiple genres including another historic recording on the Percussive Harmonic Instrument (PHI) which was developed at UWI St Augustine.

A career highlight, however, was the 2000 World Steelband Festival where he composed, arranged and soloed with the winning band, Skiffle Bunch. His composition, “In the Rainforest,” was inspired by the late Pat Bishop who Sharpe said was a major supporter.

“I see that as one of my biggest achievements – to see the whole of Jean Pierre Complex stand up and applaud was amazing,” said Sharpe, who added that he is most satisfied with his music when it sways audiences. “Music is a sport. You win some, you lose some, but to reach people with your music, to meet people who really appreciate and love your music, is a beautiful thing.”



Len “Boogsie” Sharpe



## UWI ST AUGUSTINE 2020 GRADUATION



Professor Edgar Julian Duncan

## PLANT SCIENCE PIONEER

**Professor Emeritus Edgar Julian Duncan** has enjoyed an illustrious, nearly 40-year career during which he's contributed important biotechnological research that had a significant impact on the mass production of Caribbean crops. Although he's won awards for his work in both research and education, Duncan says his mission was not to win awards, but to change the local landscape. This most recent accomplishment receiving an honorary Doctor of Science (DSc) degree from his alma mater - is humbling nonetheless.

"All the awards I have received have humbled me because I really didn't set out to work for awards. I set out to do something to advance the subject, but I'm very honored by having it presented to me," said Duncan. He added that lecturing was key to developing a "cadre of who are scientifically trained and can do scientific investigation as it relates to us in the Caribbean."

Among his many accomplishments, which include introducing Plant Tissue Culture as a discipline to St. Augustine, publishing two books and serving as Head of Department of Life Sciences and Deputy Dean in the Faculty of Agricultural and Natural Sciences, Duncan says he's also proud to have founded the UWI Biological Society a vibrant organisation still in existence today with an important focus on environmental issues.

Duncan says he made a deliberate decision to come home after completing his PhD at University of St. Andrew's in 1963, and does not regret turning down a position in Scotland to work at The UWI. "Had I stayed at St Andrew's, I would've been a cog in a well-oiled machine, and I don't think that after 35 years I would've been able to look back and say this is what I accomplished. I came here in the pioneering days and I can look back with a great deal of satisfaction."



Paul Keens-Douglas

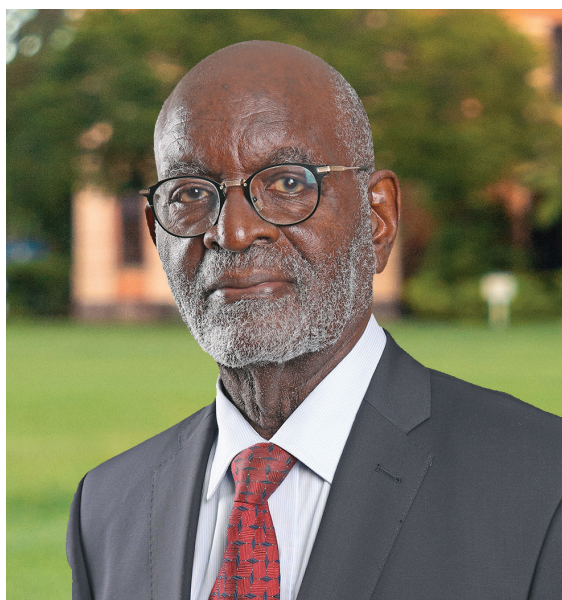
## DIALECT DOCTOR

**Storyteller, writer and producer, Paul Keens-Douglas** said he was honoured to receive an honorary Doctor of Letters (DLitt) for his contribution to the arts and culture, while echoing similar sentiments of working towards change and not fame. "When you work, you don't work for honours, you do so for the joy, especially in this area of work. The honour itself is a sign of what you're doing and why you're doing it," he said.

An alumnus of Concordia University and The UWI Mona, Douglas' stories and plays have been featured on the BBC, National Geographic and widely in Caribbean and US media. Additionally, Douglas is an advertising professional, and motivational speaker. While he is fondly remembered for his character, Tim Tim, and the annual production, the Carnival Talk Tent, he holds two accomplishments close to his heart. The first is his ability to turn art into a career.

"The fact that I live and work off of my art is very important. I've been working full-time as an artist since 1971 and that's very hard to do in the Caribbean -- to make this a career -- and the success of that is one of my major gains, and it has been an inspiration for other artists as well," said Douglas.

The second is his advocacy for the use of dialect in communications and theatre. Douglas expertly used dialect in now classic works such as Tanti at de Oval, but the local language wasn't always highly regarded. "There's a boost of self-esteem and respect and joy in being able to contribute to society promoting the native language and culture, a strong nationalism. It was difficult in the early days and a challenge to use dialect, however, it's very natural now to hear dialect in theatre and commercials, etc but I had to fight for it."



Dominico 'Don' Martina

## LEADER IN THE ANTI-COLONIAL ERA

**Former Prime Minister of the Netherland Antilles, Dominico "Don" Martina** is a political stalwart extremely deserving of the honorary Doctor of Laws (LLD) degree. Martina began his political career in 1971 when he co-founded Movementu Antia Nobo, which was an anti-colonial, pro-worker organisation. He would go on to serve in various positions such as Labour Inspector in the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Head of Social Affairs and Labour Affairs, Commissioner, Island Government of Curacao and as a Member of Parliament before becoming Prime Minister.

In his video message at the graduation ceremony, Don Martina explained that he embarked on a political career because "I lived and experienced the consequences of social and economical inequality." This, he added, gave him "a burning desire to make a contribution".

An alumnus of both The UWI and Columbia University, Martina played an integral role in the recognition of Curaçaoan slave revolt leader Tula as a national hero through his organisation Fundashon Rehabilitashon Tula. He served as Prime Minister of the Netherlands Antilles from 1979 to 1984 and then again from 1986 to 1988.

Describing his outlook on politics and the role of citizenship, Martina said, "The talents that a country creates should give back from their part to help the advancement of the country. If we do not give from ourselves to help the progress of our country, who will do it for us? Who will do it for us, if we don't have the courage and the ability to do certain sacrifices to help our country forward?"



UWI ST AUGUSTINE 2020 GRADUATION





## FOOD SECURITY

**Claire Craig has always liked gardening**, seeing it as therapeutic and a way to enjoy nature and the outdoors. So when COVID-19 hit, it seemed like a good outlet in these stressful times.

“I decided to start a kitchen garden,” says Craig, a member of the UWI St Augustine community employed as a manager in Campus IT Services.

She planted ochro, pigeon peas, pimento, sweet pepper and tomatoes. She also had a container garden with pakchoi, chive, chadon beni and basil. It didn’t go smoothly:

“Because this was a very small space, there were too many plants in such a small area, and within a very short time, it was unmanageable.”

Craig, however, and many other members of the campus community, would find new encouragement and a host of resources to start gardening. From July to August 2020, UWI’s Faculty of Food and Agriculture (FFA) held “Grow Your Garden”, a competition created to promote small-scale, home food production and healthy eating.

“For some time now, local food production has been on the national agenda. This has only intensified because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the risk to our food security because of the amount of food we import,” says Professor Wayne Ganpat, Dean of the FFA. “We have been contributing to the national discussion, but we saw that we could also do something for our own people. So we developed a home food production initiative on the Campus.”

Ganpat and the FFA have for some time now been major advocates for food security, local agriculture, the evolution of agricultural technology and practices, and agri-business through new crop-based products, manufacturing and support industries. Every year (postponed in 2020 due to COVID-19), the faculty hosts the techAGRI Expo, one of the region’s biggest public events for food business, ideas and technology. FFA also produces and sells several crops, livestock and manufactured products, hosts technology and innovation parks, and has several programmes of study focused on bringing new professionals and ideas to the food and farming sector.

Globally, calls for food security have become more urgent as climate change, conflict, globalisation, lifestyle-related disease and economic uncertainty have forced us to question what we feed ourselves and where it comes from. Trinidad and Tobago imports over 80 percent of its food, costing close to TT\$5 billion a year.

Initiatives like Grow Your Garden, although small, have the potential to make people think differently about food and maybe even find their green thumb.

“We really just wanted to get people involved, get them educated and to see that home gardening is not rocket science,” says Ganpat.

Grow Your Garden did reach such people, as well as those who already had an interest like Claire Craig, who won first place in the Vegetable Field Crop category.

“I really enjoyed the experience,” she says, “seeing what others were planting, from the pictures that were shared in the group, and the advice and support that was provided from the Faculty in the plant clinics.”

The competition was almost entirely virtual. Gardeners received technical support and information online. Dean Ganpat was the presenter in several food production videos that were shared on social media. Every two weeks, a plant clinic was held to help the participants with their gardens and give feedback on their progress. The competitors uploaded photos of their work and were judged online. Even the prize giving ceremony took place online, with the 18 winners coming onto Campus individually to collect their prizes.

Over 32 St Augustine staffers took part, competing in seven categories. Among them was Makanzwa Pita, who was the winner of the Environmentally Sustainable Farming category.



A collage of green from Shastri Motilal's hydroponic garden.

# UWI's 'Grow your Garden' takes the personal approach to food security



UWI St Augustine School of Education lecturer Paulson Skeritt (left) receiving his first prize in the Landscape Garden category from FFA dean Wayne Ganpat.



A shot of pakchoi, Malabar spinach and cabbage, just one part of Makanzwa Pita's winning sustainable home garden. She also grows different varieties of banana, aloe vera, root crops, vegetables, fruit trees, and even raises chickens.

“I started seriously gardening about 4 years ago,” says Pita, a technical assistant at the FFA. “As a child, I always saw my grandmothers gardening. I guess it is in the genes.”

Her winning garden is extremely sustainable, minimising waste by putting what is produced back into the land:

“The chickens provide me with eggs and I feed them with the weeds and fruits from the garden. I also use the chicken poop along with kitchen scraps to make compost. I try my best not to waste. I use a mixture of vermicomposting and composting to fertilise the crops.”

Not all the winners have a long background in gardening. Shastri Motilal, winner in the Soil-Less category, became interested in hydroponic gardening in 2017 after seeing it in action at the techAGRI Expo.

“I always had an interest in growing but had bad experiences with soil,” says Motilal, a lecturer in family medicine at the Faculty of Medical Sciences. “For this reason I got interested in hydroponics. I also found out that the yield and grow times can be better than soil. Less water is needed and certain plant diseases are less likely so little or no insecticides [are required].”

Hydroponic systems grow crops without the need for soil, using nutrient solutions in water containers. Extremely efficient, they allow farmers to bypass the need for fertile land, removing a major hurdle for food producers.

Ganpat says there is a way to take part in gardening for every type of home environment:

“Whether you have a small space or a large space, if you live in an apartment with a verandah, there is room for a garden.”

And although the first Grow Your Garden competition was held on campus, he sees the potential for it to expand to the other UWI campuses in the region and even possibly the wider society through private or public sector organisations. However it grows, the competition’s message of food self-sufficiency is crucial.

“Times are changing. We really have to see about our food supply,” says the FFA Dean. “It is becoming more risky to depend on external sources of food.”



## ■ CAMPUS NEWS

# Earth's Scientist

BY JOEL HENRY



Professor John Agard  
PHOTO: ANEEL KARIM

John Agard doesn't like too much fuss. "They tell me I'm too modest," says the UWI scientist.

Recently, his aversion to attention has been tested like never before. In early November, it was announced that Agard, one of the region's leading climate scientists, had been appointed as co-chair of the UN's 2023 Global Sustainable Development Report team. This is massive. A citizen of T&T is one of the leads on a small team of some of the world's greatest scientific minds, creating a document to guide our collective human path to a better world.

For someone who has dedicated his career to protecting the environment it's quite an accomplishment, but Agard is adamant, "it's not about me".

He made similar statements in December 2019, when his work as one of the co-authors of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) report made international news. The global assessment, which looked at the human impact on nature, was powerfully sobering and incredibly timely. A few months later, the world would feel the consequences of mankind's encroachment into the natural world with the rise of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Time is critical," says Agard about the need to confront the problems the world is facing now.

For the professor of tropical island ecology, the position on the UN sustainable development report team is perhaps his greatest opportunity to contribute to the well-being of the planet and its occupants.

In 2015, the UN General Assembly set the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in its own words, the "blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all". The SDGs, agreed upon by the UN member states, range from no poverty, to gender equality, to climate action, and responsible consumption and production.

"All of the world's governments agreed that this is the future we want," says Agard. "They then set about finding the people with the knowledge that will help them get to that place."

Governments from the over 190 UN member states selected scientists to be part of the team. Agard was T&T's choice. Not only did he make it through the selection

process (which included an assessment from the UN's agencies) to become one of the 15, he was made co-chair.

"I was quite surprised," he says, recalling his response to receiving the letter from UN Secretary-General António Guterres.

Based on his status as a well-respected scientist and his international work, his place on the report team is not as surprising as he believes. Apart from his role in the IPBES, Agard was also a lead author on the UN Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change. He has also served as an advisor on sustainability issues to the Inter-American Development Bank and been a member of environmental-related groups within CARICOM and the Association of Caribbean States.

"Yeah, I don't sleep," he says of the workload.

And that's just his work outside of the University. As a UWI academic, he has been engaged in serious scholarship, mainly at the St Augustine Campus' Department of Life Sciences within the Faculty of Science and Technology. He served as the head of Life Sciences for six years. Currently, Agard is the director of the St Augustine Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship, a fledgling campus entity created to unlock and monetise the business creativity of staff and students.

But one of Agard's favourite responsibilities is teaching:

"When you're young, people think you don't have any experience and you aren't worth their time. My passion is to share everything I have learned with young people so they have more time to get things done."

Unfortunately, his work for the University has required him to step back from teaching. "I have been mandated to work on other things, he says. Then adds wryly, "So what I do is teach secretly."

Perhaps the most surprising thing about this driven environmentalist and academic is his sense of humour. He's genuinely funny. If you've ever experienced a newsroom, his energy is very much like an old school sports journalist, sharp wit and small smiles.

"I was brought up in St James and Woodbrook," he says. "There were five of us and my parents; we came from humble beginnings."

Agard says it was his parents who instilled in him

the ability to work hard, be determined and make a difference. "My mother is still alive. She's 95 now. I go to see her every Sunday and have lunch. Her mind is intact."

A family man, he has a wife and three children of his own. His eldest daughter, Katherine Agard, is a published author who recently appeared at the NGC Bocas Lit Fest this year.

Perhaps it's that strong connection to others that makes him fight so urgently.

"There's a God," he says, "and God brought us here to try and make things better."

In late November, the team of 15 will meet to plan and assign work. Because the SDGs are so different, the structure of the group is interdisciplinary and they have several areas of expertise.

"I can contribute to areas such as climate action and life below water, but we have other experts for poverty, gender and so on," he says.

The team will also have to use language very carefully and diplomatically as acceptance from the UN member states is crucial to making the plan work. Diplomacy in language isn't his greatest strength, Agard admits.

"I try to speak the truth, whether you like it or not," he says. But he is willing to be guided. The report must be embraced and its recommendations implemented. That's what matters most to him.

"My thing is focusing on action. We must not put together a wonderful report that lies on the shelf. This must lead to action."

It's not difficult to be skeptical of attempts to improve the world. Many committed people have seen their work thwarted by powerful interests who benefit from the status quo. Agard has seen it happen many times himself. Yet, he is optimistic today, particularly because of the evolution of sustainability movements from hard science to more inclusive approaches that incorporate wider fields of inquiry like sociology, political science and gender theory.

Still, no matter how easy or difficult the way forward, he has no intention of stopping.

"My passion is to make the world a better place. To make my country a better place. To make my region a better place."

Without the fuss.



## UWI IN SOCIETY

# Work from home? YES!

*Transportation survey shows great enthusiasm for the working conditions created as a consequence of COVID-19*

BY DIXIE-ANN BELLE



Katherine Agong

**Eighty per cent of Trinbagonians would be happy** to work from home once pandemic restrictions are over. Seventy-five per cent think that this is possible. These are some of the results transport engineer Katherine Agong discovered after surveying 480 respondents on their impressions about working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Agong, who studies the needs of travellers and modes of transportation at UWI St Augustine's Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, promoted her survey through Facebook and Whatsapp. She received a creditable number of responses, many from professionals who drove to their workplaces but switched to working from home due to pandemic protocols.

She discovered that many of the respondents had excessively long commutes - no matter what mode of transport they used. Seventy-four per cent used cars. Thirteen per cent travelled by maxi taxi, 7 per cent used taxis and 2 per cent PH taxis. However, in all twenty-five per cent took over an hour to get to work.

"There is research internationally that shows that journey times that are half an hour and over have a serious detrimental effect on people's life, people's health and relationships," Agong observes.

Her survey responses seem to mirror these studies. "The stress was coming from having to wake up early, fighting the traffic and not having enough time with family," explains Agong.

According to the results of her survey, working from home had its drawbacks. Respondents experienced disadvantages like distractions, lack of equipment and difficulty in switching off from work to home life. Nevertheless, many reported several benefits. Besides the lack of or shortened travel times, they described better work-life balance and more productivity. They also found it more economical.

"People were really enjoying the amount of money they were saving from not having to travel to work," says Agong.

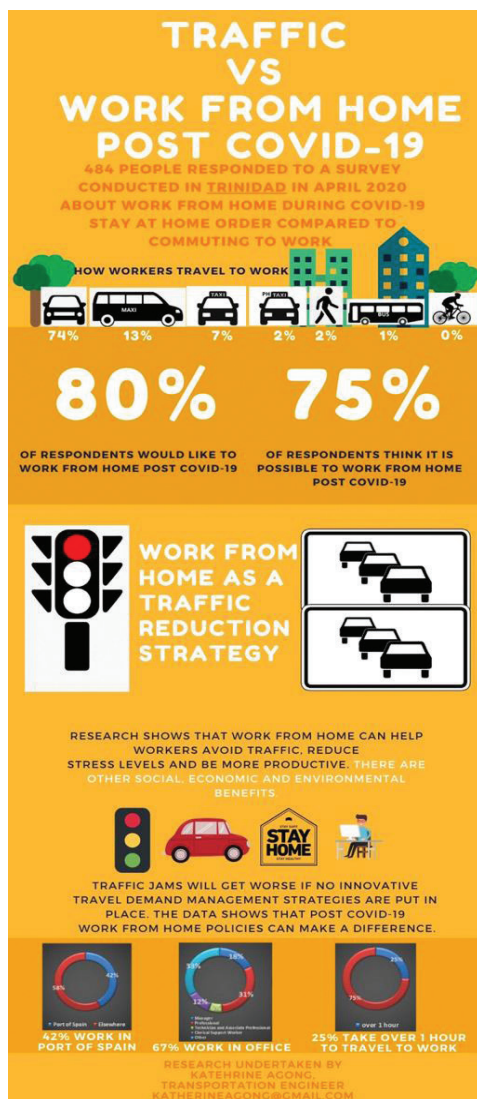
This particular study is not part of Agong's regular research, but the sharp reduction in traffic when the Trinidad and Tobago government implemented pandemic protocols caught her attention. She also has a personal interest in how the pandemic has affected work from home trends:

"When I lived in the UK, I strongly wanted to work from home -- say three days a week -- and my line managers were not of the opinion that it would be effective. My idea was many years in advance of when home working became acceptable, but I saw the benefits personally with my responsibilities."

The transport engineer saw the possibilities of examining the effects of this new circumstance. "I thought this would be a really good idea to test people's opinions of working from home as it relates to quality of life and travel in general."

She believes her research can be valuable in developing transport and work from home policies. "I would like that people are encouraged to work from home," she says. She also thinks that travel demand management could help the government in making data driven decisions. The results of her research suggest beneficial outcomes like traffic reduction, less pollution and delay of major road works. There could be, she says, a significant drop in stress levels in the work force and an increase in productivity.

Agong suspects that traffic levels could go up to and even exceed normal amounts when more people go back to work in offices once protocols are relaxed. That would be a shame. If there is one positive to come out of the pandemic it's the example of how incorporating travel management in transport policy can make a meaningful change in the amount of traffic on our roads and even in the health and happiness of our workforce.



## UWI and CARICOM Partner on Project to Combat the Health Effects of Climate Change



**The University of the West Indies (UWI)** is partnering with CARICOM on an initiative designed to help reduce mortality and morbidity from the health consequences of climate change.

The European Union-funded initiative, "Building Climate Resilient Health Systems in the Caribbean", builds upon the success of the "One Health, One Caribbean, One Love" project led by UWI from 2014 to 2017.

"We realise that climate change is with us, and we are very much on the front line, and we're seeing the changes," observes Chris Oura, Professor in Veterinary Virology at UWI's School of Veterinary Medicine.

Prof Oura is the team lead of the UWI component of the project and also led the earlier "One Health" initiative.

Many CARICOM countries are developing their national adaptation plans (NAPS) for climate change, but Oura notes "in a lot of those plans, there are no health elements at all".

The need to address the health impacts of climate change are evident across the Caribbean: violent hurricanes, heat waves, increased air pollution, rising sea levels and of course the ever-looming shadow of COVID-19 and pandemics.

"We've seen pictures of a wave coming through with COVID-19 on it," explains Oura, "and close behind it, this massive tidal wave is coming -- climate change."

Emphasising the close relationship between health and climate, Oura notes: "They are both wicked problems that are having a severe impact. We need to increase resilience in our health. We need to look after our environment. Otherwise, we're going to be hit again harder by pandemics, and we're going to be hit harder by climate change."

Coordinated through the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO), the project has acquired European Union funding. Four key components were identified -- adaptation and testing of PAHO/WHO tools to estimate health benefits; comprehensive health chapters in NAPS; improved surveillance capacity of professionals in health sectors; and -- UWI's responsibility -- strong and effective climate change leadership.

One of UWI's initiatives within the project will be a fellowship programme. Fellows will be recruited from the 15 participating countries, receive training and embark on projects geared toward turning plans and policy into action. The ideal fellow will be enthusiastic and motivated -- with leadership potential -- a person in a position to promote real change.

Oura envisions a cohort across the region cooperating to promote climate change and health policies. "In ten years' time we'd like to have 50 or 60 fellows, all interacting and working together, collaborating and moving forward."

The programme's targets include more regional policymakers advocating a "one health, one Caribbean" approach, timely surveillance reports outlining climate sensitive diseases and conditions, and more countries with comprehensive health strategies and action plans.

However, Prof Oura emphasises that real transformation cannot happen without community involvement: "All this change generally in these kinds of areas comes from the bottom up and comes from the community." He notes that one positive outcome from the pandemic is that more people seem to be aware of the crucial link between climate change and health. Perhaps this can help foster the public's support of these initiatives.

"It's made people more aware of the fragility of our environment and the importance of respecting and protecting nature, and that has big consequences for the pandemic and also for climate change as well."

More information about the fellowship can be found at the following link: <https://sta.uwi.edu/cchsr/empowering-caribbean-action-climate-and-health-each>



## ■ OUR STUDENTS



PHOTO: ANEEL KARIM

## STAMPED WITH HISTORY: *A Gendered Look at First Day Covers at West Indiana*

BY SATIRA MAHARAJ

**I used to think of history as objective truth** – straightforward facts that told a story. As a gender studies student, I learned that knowledge does not simply come to exist. It is constructed within specific contexts (historical, cultural, political and economic), sometimes with particular agendas in mind. Dominant narratives become difficult to question.

Intrigued by the materials at UWI St Augustine's West Indiana and Special Collections (WISC) Division within the Alma Jordan Library, I wanted to question the underlying assumptions about gender in our historical archives, attending to how knowledge is not just uncovered, but created. West Indiana houses a general section, rare books, and Special Collections. The Special Collections are what drew me to this division. They contain manuscripts, personal papers, letters and organisational documents that offer fascinating opportunities for examining how we construct history.

As part of my MSc programme at the Institute of Gender and Development Studies (IGDS), I undertook an internship at WISC. I worked with a collection of Caribbean First Day Covers, which are commemorative envelopes issued by official postal authorities. These envelopes usually contain specially designed stamps for the event being celebrated. This collection became an archive for my research.

Could each cover be useful for research on gender? I recorded information about relevant covers, such as postmark date, the event it commemorated, the number of stamps, a short description of each stamp and the monetary value of the stamp. This will be uploaded to the Special Collections database by the WISC staff, so that future researchers have access to the information.

My findings covered six themes. The first was the Invisibility of Women in Building the Caribbean. The covers celebrated many men who contributed to building the Caribbean nations, but few women.

The second theme examined the Underrepresentation of Women in Sport. I looked at unequal power relations that led to the extreme visibility of men's sports like cricket and football, but did not similarly celebrate women's participation in sports like netball and cricket.

The third theme looked at Women's Organisations, such as the Soroptomists Clubs and Girl Guides. Their valuable work is often framed as volunteerism, service and care work, or "women's work". It was not seen as important as the "nation-building" activities for which men are celebrated.

The fourth theme, Representations of Women in Art, showed the colonial male gaze through which women are often depicted in artistic stamps. The fifth theme involved Christmas and the Sacred Feminine. Through Christmas stamps, I examined the role of the Virgin Mary figure and religious influences in contributing to Christmas as an idealised, domesticised, nationalistic but syncretic festival. The final focus, on Caribbean Women Artists, catalogued stamps which featured the art of women artists, like Weme Caster, Paula Walden, Eva Wilkin and Sybil Atteck. These artists told women's stories from the perspective of women.

Overall, my internship experience was wonderful. WISC is a library within a library, since many general library functions are carried out on a smaller scale. Staff members facilitate and assist university students, independent researchers and visiting scholars. The staff showed me their ongoing projects. One was working on the JD Sellier Collection, which was acquired from an old, prestigious law firm. Another was documenting a series of taped interviews. All these materials are available for further exploration.

This internship reminded me why I love libraries. It contributed to my academic development, and enabled me to document how stories can come to appear as historical, gendered truths. Next, I will be sharing my findings through an online lecture. Look out for further information on the Alma Jordan Library Facebook page.

*Satira Maharaj is a gender studies student, researcher and documentalist.*

## Essayist OMARI JOSEPH *wins CAF competition*

**Omari Joseph, a 2020 Management Studies graduate** from UWI St Augustine's Faculty of Social Sciences, has bested over 3,440 students from universities in 19 countries to win the 2020 "Ideas for the Future" essay competition.

In 2019, Omari won the Caribbean leg of the competition, which is held by the CAF Development Bank of Latin America. This year, he won the overall competition with his essay on the current situation of Latin American SMEs and the best public policies to close historical productivity gaps. He received the Guillermo Perry Award, worth US\$3,000.

"It felt really good, especially given the fact that I improved on my previous performance," said Omari, who was born in St Lucia and grew up in Guyana. "I was a bit surprised because I felt that I failed to reach the benchmarks that I set for myself in preparation, considering that I left several minor errors in my final submission. Regardless I'm thankful to the Almighty and to the family, friends and associates that helped along the way."

In 2018, Omari won the Eric Williams "School Bags" Essay competition, an initiative of the Eric Williams Memorial Collection Research Library, Archives and Museum (EWMC) at UWI St Augustine's Alma Jordan Library. He attributed his success to learning from past mistakes and striving to do better.

"Taking time to review my failures and learn from them is a big reason for my success in essay writing," he said. "Though I won the Trinidad leg in the previous edition, I fell short in the regional leg. I reviewed my essay and tried to determine the areas where I fell short and made the effort to improve my writing. The main difficulty is always striking a balance between readability, clarity and being sufficiently informative. I can also say I've had a lot of practice as I've been writing for competitions since I was about 14 years old. Consequently, I have many failures and some triumphs that gave me rich experiences to draw from."

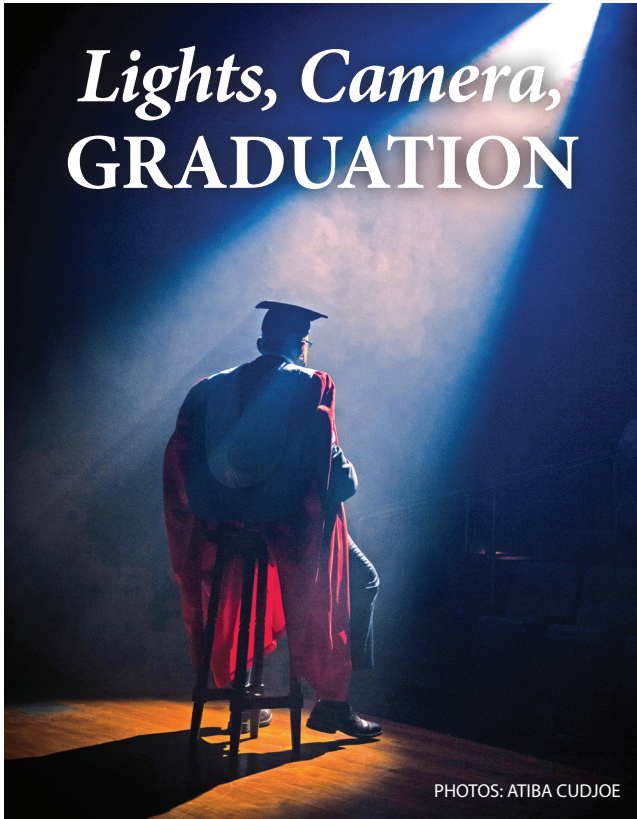
The essay identified areas that should be addressed through policy interventions that help to improve the global competitiveness of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC).

In a statement on Omari's victory, CAF's Gianpiero Leoncini, Country Representative for Trinidad and Tobago, said it was a "remarkable accomplishment" and his essay was "deemed outstanding by an international panel".

On his future plans, Omari said, "I plan to find employment, having recently graduated from UWI. In my spare time I will continue to write for competitions as well as working on some of my own ideas. I plan to complete some longer format work in the future, however, this requires much thought and preparation time, which escapes me at present."







## UWI ST AUGUSTINE 2020 GRADUATION

Every year, UWI St Augustine has a host of events, but none more important than graduation. The annual graduation ceremony brings the entire campus community together -- along with the loved ones of the graduates -- to celebrate their academic achievements. For Graduation 2020 however, the restrictions on mass gatherings brought about by COVID-19 meant that the graduation committee had to find a new way to make it happen. They went virtual.

“The objective of the virtual graduation was to host an online celebration of and for our graduates that was full of pomp and ceremony that this milestone deserves,” says Wynell Gregorio, Director of UWI St Augustine’s Marketing and Communications Office (M&C), “while ensuring that it did not pose a risk to the health and safety of our students, staff, and stakeholders.”

It was an enormous task, requiring not only the reimagining of the two day ceremony (held on January 11 and 12), but also a great amount of work. Graduation 2020 included five months of planning, nearly 900 hours of production, two days of voiceover work, 18 days of photography, eight days of shooting and five live performances.

The virtual graduation was very much like a traditional, in-person grad, except it was in the format of a pre-recorded, streaming show. Some of the highlights include the cultural performances by St Augustine students Emmanuel Joseph on the pan, dancer Nicole Whiteman, and Indian classical

musician Abhijit Anchortassoo. There were also performances by master pannist Len “Boogsie” Sharpe and storytelling icon Paul Keens Douglas, two of the 2020 honorary graduates.

Perhaps most important of all for the students, every graduate’s name was called to receive their diploma. When the virtual graduation was being planned, some students were not pleased.

“Getting buy-in from students was a challenge we had to overcome. Students were obviously disappointed that they would not be able to cross the stage and clamored for a physical ceremony,” says Mrs Gregorio.

However, the campus was unwilling to accept the risk of a large gathering. And though the event was not the same, it was very well-received.

“The feedback has been mostly positive,” she says. “Students were appreciative of the production value and have lauded the effort of the campus in putting together a virtual graduation they were proud to be featured in.”

The Director of M&C also stressed that graduation was a collective effort involving The Office of the Campus Registrar- Exams and Postgrad Studies, the Office of the Campus Principal, Health Services Unit, Division of Facilities Management, and Campus Security. The production was done by Imagine Media International.

She says: “It certainly has been a rewarding experience. The University is very proud of the overall production. The virtual ceremonies were able to capture the essence of the celebration of students. It made viewers emotional and it showcased the beauty of the St Augustine Campus.”

