



Imani Charles, a UWI St Augustine undergraduate student and member of the Institute for Gender and Development Studies' group, IGDS Ignite speaks into the megaphone during the International Women's Day (IWD) march in Port-of-Spain on March 8, 2024. NGOs, activists, students, and members of the public joined the IWD activities which celebrated women and girls, and called for change on a range of social and political issues in both T&T and internationally. PHOTO: KC MEDIA LTD

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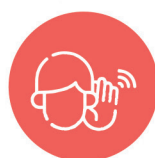
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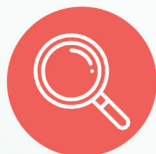
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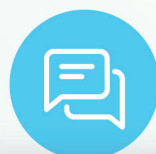
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FROM THE PRINCIPAL

# CREATING CHANGE TOGETHER

**On March 12, 2024,** UWI St Augustine held its annual Campus Council meeting (see article in this issue). At the meeting, **Campus Principal Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine** presented her review, which is also included in The UWI St Augustine 2022/2023 annual report. **UWI TODAY** is pleased to share the review below.

*For the full annual report, visit <https://sta.uwi.edu/news/reports/default.asp>*

The 2022/2023 academic year saw the St Augustine Campus fully resume face-to-face operations post-pandemic. It was also the first year of implementing Phase II of The UWI's 2022–2027 strategic plan, the Revenue Revolution, which coincided with my first year as Campus Principal.

All of these were important changes, but when I spoke about change at my Induction Ceremony in January 2023, I was also focused on three elements: change to save our environment; change to make our society more equitable and inclusive; and change for the survival and sustainability of the St Augustine campus. The first two I view as critical for the continued survival and development of our people and planet, and the third is critical to the survival and development of our campus and university. As you read this report, you will see we have made important progress in these areas. You will also find that, as our theme suggests, responsibility for that progress is spread across disciplines, in both academic and administrative arms, and often involved partnerships with public and private sector organisations. We must create change together.

Our commitment to addressing environmental issues through our work and to increasing our own environmental stewardship remains unwavering. Projects undertaken in the reporting year vary widely and showcase cutting-edge research, fuelling development, our core mission. Some highlights include the establishment of a pollinator garden which is to be replicated across the country; the reformulation of sargassum seaweed into eco-friendly organic pesticides; unlocking carbon capture in Trinidad & Tobago by developing a National Carbon Dioxide Storage Atlas for Trinidad & Tobago in partnership with the Ministry of Energy & Energy Industries, BPTT, Shell and the University of Trinidad & Tobago; the creation of “green pesticides”, which saw our staff working directly in the field with farmers; and a collaboration with the Ministry of Planning & Development to mitigate the effect of flooding on already vulnerable communities and ecosystems around the South Oropouche River Basin. No doubt this project will someday benefit from another that was set in motion during the review period – the establishment of a Mexico-funded Geospatial Monitoring Station that will provide data for decision-making related to agriculture, combatting climate change, disaster reduction, and other areas.

Of course, these are just the projects undertaken during the review year. Many more are in train, such as additional electric vehicle charging stations that will serve the campus community and provide additional opportunities for research.

To provide the public with a broader overview of the campus' contribution to important environmental and climate-related matters, we launched a series of weekly articles in the *Trinidad and Tobago Newsday*. The full breadth of our research, however, could be seen in our revived and revamped column in the *Daily Express*, in our flagship paper, **UWI TODAY**, published each month in the *Sunday Guardian*, and splashed across our social media pages online, as we sought to incentivise research and take it to the people.



Significant strides have been made in advancing social change that is both equitable and inclusive. In partnership with the Ministry of Youth Development & National Service, we trained scores of young people in farming and entrepreneurship, opening doors to sustainable self-employment and higher education, should they so choose. We have not only advocated for disability rights but are empowering our students to advocate for themselves, and on an issue close to my heart, we have stood with the First Peoples of the Caribbean, amplifying their calls for justice and equal recognition. Additionally, we continued to take our work on gender and social issues into the community by hosting gender-based violence workshops for youth across the country.

Finally, we are pleased to report on the many initiatives that were undertaken to improve the student experience, to create a more responsive and inclusive atmosphere for staff, and to create a sustainable and more self-sufficient campus. I have held staff listening sessions, and although work is still in progress, strides are being made to foster an improved campus team. I initiated funding for an after-school care centre to assist with care duties, and I hold weekly staff open hours. Taking on board feedback from students, we have digitalised many services for a faster turnaround time in various application processes. To enhance our customer service experience and improve efficiency, we provided training for a number of staff and managers throughout the campus at various levels.

To better facilitate our revenue revolution goals, we set up a campus implementation committee in which we explore, examine and support potentially profitable projects from our ever-expanding campus

innovation ecosystem. Even as the International Fine Cocoa Innovation Centre provides training, meeting spaces, and production facilities for start-ups, it is also poised to take the next step and enter the international fine chocolate market. During the reporting period, the foundation was laid for the successful completion of our new Chocolate Factory. This venture takes advantage of the decades of research conducted by our Cocoa Research Centre as stewards of the world's largest Cocoa Genebank.

As I close, I acknowledge, with sincere thanks, the many stakeholders and interest groups who took time from their busy schedules to meet with me and my team to discuss areas of mutual interest – in particular, the President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, His Excellency Dr Irfaan Ali, who shared his vision for the development of his country and the areas in which The UWI may support; and members of the business community, such as the ANSA McAL Group. I thank too those individuals and companies that continue to stand by us despite the economic challenges, such as Republic Bank Ltd which sponsors our World of Work programme, and the Guardian Group of Companies that celebrates our excellence in teaching through its Awards. I also thank the Government of the Republic of Trinidad & Tobago for its support and for trusting us as a development partner.

We aim to continue this momentum as we move forward, creating impactful change for a better future. Your support and dedication are vital in this journey. Please reach out to us with your ideas on how we can partner with you, your business or community, to make a direct and positive impact. We look forward to hearing from you!

*Rose-Marie Antoine*

**Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine**  
*Campus Principal*

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## CAMPUS NEWS



FROM LEFT: Campus Registrar Dr Dawn-Marie De Four-Gill, Campus Principal Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine, Campus Council Chair Ms Sharon Christopher, UWI Vice-Chancellor Professor Sir Hilary Beckles, Minister of Education Dr Nyan Gadsby-Dolly, and Deputy Principal Professor Indar Ramnarine at the 2024 Campus Council meeting. PHOTO: ANEEL KARIM

# UWI Revenue Revolution marches on

BY DIXIE-ANN BELLE

Despite the challenges of a post-pandemic world, The UWI's "Revenue Revolution" is showing encouraging progress. This was the prevailing mood during the Annual Campus Council Meeting on May 12 as Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine, Campus Principal, made her address before an audience which included Minister of Education Dr Nyan Gadsby-Dolly.

Reminding those assembled that many UWI projects are advancing, the Principal declared, "What we are seeing is that, across the campus, there's tremendous work going on, work towards societal advancement, pioneering research from our scientists, from our other scholars, our educators, from our artists, from our social scientists, and our educators."

As part of the movement to garner enduring revenue, Prof Antoine explained, a "Shark Tank" type of system had been developed, where the management team comes together to discuss and analyse projects. She also mentioned the South Oropouche Flood Mitigation Project, the HIT-RESET Climate Coastal Resilience Project, and the Volcanic Eruption Emergency Project (VEEP) among others.

"These are some of the really key things that this campus is leading on," she said.

She expressed satisfaction with UWI Fine Cocoa, noting that the factory had been completed ahead of schedule:

"We're moving ahead to leverage our international reputation – the fact that we are leaders in cocoa research, the fact that we have the largest cocoa genebank, and that we already have international partners."

The Principal also noted that UWI Seal-It produces roofing sealants and plastic sealants which they believe are the best in the market. She revealed that the products are also saving the campus millions as they are being used to fix roofs and do repairs.

Principal Antoine also explained that, once a feasibility study is completed, they will be going ahead

with the Global School of Medicine. UWI alumni who wish to donate to the school will soon be able to do so easily and seamlessly with the TouchNet online portal.

## 41 NEW RESEARCH PROJECTS

During his address, UWI Vice-Chancellor Professor Sir Hilary Beckles praised the St Augustine campus "for embracing fully the university's strategic plan, and showing tremendous agility and energy in implementing that plan within this campus". He stressed the importance of the revenue revolution for UWI's future, explaining that the university has a US \$50 million shortfall.

"We're not going to sit around and complain about it," he asserted.

UWI's research accomplishments were also a major focus. The Principal noted that without counting ongoing projects, the St Augustine campus has 41 new research projects. These have accumulated \$106 million

in funding. She noted the partnerships that have been created both locally and internationally, and mentioned several research highlights.

The Principal also brought up the efforts that were inspired by the pandemic. She reminded those assembled that the Faculty of Engineering constructed essential devices and protective equipment during the height of that difficult period.

As many universities are struggling to recover from the impact of the pandemic, UWI administration is viewing the future with some positivity, confident in the strategic plan which has been unfolding over recent years.

Principal Antoine noted that enrolment was down with a drop of 8 percent for undergraduates. Postgraduates also dropped by 8 percent. However, she pointed out that the drop is "in tandem with a global and local trend".

She pointed out that while there were drops in some areas, the Faculty of Law was oversubscribed and Medical Sciences and Sport saw big increases. Certificate courses also saw an increase of 52 percent. Forty five students graduated with PhDs, the largest campus cohort in four years.

As he reflected on the progress of bolstering the university's reputation and building revenue streams, the Vice-Chancellor stated, "When we look back 25 years from now, we will know that this was the moment where we turned around the cruise ship in the harbour."

He added, "It's a very huge ship as you know. It's a very small harbour, but we have to turn it around gradually, and get it out on the high seas, and this is what we have started on the issues of financial sustainability."

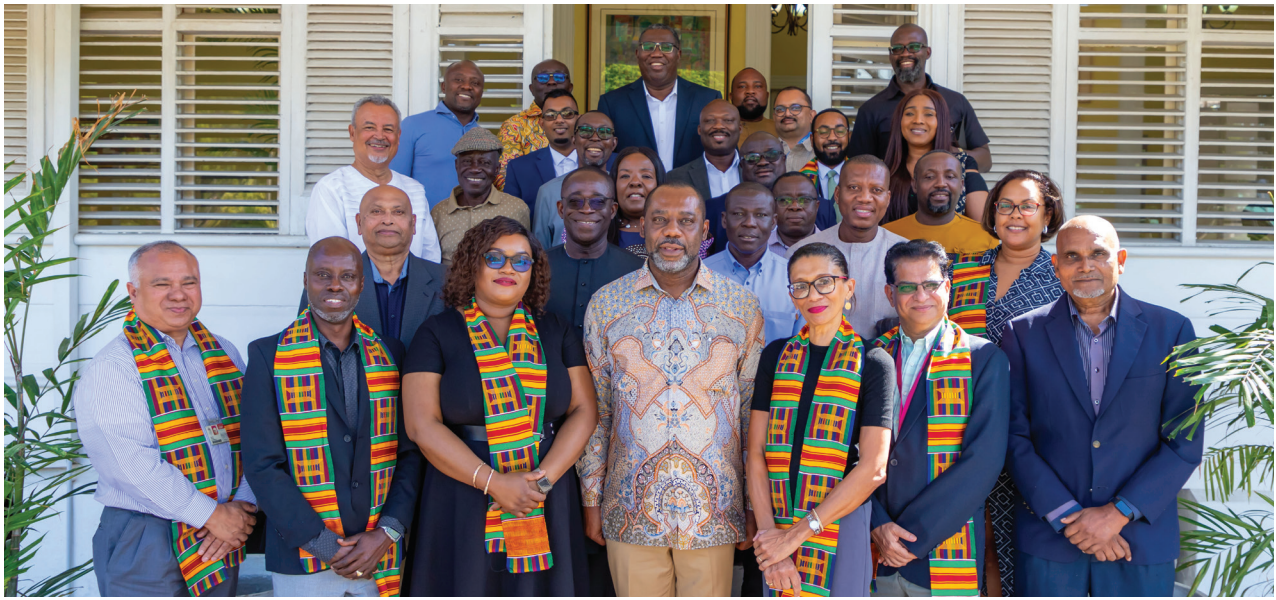
The UWI council meetings are the university's annual business meetings, during which accountability of operations, finances, and all activities undertaken during the academic year are presented to the councils and campus executive governing bodies.





CAMPUS NEWS

# GHANA ENERGY MINISTER VISITS ST AUGUSTINE CAMPUS to discuss opportunities for collaboration



Dr Matthew Opoku Prempeh (front row, centre) with the delegation from Ghana and representatives of the St Augustine campus in front of the Office of the Campus Principal. Beside him, in the front row are (from left) Deans of Faculties of Engineering (Prof Bheshem Ramlal), Food and Agriculture (Prof Mark Wuddivira), Law (Dr Alicia Elias-Roberts), Humanities and Education (Prof Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw), and Medical Sciences (Prof Hariharan Seetharaman), and Campus Librarian Mr Frank Soodeen. PHOTO: ATIBA CUDJOE

**Dr Matthew Opoku Prempeh, Ghana’s Minister of Energy**, and a 20-member delegation comprising senior officials, visited The UWI St Augustine campus on February 23 to discuss opportunities for collaboration between his country and the university.

Dr Prempeh, who is also the Member of Parliament for the Manhyia South constituency in the Ashanti Region, met with the deans of several faculties as well as other faculty members. His team included representatives from the Ghanaian Embassy in Cuba, and from Ghanaian companies Bulk Energy Storage and Transportation Company (BEST) and GOIL Good Energy.

Mr Kuarlal Rampersad, Chair of the Society for Maintenance and Reliability Professionals (SMRP), spoke on behalf of the SMRP chapter, its ties to Ghana, and the potential collaborations with The UWI.

“This visit marked a crucial milestone in strengthening

the ties between the Government of Ghana and The UWI, especially in the areas of energy and education,” a statement from the St Augustine campus explained. “The UWI aims to foster this connection and solidify future collaborations with Ghana in hopes of establishing the exchange of knowledge, research opportunities, innovation, economic development, and increased global visibility.”

Dr Prempeh brought a wealth of experience and expertise in the energy sector, the statement said, and his visit to the university served as a valuable opportunity for knowledge exchange and collaboration.

The Ghanaian Minister of Energy emphasised the deep historical connections between Ghana and Trinidad and Tobago. He highlighted personal familial ties and discussed the numerous opportunities for mutually beneficial partnerships, particularly in sectors such as oil and gas, cocoa, medicine, and sustainability.

## UWI Entrepreneurship Unit delivers training for 30 innovators/entrepreneurs in Tobago



Mr Julian Henry, Manager of the Entrepreneurship Unit (seated, centre), with entrepreneurs from Tobago and members of the training seminar planning committee from the Tobago House of Assembly.

**UWI St Augustine’s Entrepreneurship Unit** delivered a training seminar on behalf of the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) to 30 innovators and entrepreneurs on February 28 and 29. The seminar - which focused on business planning, financial forecasting for early stage enterprise, and financial strategy - was held at the Tobago Information Technologies Ltd in Signal Hill.

The entrepreneurs were from various business sectors including hydroponics agriculture, garment manufacturing, coconut oil extracts/creams, and various food and beverage business enterprises. Participants were also able to access one-on-one confidential mentorship sessions with the facilitator, Mr Julian Henry, Manager of the Entrepreneurship Unit.

“The training was requested by the THA based on similar training events provided by the Entrepreneurship Unit in Tobago,” explained Mr Henry. “Namely, to entrepreneurs of the E-IDCOT Entrepreneurship Development Programme.”

Operating within the Department of Management Studies in the Faculty of Social Sciences, the Entrepreneurship Unit’s purpose is to support the development of student and staff entrepreneurs within the UWI ecosystem.

On a wider scale, the unit works closely with other entities within UWI St Augustine to support the commercialisation of UWI intellectual property and innovative enterprise. These include the St Augustine Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (STACIE), the UWI St Augustine Campus Implementation Committee, and UWI Ventures Limited.

**For more information on their services, visit [sta.uwi.edu/entrepunit/](http://sta.uwi.edu/entrepunit/)**



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## ■ CAMPUS NEWS

At The UWI St Augustine campus, a team of researchers are forging ahead with their efforts to improve awareness of Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS), which the World Health Organisation (WHO) has estimated affects up to 13 percent of reproductive-aged women (15-49).

When *UWI Today* last caught up with Dr Stephanie Mohammed, supervised by Dr Venkatesan Sundaram in collaboration with Dr Brian Cockburn (Dean of the Faculty of Science and Technology), Prof Ricardo Azziz and Ms Sasha Ottey in September 2023, a study of 230 women (aged 18-45) in Trinidad was being done to better understand the condition's prevalence, and efforts were being undertaken to raise awareness of the condition.

In a recent follow-up interview, Mohammed shared that the team has been able to achieve these targets and also gain more recognition for the research.

Mohammed stated that in the past several months, the team was able to get a better understanding of the prevalence of PCOS amongst women in Trinidad.

A preliminary analysis of the data obtained from the study of the 230 women showed that there is a seven percent prevalence of PCOS in Trinidad.

Mohammed added, "We also found a strong association between acanthosis nigricans – a condition that causes areas of dark, thick velvety skin in body folds and creases – and Body Mass Index (BMI).

"We also observed that there were fertility issues in women with PCOS, so there was a high incidence of infertility."

For the research, the 230 women were phenotyped and placed into four categories according to the National Institute for Health (NIH) 1990 guidelines to diagnose women with PCOS: (i) women with no clinical hyperandrogenism (an excess production of "male" hormones) or menstrual disorder; (ii) women with clinical hyperandrogenism; (iii) women with menstrual disorder; and (iv) women with both clinical hyperandrogenism and menstrual disorder.

Further analysis of the data is being conducted to better understand the correlation between PCOS and mental health.

While the data continues to present a clearer picture on the prevalence and effects of PCOS, Mohammed said the team is continuing its efforts to raise awareness amongst vulnerable groups.

## VIRTUAL SEMINAR WITH ROTARY

In late September 2023, over 100 adolescents aged 10-18 from schools across Trinidad, in collaboration with the Rotary Club of St Augustine, attended a virtual webinar as part of the team's PCOS Awareness Month activities.

She explained, "Of course, we had to present the information in a way that acknowledged the sensitivity of discussing the topic with their age group.

"But the webinar was necessary to inform them about PCOS because the WHO has identified there is a lack of awareness about PCOS amongst adolescents, and the condition is understudied in their age group.

"Part of the presentations also included information about the importance of PCOS research in Trinidad."

The webinar featured presentations by Sasha Ottey of the global PCOS Challenge Organisation, Mohammed, Sundaram, and Cockburn.

On the importance of engaging this group in the research, Mohammed said there are preventative measures – related to physical and mental health – that adolescents can engage in to reduce their chances of developing the conditions.

As such, she said awareness efforts in this group can be a proactive approach to local PCOS management.

They are currently awaiting approval to conduct a study on assessing the reproductive and mental health of adolescents, which is a first of its kind study in Trinidad and Tobago.

Given the impact of Mohammed's research, it continues to be recognised and awarded both locally and internationally.

In October 2023, Mohammed attended a meeting of the Androgen Excess Polycystic Ovary Syndrome Society in Rotterdam, Netherlands. At the conference, she received the PCOS Challenge Early-Stage Investigator Award, and the Ricardo Azziz Advocacy Leadership Award.

Shortly after, Mohammed was also recognised at the UWI Research Festival in November 2023, where she received the Principal's Award for the Most Outstanding Graduate Researcher. Her mentors, Dr Sundaram and Dr

# UWI researchers make headway on PCOS RESEARCH AND AWARENESS

BY TYRELL GITTENS



From left: Professor Aldrie Henry-Lee, Pro-Vice-Chancellor of Graduate Studies and Research, giving the Most Outstanding Graduate Researcher and Mentor Award to Dr Venkatesan Sundaram, Dr Nikolay Zyuzikov, and Dr Stephanie Mohammed at the Research Festival and Principal's Research Awards ceremony in November 2023.

Nikolay Zyuzikov, received the Most Outstanding Mentor Award.

A research poster, presented at the UWI Research Festival in collaboration with Dr Sundaram and Dr Cockburn, was also awarded Best Poster Presentation in Regional Health Issues and Advances.

Set to soon receive the Paul Harris Fellow recognition on behalf of the Rotary Clubs of Central Port of Spain, Felicity/Charlerville, Princes Town, San Fernando and St Augustine, Mohammed will also begin a two-year postdoctoral position

at the University of Pennsylvania in March 2024.

"There, I will continue bioinformatics work and other research on pure women's health including fibroids, endometriosis, PCOS and other reproductive dysfunctions."

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

**The UWI Development and Endowment Fund's (UWIDEF's) new manager Mr Kory Mendez** is leading the production of the fund's second annual fundraising concert, **IGNITE 2 – Rekindle the Flame**.

Mr Mendez joined the UWIDEF at the start of 2024 as manager with responsibility for the business efficiency and innovative efforts of the fund. UWIDEF provides scholarships and bursaries to deserving students of The UWI. Mendez brings leadership experience gained from numerous years in leadership roles at multiple culture-focused non-profit organisations. He led the production team for the first **IGNITE Concert** in 2023.

UWIDEF has planned a series of fundraising events for 2024, the first being **IGNITE 2**. Performers will include The Lydians, Southernaires Choir, Signal Hill Alumni Choir, the National Steel Symphony Orchestra of Trinidad and Tobago, The Shiv Shakti Dance Company, and The UWI Arts Chorale and Steel, as well as soloists, Edward Cumberbatch, Neval Chatelal, and Quinton Neckles.

The benefit concert **IGNITE 2 – Rekindle the Flame**, will take place on Sunday, March 24 at the National Academy for the Performing Arts (NAPA).

## UWIDEF'S NEW MANAGER sparks IGNITE 2 benefit concert



Dr Sterling Frost ORTT (left), Chairman of the UWIDEF, shakes hands with new manager Mr Kory Mendez.



## ■ OUR PEOPLE

# ‘ONE HEALTH APPROACH important in a changing world’

*Prof Hariharan Seetharaman, Dean of the Faculty of Medical Sciences,  
shares his perspectives and plans*

BY TYRELL GITTENS



Since becoming Dean of UWI St Augustine's Faculty of Medical Sciences in August 2023, Professor Hariharan Seetharaman has been striving to incorporate a "One Health" approach into the faculty's teaching methods.

The United Nations defines One Health as "an approach to designing and implementing programmes, policies, legislation, and research in which multiple sectors communicate and work together to achieve better public health outcomes."

By promoting this approach, Prof Seetharaman, known affectionately as "Prof Hari", is working to give students the best possible chance to be well-rounded and capable of sufficiently serving an evolving healthcare system.

In a recent interview with UWI TODAY, he said medical professionals must take note that current global developments relating to health, technology, and the environment are important reminders that healthcare services do not exist in silos, and one must be able to grasp how other issues affect the care they provide.

Mental health, physical health, climate change

He explained, "The [COVID-19] pandemic taught us that a virus can jump from an animal to a human, which means that veterinary health is important. Throughout the pandemic, we also saw how mental health was related to physical health.

"But understanding the environment is important too – as climate change can also cause problems for human health – as it provides conditions for the spread of diseases and affects people physically. Everybody should be climate conscious."

Apart from ensuring the faculty's curriculum better reflects an understanding of how all these issues correlate to health, Prof Seetharaman is encouraging the faculty's many departments to collaborate on research and teaching exercises.

Looking further afield, the Dean said that while technological advancements continue to expand treatment options for ailments, and healthcare is becoming more digitised, it is important for students to understand that healthcare is still rooted in human interaction.

"I want to promote not only the technical aspects of medicine but also the social dynamics such as ethics and professionalism," he said. "I tell all my students that the major thrust of medical care, in my view, is ethics, professionalism and soft skills, like being caring."

He added, "In this era of technology, medical professionals cannot forget to be empathetic and understanding of the plight of patients by being kind to them."

Serving as President of the Bioethics Society of the English-speaking Caribbean from 2015-2019, Prof Seetharaman is passionate about ethics and quality of care.

## ‘MEDICINE IS A PASSION’

With specialisations in anaesthesiology and critical care, he credits his humble beginnings in India as inspiration for not only his approach to healthcare, but also his medical career.

Explaining that healthcare was not easily accessible in the community he grew up in, Seetharaman said this, coupled with his father's encouragement, inspired him to pursue medical studies.

In 1982, he got accepted to his province's public medical school and completed his MBBS in 1987, followed by his internship in 1988.

"In 1989, I went to join the small district general hospital in my town as a junior medical officer, and then for five years, I was a general medical practitioner," he described. "I really remembered those five years because those were actually the times I really helped the marginalised people from rural India with lots of issues."

"Medicine," he said, "is a passion, and once you know that you are helping out other people, it's a very rewarding experience."

Between 1994 and 1998, he did a postgraduate specialisation in anaesthesiology and was a critical care trainee.

In 1999, he took up an opportunity to work at Barbados's Queen Elizabeth Hospital, where he also taught as a non-academic employee and supported research, until he moved to Trinidad and Tobago in 2004 to become a full-time lecturer at UWI St Augustine.

Dedicated to his duties, Prof Seetharaman moved up the ladder to become a senior lecturer in 2007 and then a professor in 2010.

He has also served as the Head of the ICU at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex (2009-2012), and the Director of Operating Rooms in the North Central Regional Health Authority (2012-2016).

In 2019, he became the Director of Graduate Studies and Research at UWI St Augustine, and ultimately, Dean of Faculty of Medical Sciences in 2023.

Even after becoming a professor in 2010, Seetharaman completed a PhD in Health Economics in 2015 to better understand the role that special interests and money play in healthcare.

When teaching and contributing to the development of teaching methods, he wants students to understand that medicine is ultimately about human care and not excessive profits.

## ETHICS AND EMPATHY

"Economics is very important in healthcare because, when I was a practitioner in India, I never charged anyone below the poverty line. I felt very bad to take a fee from them because they only had coins which represented their daily earning," he said.

With his wealth of experience, and understanding of healthcare in many different countries, Prof Hari continues to teach students about the value of ethics and empathy, which he also includes in his leadership style:

"For me, leadership is not bossing over people, but rather representing everybody in the institution and representing their voice. I try my best to seek the interest of everyone."

While there are times I have to be assertive and make decisions independently because it is needed, I strive to not do things unilaterally as the faculty is diverse with many different interests."

By fostering values of collaboration and care at the Faculty of Medical Sciences, he hopes that these inspire students to be dedicated to quality of care when they are practicing medical professionals.

"Everybody should be respectful of each other regardless of their titles in the medical field," he said.

"For example, I can tell you that a nurse is the most important healthcare worker in an ICU because she spends the most time with a patient and takes the most intimate care of them."

In doing so, he believes that there will be more socially conscious medical practitioners graduating from the faculty, and ones that will help Trinidad and Tobago's healthcare system become more developed.

■ **For more information** on the Faculty of Medical Sciences and its educational opportunities, visit: <https://sta.uwi.edu/fms/>



## ■ NATURE

**As Caribbean people**, we are never too far away from the green that surrounds us. Even in the most bustling of cities, you can look up and see a flash of emerald mountainside or the endless blue maw of the ocean. You hear the cry of parrots and macaws returning home in the sunset, the call of cicadas through the night.

Not all of us pay attention to the wild world that surrounds us – tropical ecosystems that are unique and only found right here – but our rich biodiversity is championed by a series of unassuming everyday heroes who find ways to work within their limited resources to protect, research and spotlight the Caribbean's incredible flora and fauna.

Early last year, BBC wildlife and science presenter Liz Bonnin made her way around the region for three months, shedding light on not only the native ecosystems that call this place home, but also the local conservationists and naturalists who work to keep them protected, for a series called Liz Bonnin's Wild Caribbean. Her last stop was a visit to Trinidad – her ancestral home.

### Reaching out to UWI

For help navigating the Trinbagonian landscape, one of the first steps was reaching out to The UWI's own Dr Amy Deacon, Senior Lecturer of Zoology in the Department of Life Sciences. Dr Deacon, who is also an active member of the historic Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club (TTFNC), was the ideal person to give ideas on where to go to showcase the work being done across the country.

"They wanted to get some information on the ground about suitable projects that would be good to include in the series," said Dr Deacon during our interview.

Interestingly, the production team didn't only want to focus on the wildlife itself, but also wanted to shed light on the human aspect of conservation.

"They were very much saying that we want to meet the Caribbean people that are doing things to conserve wildlife," she said.

With that in mind, she gave them a handful of projects to think on, and one that piqued their interest was the work being done around the Nariva Swamp by a group from the TTFNC including UWI alumni Laura Baboolal and Sinead Stewart.

Both Laura and Sinead are part of the TTFNC mammal group, who conduct surveys of the Nariva Swamp for red howler monkeys and white-fronted capuchins. These monkeys, endemic to Trinidad, are the only native species of monkeys found in the Caribbean.

"We [the TTFNC] do general monthly trips, like hiking trips and nature walks. And then there are subgroups that focus on mammals, birds, insects, and the different categories," said Baboolal, who leads the monthly mammal trips.

During her time at UWI, she completed a Bachelor's degree in Environmental Management with a minor in Zoology, and then a Master's degree in Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Development in the Caribbean.

### A curiosity about wildlife

Animals have always been a part of her life. Growing up, she had a love for dogs and a curiosity about the wildlife around her. Her childhood home in Sangre Grande, with the edges of the forest right behind, was her first introduction to the natural world.

"When I was younger, I would always be in the bush somewhere or in a tree somewhere," she said with a laugh.

Now, she is putting that love for the wild to work researching our two species of local monkeys – both endangered.

One of their most interesting sightings that also ended up making it into the documentary was an unusual behaviour of the white-fronted capuchins with the local cannonball fruits that grow nearby. It was fellow mammal group members Sabira Ali and Sinead Stewart who were able to observe that the capuchins were waiting for the fruits on the ground to rot, and then breaking them open and feeding on the insects that are attracted to the rotting fruit feast.

Stewart knows that monkeys have a reputation for being dangerous in Trinidad. But once they are left alone to thrive in their natural habitat, they don't need to be feared.

"People say that when you encounter monkeys, they attack you, but I never had that experience," she said.

On her trips, over time she was able to observe the monkeys feeding, fighting for territory, and even "...eating the grubs from cannonball [fruits]; which I've heard about, but there's not a lot of documentation about it".

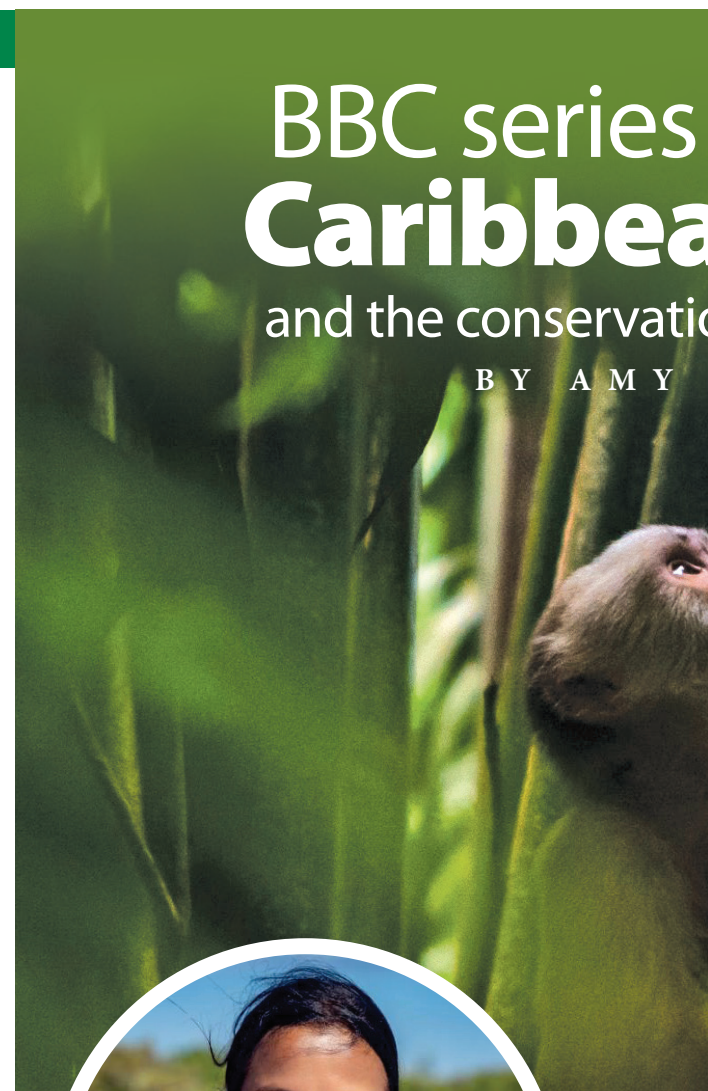
**Early last year, BBC wildlife and science presenter Liz Bonnin made her way around the region for three months, shedding light on not only the native ecosystems that call this place home, but also the local conservationists and naturalists who work to keep them protected.**

Member of the TTFNC mammal group and UWI alumni Laura Baboolal takes a selfie with Dan Jaggernauth, TTFNC Management Committee member, regular assistant at the National Herbarium, field trip leader for numerous UWI St Augustine excursions, and a well-known advocate for the natural world. PHOTO: LAURA BABOOLAL



# BBC series Caribbean and the conservation

BY AMY

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PHOTO: JERPHOTO:  
LION TELEVISION

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Liz Bonnin with members of the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club (TTFNC). PHOTO: CO



# focuses on n Nature

onists who protect it

LI BAKSH



bifrons (white-fronted capuchin) gazes upwards in the stillness of Nariva Swamp.  
JEROME FOSTER

y wanted to showcase the **beauty of**  
**Caribbean**, but also the **beauty of the**  
e, and those who are connected to nature.  
d to show what Caribbean people are  
use they are some of the most **beautiful**  
**the planet.** ~ **Liz Bonnin**



COURTESY LION TELEVISION

**Stewart knows  
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that experience.'**



An *Alouatta macconnellii* (red howler monkey). PHOTO: JEROME FOSTER

This exciting find was a culmination of many years of fascination with nature. "I was one of those children who used to play in the yard, go and look at the ants and the caterpillars," Stewart told me.

She went on to do her undergrad studies in Environmental and Natural Resource Management at The UWI, and followed up with a Master's degree in Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Development in the Caribbean, similar to Baboolal.

"My thesis was on the density of the red howler monkey in the Bush Bush Wildlife Sanctuary, and that is where I got into monkeys," said Stewart.

And she was hooked. But the task of observing monkeys in the wild can require a lot of patience. You never know when they are going to show up.

"They are so elusive," she chuckled.

For her thesis, she couldn't include white-fronted capuchins because she only saw them twice on her excursions. But, once her studies were complete, she went back out into the field, and there they were.

## Trip into Nariva

For Liz Bonnin and the BBC team, their trip into Nariva seemed to be blessed with good luck. Speaking in hushed tones, you can see the excitement in the documentary episode as the team realised, from the sound of breaking branches, that there are monkeys in the trees nearby.

"They were able to get on film both species of the monkeys on the same day, which is very rare," said Baboolal. "They were very lucky."

For Bonnin, who has roots in Trinidad, these sightings were one of the highlights of her travels across the Caribbean for the documentary series.

"I forget I'm on telly sometimes because I am so passionate about wildlife," she told me. "Selfishly, just to have the experience of seeing one of the rarest animals on the planet, not only in Trinidad, the white-fronted capuchin, in Bush Bush in Nariva Swamp.... I was embarrassingly forgetting I was being filmed!"

But, exciting as these animal encounters were, at the core of these stories were the people who made them possible.

"I really wanted to showcase the beauty of the Caribbean, but also the beauty of the people, and those who are connected to nature," said Bonnin. "I wanted to show what Caribbean people are like, because they are some of the most beautiful humans on the planet."

In a space like Trinidad, which holds some of the richest biodiversity in the world, not everyone sees the interconnectedness between themselves and nature around them. But those who have dedicated their lives to conservation work understand that what we have here is truly special, and should be protected.

*Liz Bonnin's Wild Caribbean* aims to tell this story to an international audience, but it is a story that is valuable to the Caribbean people as well. In the Trinidad and Tobago episode, it traces not only the story of the TTFNC's mammal exploits, but also the important work being done by other conservation groups like the El Socorro Centre for Wildlife Conservation and Wa Samaki Ecosystems. Although the series is not currently available for viewing locally, a public screening will be organised by the TTFNC, so those interested in learning more can keep an eye on their social media for updates.

As the world sees the impact of climate change and other effects of human consumption, it is important to recognise that there is important work being done right on our own doorsteps – sometimes with extremely limited resources, but still finding a way to make a difference. We should celebrate the people who are committed to keeping our region livable for the next generation of Caribbean children, off in a tree somewhere or in their backyards looking at ants and caterpillars.

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



## ■ OUR STUDENTS

# Alicia Lalite: Inspiring through Action

*Differently-abled scholar at the Faculty of Social Sciences uses adaptive technology to learn, teach, and challenge preconceptions*

BY DR RIANN SINGH

**“This is my opportunity,”** says Alicia Lalite, “to sensitise and positively influence the perceptions of future generations about persons with disabilities.”

Ms Lalite, a PhD candidate in Business Administration within the Department of Management Studies, was born with Retinitis Pigmentosa, a genetic and progressive eye disease that causes visual impairment and eventual blindness. She has encountered unique challenges on her path to academic success. They haven’t stopped her.

As a PhD student at The UWI St Augustine specialising in Human Resource Management, Alicia has navigated the complexities of academia with conviction, drawing strength, she says, from mentors within the Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS) who recognise her potential. Her research focuses on the perceptions towards persons with disabilities in the workplace. She is nearing completion of her dissertation and doctoral studies.

“Alicia has been truly inspiring,” says Dr Shalini Ramdeo, a colleague within the PhD Business Administration programme. “Her ability to use adaptive technology to navigate the many academic complexities is a testament to her determination.”

## ADAPTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Adaptive technology (AT), is a sub-category of assistive technology specially designed for persons who are differently-abled. They include screen readers, text-to-speech software, and other assistive technologies. AT has empowered Alicia in her studies and research. As a technology consultant and computer instructor in AT within the blind and visually-impaired community, she was able to capitalise on her expertise in this area.

“Alicia’s presence in the classroom and her use of adaptive technology demonstrate the faculty’s commitment to being socially engaged and solutions oriented,” says Dr Acolle Lewis Cameron, Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences.

Alicia’s journey extends beyond the confines of a UWI student within FSS. Since 2014, she has been involved in the faculty’s summer programme, teaching Introduction to Management. Using AT, she engages students. At the beginning of the semester, Alicia would brief the students on her abilities, and give them alternative approaches to encourage their participation.

“When I entered the lecture hall on the first day,” she recalls, “I could sense the apprehensiveness from the students, but after the first lecture, they were very interactive and engaged.”

In the first semester of the 2022/2023 academic year, Alicia transitioned to co-lecturing, teaching over 150 students under the supervision of Dr Riann Singh, Senior Lecturer and Deputy Dean of Graduate Studies and Research at FSS, and Head of the Department of Management Studies Dr ShellyAnne Wilson.

Dr Singh says, “From a supervisory perspective

*‘When I entered the lecture hall on the first day, she recalls, ‘I could sense the apprehensiveness from the students, but after the first lecture, they were very interactive and engaged.’*



and, based on student assessments, the feedback has been positive, attesting to Alicia’s ability to effectively use adaptive technology in the classroom. She was offered another opportunity this semester [Semester 2, 2023/2024] and is progressing well thus far in co-lecturing.”

She adds, “As a faculty, we are proud.”

## MORE THAN A PROFESSION, A CALLING

For Alicia, teaching is not merely a profession but a calling - one that enables her to inspire the next generation of scholars and leaders.

“I was delighted when given the opportunity to co-lecture. This was the moment I have been waiting for,” she says.

“From a human resource (HR) perspective, the policies for recruiters, employers, and employees, as well as learning institutions, lack inclusivity,” she continues. “They are apprehensive to practise full inclusion of persons with disabilities. I was able to sensitise students on the capabilities of persons with disabilities. They learn that having a disability does not prevent me from lecturing. This challenges their preconceptions about the differently abled.”

She further credits her success in the classroom to the support of the administrative and technical staff within the faculty and the Teaching and Learning Complex at the university, who assist with guiding her to the lecture rooms and providing the necessary technical support for the additional equipment.

That support helps her with challenges like navigating classes with smaller physical spaces and larger cohorts of students, overcoming obstacles that illustrate her resilience, her colleagues within FSS say.

Her students, she believes, have also been inspired.

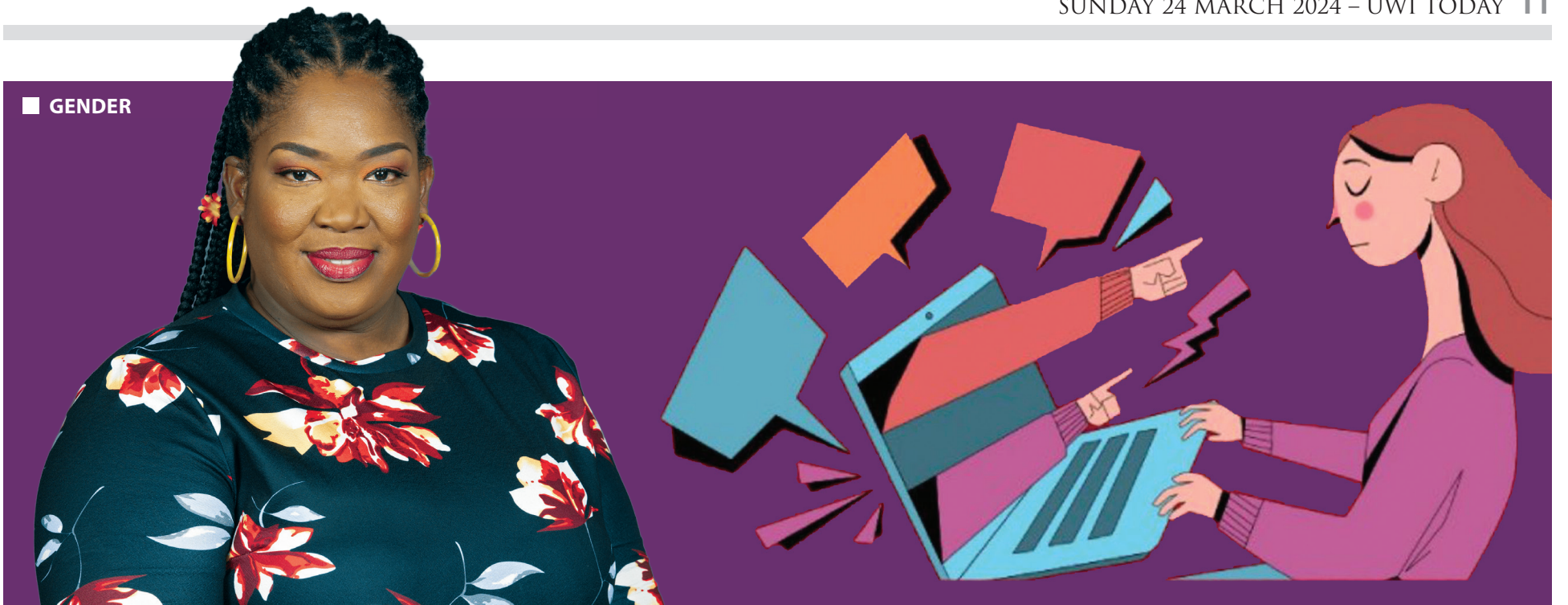
“When they approach me at the end of the semester or share emails expressing their gratitude, not only for the course insights shared but expanding their perspective on how they view persons who are differently abled, I am indeed humbled,” she says.

Speaking on the importance of providing opportunities to talented scholars such as Alicia that are differently abled, Dr Singh says, “Within academia, diversity and technology are not mere buzzwords, but essential components of progress. Alicia Lalite’s journey serves as a reminder of the transformative power of inclusivity and adaptive technology. As her accomplishments are celebrated, it reaffirms the Faculty of Social Sciences’ commitment to creating an inclusive educational landscape—one where every student can thrive and excel.”

She adds, “In the pursuit of knowledge, barriers are meant to be overcome. By moving beyond embracing diversity towards inclusivity, capitalising on AT, and paving the way for a brighter, more inclusive future in education, we are moving in the right direction.”



## ■ GENDER



Dr Sue Ann Barratt, Head of IGDS. PHOTO: ANEEL KARIM

## ‘We confront persistent vulnerabilities, intense backlash – *online and offline*’

*IGDS Head Dr Sue Ann Barratt views International Women’s Day as a timely reminder that work still needs to be done*

BY TYRELL GITTENS

As the world commemorated its 114<sup>th</sup> International Women’s Day (IWD) on March 8, local gender activists took to the streets of Port-of -Spain to call on society to make progress on issues affecting women during the UWI St Augustine Institute for Gender and Development Studies’ (IGDS’) annual IWD Rights Rally and March held in collaboration with the Women’s Rights Alliance.

With issues such as climate change, gender-based violence, leadership, and access to proper healthcare services being some of the most pressing issues affecting women, IGDS Head Dr Sue Ann Barratt is reminding people that there is work to be done.

While IWD activities around the world have taken on a more celebratory tone over the years, Barratt said that it is crucial to ensure that local commemorations remain rooted in advocacy.

She explained, “It’s a time to reflect on a range of issues that may have emerged since the last International Women’s Day, or issues that are sustained over time.

“We go out and march because we want to ensure there is visibility for the issues and assert strong calls for transformative change.

“International Women’s Day has also been a fixture for UWI and IGDS as a moment where we assert commitments, advocacy, and representation for, by, and on behalf of women and girls, in collaboration with allied men and boys.”

### PUSHBACK AGAINST WOMEN’S RIGHTS

With this year’s IWD themed “Inspire Inclusion,” Barratt said it’s an answer to the “pushback” that the women’s rights movement has received.

She explained that, in some cases, people believe “it’s a threat that women and other traditionally subordinated groups are making gains.”

Barratt said the surge of “extreme” views online and in podcasts related to women are examples of how the

pushback against gender justice has manifested itself locally, regionally, and internationally.

“We’ve made gains in areas where people are more conscious about the inclusion and empowerment of women,” said Dr Barratt. “But then, on the other side, people are asserting jokes or dismissals of the trends that signal women’s empowerment.

“There are a lot of people who are not in favour of progress because they think to include means to exclude them, but the purpose of inclusion is adding more.”

With these pockets of resistance manifesting itself as violent language and sexual harassment in online spaces, Barratt said it is important to take action to counteract extremist views online.

While many may not make the connection, Barratt said extremism in online spaces can manifest itself into gender-based violence and femicide, an issue Trinidad and Tobago is already grappling with.

“We have made strides for women and girls, in collaboration with so many players across academia, corporate, the state, civil society organisations, and faith-based organisations,” she said. “However, we confront persistent vulnerabilities, intense backlash – both in the online and offline – and states are in conflict across the globe that put women’s rights in a troubling space.”

### RESEARCH AT IGDS

At the IGDS, Barratt highlighted efforts which include research on child-sexual abuse, child marriages, and social and behavioural change to end gender-based violence.

Further research efforts include gender and climate justice, sexuality, and the intersection of gender and food systems, in collaboration with the Faculty of Food and Agriculture.

“Regionally, we have updated the UWI Gender Policy which is now going through the different levels of approval,” she said. “We strive to work collaboratively with different faculties and departments to advance our research and action.”

Barratt noted that comprehensive data and information will contribute to the development of effective policies and actions.

To date, representatives from the IGDS and other gender stakeholders have been able to intervene on local policies and legislation. Personally, Dr Barratt has been involved in the development of the National Action Plan as part of the UN’s Women, Peace, and Security Resolution 1325.

But IGDS Head is also reminding people that change begins at home and in their local communities.

“We also see young people taking action for themselves and asserting their perspectives on issues,” Barratt said. “In The UWI space, we have the IGDS Ignite, where students have been vibrant, and we also see the inclusion of a gender advisor on The UWI St Augustine Guild of Students, which is so important.”

### TRUE INCLUSION

Barratt’s vision for women is that their existence, presence, and contributions are not seen as an exception, but rather a way of life, which would indicate true inclusion.

“Women’s contributions need to be inherently valued and not pointed out after the fact to be appreciated,” she stated.

She is hopeful that there will continue to be a reduction in gender-based violence and collaborative work with men, boys, and gender non-conforming individuals, to contribute to this.

Dr Barratt calls on influencers, the media, the state, faith-based organisations, and civil society organisations to continue to work together to address gender-based violence.

“Women are not a homogenous group. So when we speak of gains for women, we also need to be cognisant of the fact that not all women enjoy those gains, and we must work to ensure all segments are empowered,” she said.

“Therefore, women and girls’ ways of being, realities, vulnerabilities, considerations, decisions, and so forth, must be included as part of what is standard ways of being human rather than being an exception,” Dr Barratt concluded.



## ■ CARNIVAL



Dr Suzanne Burke (front row, blue dress), with PhD students from the Cultural Studies programme of the Department of Literary, Cultural and Communication Studies (DLCCS), in a relaxed moment during the trip to Ghana.

## DR SUZANNE BURKE delivers keynote speech at Carnival conference in Ghana

BY OMEGA FRANCIS

**“For many of us, the Carnival’s journey** to rekindle part of its roots through this conference is both noteworthy and necessary, simply because so many elements of the carnival arts that we practise today find their origins here. Of equal importance is the route it has taken us to get here.”

These were the words of Dr Suzanne Burke, Head of the Department of Literary, Cultural and Communication Studies (DLCCS) at UWI St Augustine, as she delivered her keynote speech to the 10th International Conference on Carnival and Masquerade Arts in Winneba, Ghana.

The conference, titled “Rhythm of a People: Tradition, Connection, Innovation and Decolonisation” was held from December 4 to 9, 2023 at the University of Education, and hosted Dr Burke and ten PhD students from the Cultural Studies programme whose research was related to the themes of Carnival, masquerade arts, performativity, and resistance.

Delivering her keynote speech, “Spirits Rise: The Significant Power of the Carnival Arts as Portals for Transilience”, Dr Burke showcased the power of Carnival to act as a portal through which we can enact radical change, incorporate sacred rituals (such as J’ouvert), provide space for liberation, and release societal tensions.

Emphasising the dynamic structure of Carnival that includes the economy, state, and people, Dr Burke’s address dealt primarily with how Carnival and masquerade art can be used as an anti-colonial praxis that seeks to decentre empire and act as a transformative force.

Delving into how Caribbean-styled Carnivals have distinctive forms of artistic expression that utilises music, masking, mimicry, and movement to identify and unsettle societal injustice, she posits, “It connects us to each other. We in the Caribbean have all come from somewhere else, and the conference being held in Ghana recognises just one of the roots of Carnival. By going back to Africa, there is an acknowledgement that it is something that we carried and are bringing back.”

After attending the conference, Dr Burke recognised that many on the African continent are particularly interested in Carnival as a mechanism for peace and social justice, underscoring how the festival itself can be used as a portal for connection across the seas.

“When I talk about the Carnival and masquerade arts as portals for change, it is not just in the messages that the masquerade can give, or the music can give, but also for us to feel somatically, inside of our DNA – a connection to our roots and to each other – and these are the things that allow us to know what we know in different ways,” she said.

On the second day of the conference (December 5), Dr Burke presented a conference paper, “‘Town will need a renovation’ – The Performative Affect of Super Blue’s Music (1980-1995)” which discussed how Super Blue’s music and live performances were also insightful tools to theorise about society, identity, and creating change.

“When you have a piece of art, it brings you inside of the conversation, and you know that fact in a different way,” she explained. “That can effect change in the way you deal with yourself, you understand yourself, and how you deal with communities and people around you.”

Alongside Dr Burke, the ten PhD students that attended the conference also presented papers, which were all well received. The trip was wrapped up by touring places of interest such as the Kwame Nkrumah Memorial, the slave dungeons at the Gold Coast and Elmina, as well as the hospitality centre at Elmina where the group were hosted by Queen Gwira Akyinim, Elmina, Nana Tseasewaa III.

## The National Festival from all angles

*Dr Burke’s upcoming book takes on T&T Carnival from academic, political, and social perspectives, made up of essays from a range of diverse, expert voices*



PHOTO: AFIYA FRANCIS

Trinidad and Tobago’s Carnival is one of the more renowned carnivals in the world, and serves as a representation of the fusion of cultural influences from Europe, Asia, Africa, and of course, our indigenous population. However, understanding how Carnival works and what it takes to encourage its growth and sustainability is extremely important when it comes to the future of the festival.

In line with this, Dr Suzanne Burke, Head of DLCCS, has integrated writings from those in the Carnival industry into the collection, *Memory, Politics and Performance in Trinidad and Tobago’s Carnival Complex*. The book seeks to build the scholarship of Carnival.

Edited by Dr Burke herself, this book includes presentations made from practitioners, academics, policy makers, and educators at the 2017 symposium, “Memory, Performance and Politics: The Trinidad and Tobago Carnival Complex”, that was organised by the Cultural Studies section at UWI St Augustine.

The essays are organised around five thematic areas: Politics, State Policy and Governance, Politics and the Performance of Identity, Gender Performativity, Systems of Knowledge Creation and Dissemination, and Nostalgia and the Construction of Memory.

Dr Burke, in speaking on her upcoming work, stated that, “The more important thing that I want to underscore is the building of scholarship on Carnival from the region. Not other people writing about us, but us writing about ourselves.”

Opening up larger discussions in the society as to what Carnival means to everyone, and how it can be used as a mechanism of seeing and imagining ourselves differently are other important aspects of the book. Recognising policy issues that are necessary for creating the kind of environment that any festival needs to grow will also be addressed.

“I think these types of contributions add to discussions around Carnival that in the past have centred in a very specific disciplinary silo,” she said.

Beginning with a dedication by Marvin George, and an introduction by Dr Burke herself, the collection includes contributions that examine topics of gender performativity by female soca artists; calypso as a site of socio-political commentary; and the incorporation of resistance, integration, and commodification to the festival; and even speaks to how Carnival is taught in schools.

The collection of writings ends with a special think piece by Tony Hall entitled, “Mas as a Living Museum: an exploration of the work of Peter Minshall” which states that Carnival is “a very important mirror through which we can observe and reflect on this drama and our culture”.

Other contributors include Keith Nurse, Keron Niles, Leah Gordon, Joanne Briggs, Haroun and Laila Shah, Kai Barratt, Nikoli Attai, Kela Francis, Guy Massiah, Janelle Sanchez, Ceval Regis, Candace Hughes Bengochea, Jarula Wegner, and Dixie-Anne Banga.

Memory, Politics and Performance in Trinidad and Tobago’s Carnival Complex will be launched in August 2024.

*Omega Francis*



## ■ CARNIVAL

**Slinger Francisco, the Mighty Sparrow and Calypso King of the World**, is noted for his versatility of style and subject in this musical genre. In songs such as *No Doctor No*, *PAYE*, *Federation*, *Get the Hell Out* and *BG Plantain*, he focuses on the political leadership of Dr Eric Williams, the founder of the People's National Movement (PNM), First Prime Minister and father of the twin island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Between 1956 to 1966, the Mighty Sparrow and Dr Williams both found themselves in their respective careers, creating the opportunity for some of Mighty Sparrow's great works.

Academics' consensus is that, in his early years, Sparrow used his calypsos to win popular support for Eric Williams and the PNM. Dr Louis Regis declared, for example, "the PNM public relations thrust was dictated by Williams ... and was supported magnificently by Sparrow in calypso". But, while indeed Sparrow's early social commentary calypsos appeared as a stamp of approval for Williams and the PNM, there is also evidence to the contrary, as some of his renditions, to varying degrees and manner, denounced and rejected some of the policies of the Prime Minister.

*No Doctor No*, released in 1957, became the first calypso through which Sparrow vented his and the people's frustration with Dr Williams. The chorus captured the primary complaint: "They raise up on the taxi fare/and why the blasted milk so dear". The calypso articulated a multi-layered but ultimately negative public response to the rising cost of living resulting from the PNM's economic programme of 1956. The repetition in the chorus of "No Doctor No" serving as an outright rejection of the hike in prices. Sparrow also offered the jocose-serious threat of the grand charging "badjohn" calypsonian armed with "the big piece of mango wood". Dr Regis's writings reveal that the PNM was, not surprisingly, displeased with the calypso and held a consultation with Sparrow on the matter – itself a clear indication that the relationship between Dr Williams and the calypsonian was far from continuously harmonious.

Writers like Regis have highlighted that *PAYE*, the road march of 1958, was a masterpiece of PNM propaganda despite crying shame on the PNM's 1957 taxation measure. It ventriloquised Williams as a pragmatic but callous and authoritarian leader. Sparrow also offered a retort in response to the Doctor's quip to pay as you earn which was "Yuh paying to learn". The calypsonian even called on his "badjohn" father to sharpen the axe in preparation for the visit from the tax collector, but later sells the axe to comply, though unwillingly, making *PAYE* an ode to resistance and compliance.

*Federation* certainly favoured the PNM to an extent, yet it included observations that were far from complimentary to the regime. Sparrow made Jamaica's parochialism the scapegoat of the collapsed Caribbean union when he sang accusingly, "People want to know why Jamaica run from the Federation". Sparrow went on, however, to identify the collective culpability of all ten members, including Trinidad and Tobago led by

**UWI TODAY**  
is pleased to reprint these academic essays on aspects of Trinidad and Tobago's cultural history. They have been slightly modified for publication.



## A Calypsonian's Critique of the Regime of Dr Eric Williams, 1956~1966

BY DR GELIEN  
MATTHEWS

Williams, when he sang "...we failed miserably".

Sparrow also contradicted and blamed the doctor in the line "Everybody fighting for independence, singularly Trinidad for instance". Ultimately, Sparrow did not spare the doctor in his indictment that "Federation boil down to simply this/It's dog eat dog and survival of the fittest". Without exception, each party in Sparrow's opinion was as guilty as Jamaica was in causing the demise of the short-lived and ill-fated political federation of the Caribbean region.

The most scathing and sarcastic attack on Williams was in *Get to Hell Out*, released in 1965. In 1962, Dr Patrick Solomon was Minister of Home Affairs in the PNM government with responsibility for the police service. Public opinion had assessed him as guilty of abuse of power and nepotism when Solomon's stepson was arrested and incarcerated for throwing missiles in a public space, and Solomon allegedly abused his authority by entering the Woodbrook Police Station, slapping an officer on duty, ordering the release of his stepson, and taking him home. The opposition at the time, along with the wider public, demanded Solomon's resignation. At first, Dr Williams supported this position, but eventually, the Prime Minister not only reinstated Solomon, but also promoted him to Minister of External Affairs.

Williams' handling of the Solomon affair was difficult to defend, and Sparrow made no effort to do so. In *Get to Hell Out*, Sparrow scorned the doctor's tendency at times to act autocratically: "I am no dictator but when I pass an order/Mr Speaker, this matter must go no further/I have nothing more to say, and it must be done my way/Come on, come on, come on, meeting done for the day." Sparrow's biting and sustained sarcasm in *Get to Hell Out* provides uncompromising justification to revise the extent to which he had been regarded as the mouthpiece of Dr Williams and the PNM.

Sparrow took another public but playful jab through a combination of political protest and sexual innuendo at the Doctor in *BG Plantain*, released in 1966. Employing a female protagonist, the calypsonian complained about the adverse effects of banning the import of plantains to Trinidad and Tobago from British Guiana. Typical of many of Sparrow's racy compositions, he used double entendre as the plaintiff spoke disparagingly of Trinidad's plantain: "ain't good at all ... too small, too soft and got no blasted taste". Standing behind his female plaintiff, the calypsonian expressed no confidence in the doctor by declaring "... doctor you too unfair ... this is one time you ain't know what you doing".

This range of evidence available on the relationship between the Mighty Sparrow and Dr Eric Williams calls for an important revision in how the existing literature has conceptualised the interaction between these two. Sparrow was indeed a "PNMite", but he was also a bard of the people and for the people. There was no guarantee that from one Carnival season to another his releases would favour Dr Eric Williams and the PNM.



## ■ CARNIVAL

# TRINIDAD CARNIVAL

## Inclusive of Many Cultures

BY DRS ALLISON RAMSAY AND AAKEIL MURRAY



A jab molassie covered in red, white, and black, gives a terrifying and surprisingly patriotic performance during UWI St Augustine's Old Yard 2024. Carnival is both one of the most recognisable aspects of Trinidad and Tobago culture and the product of several cultures coming together. A process that continues to this day. PHOTO: KC MEDIA LTD

**The history of Trinidad Carnival** is rooted in its connection to colonialism and migration. In the 18th century, French colonisers transplanted their culture of Carnival to Trinidad, and it has transformed throughout the centuries. Originally, a celebration exclusively for whites, the expression, freedom, and second world that Carnival provided could not be contained. The enslaved Africans who were imported to work in the sugar industry negotiated their own Carnival space, and Canboulay became significant to that populace who could not access the masquerades and balls of the planter class.

Carnival transformed through the influence of the emancipated blacks, particularly during the era of the Jamette Carnival in the 19th century. Some of the black populace of Port-of-Spain, including migrants from the Eastern Caribbean who came as a source of labour, also lived in the urban slums. From there, emerged the badjohns, chauntelles, and stickbands who influenced the trajectory of Carnival that became regarded by those of the upper classes as lewd and obscene.

As Carnival continued to evolve, so too did the rise of various characters like Baby Dolls, Dame Lorraines, and Devils; calypso; tamboo bamboo bands; and steelbands, which were the sounds of the black working class into the 20th century.

The East Indian community, who came to work as indentured labourers on the plantations, also contributed to the diversity of Trinidad Carnival. Chutney music, tassa drums, and Hindi made an impact on calypso/soca music, inspiring the creation of the chutney soca genre. Some songs which celebrated Indian culture, such as Chris Garcia's Chutney Bacchanal and Drupatee and Machel Montano's Indian Gyal, became mainstream and were embraced across the region. Indian dress has also influenced costume design for masquerade.

### ARRIVAL OF THE COCO PANYOLS

Trinidad has a history of embracing the cultures of its migrants, and its Carnival is no exception. Trinidad's connections to Venezuela go back to the Pre-Columbian time of the indigenous peoples who often came from South America to settle on the island. Despite Spanish settlement in both the South American mainland and Trinidad in the late 15th century, migration from Venezuela to Trinidad experienced a significant increase after the British seized Trinidad from Spain in 1797.

Due to abolitionist movements in Britain to end the trans-Atlantic slave trade and ultimately African enslavement, peons from Venezuela came to Trinidad in droves to work from the early 19th century and settled in several agricultural areas. They were also referred to as "cocoa panyols" since they worked on cocoa estates. Political and social turmoil in South America also led to the migration of wealthy and prominent Venezuelans, such as Antonio Gomez, a Spanish-born secretary of a Venezuelan Royalist General who was sent as a diplomat to the British Governor of Trinidad in 1813, and who subsequently performed the role of Assessor to Governor Woodford, the fourth and longest serving British Governor of Trinidad. Gómez eventually purchased the large La Pastora Cocoa Estate in the Santa Cruz valley, and settled there.

In the past, some aspects of Venezuelan culture have remained in Trinidad, including pastelles, empanadas, parang, and its accompanying musical instruments, like the cuatro and mandolin. The burrokeet, a traditional Carnival character which gives the illusion of a dancer riding a small donkey, is part of Venezuelan tradition where the rider performs a dance.

From 2015, political and socio-economic unrest in Venezuela led to higher levels of poverty and the subsequent record-breaking migration of millions of

Venezuelans to various parts of the world. Currently, Venezuelans comprise the largest group of migrants in Trinidad. Their presence is seen and heard in the current landscape, including Carnival.

In 2020, Maria Nutter De Espinal showcased at Carnival La Burriquita, the Burrokeet mas to Spanish music. Nutter is involved in a children's project that promotes the preservation of La Burriquita and moko jumbies of Trinidad and Tobago, which were showcased by Venezuelan and Trinidadian participants at Kiddies Carnival this year.

In 2022, a Pan to the Poet series was launched to assist with the integration and harmony between Trinbagonians and Venezuelans residing in the country, through the steelpan. During Carnival 2023, Iwer George performed with a Spanish translator at a Spanish wet fete. A Spanish remix of Hard Fete by Road March winner Bunji Garlin was played on the streets of Port-of-Spain on Carnival Tuesday, and The Queen of Bacchanal, Destra Garcia, released a song, Fuego, which features a Latin musical arrangement to lyrics sung in Spanish and Trinidad Creole English.

In so doing, Destra not only showcased her versatility but also enhanced the appeal of soca to the Latin market with this fusion style. There are many offshoots of soca, and it remains to be seen whether Latin soca becomes another category and whether it will appeal to local and Latin performers resident in Trinidad and Tobago.

Trinidad Carnival is all inclusive, not referring only to the experience which typically characterises fetes of this nature, but it is also all inclusive in terms of the cultural expressions it incorporates of its many people which is linked to the island's history and culture of migration.



# My Journey:

## Navigating Public Transport in Trinidad and Tobago

BY KATHERINE AGONG



The author in transit.

**Trinidad and Tobago, my beloved homeland**, is a place where every corner holds a story, and every journey an adventure. Recently, I embarked on a rather “unconventional” (although it shouldn’t be) trip – a ride on a Public Transport Service Corporation (PTSC) bus to a board meeting. Allow me to share my tale filled with surprises and insights that shed light on the complexities of our island’s public transportation system. Let me take you through the highs and lows, the good, the bad, and the downright ugly moments that defined my excursion.

First, I must state that urban areas in particular cannot function well without a reliable public transportation system and the associated public transport infrastructure. A good public transportation system guarantees citizens’ efficient mobility and lowers pollution and traffic congestion.

Feedback from the public is essential to the system’s development and improvement. The views of members of the public are vital in identifying areas for improvement, offering creative ideas, and offering constructive criticism on their experiences. It is great for us transport planners when citizens directly participate in the improvement of services by sharing their opinions and providing insights. This usually results in a public transportation system that is more reliable, convenient, sustainable, and able to meet the wide range of community demands.

With that being said, I’ll now tell you about my bus journey. Let’s start with “the good”. Picture this: a waiting time of just 30 seconds before I hopped aboard the bus. Was it sheer luck or a testament to the system’s efficiency? I’ll let you be the judge. Adding to the charm was the demeanour of the bus driver, whose friendliness made the journey feel like a casual chat among old friends. But this is Trinidad, where friendly chats with people you don’t know is normal, right?

The real marvel came as we navigated the Priority Bus Route (PBR). Despite the chaos of rush hour traffic happening elsewhere, we arrived at Port-of-Spain in a mere 30 minutes from St Augustine, a feat unimaginable had I opted for a private car. It embodied the potential of public transport to ease congestion and promote sustainable mobility, especially during peak season for events and festivities such as Carnival.

The spaciousness of the bus, a haven for tall individuals like myself, and the affordability of the journey, priced at a modest \$4, further enhanced my appreciation for the PTSC service. However, amidst the commendations lay areas ripe for improvement, as encapsulated in “the bad” and “the ugly” facets of my journey.

The cleanliness of the bus left much to be desired, reminiscent of public transport experiences in major metropolitan cities such as New York and London. Furthermore, the antiquated payment system, reliant solely on physical paper bus tickets, poses a hurdle in today’s digital age. Thankfully, a stroke of luck saved the day as I unearthed an ancient bus ticket from five years prior, prompting a reflection on the urgent need for modernisation and accessibility in our transport infrastructure.

Yet, it was “the ugly” aspects of my journey that left a bitter taste in my mouth. The absence of WiFi, a modern-day necessity, underscored the digital divide prevalent in many developing nations like ours. Plus, there are no detailed timetables available... anywhere! Moreover, accessibility issues at bus stops highlighted the systemic barriers faced by people with disabilities, a stark reminder of the work that remains to be done in fostering inclusivity.

In sharing my journey, I hope to spark a conversation about the triumphs and tribulations of public transport in Trinidad and Tobago. It’s a call to action for stakeholders to heed the clarion call from members of the public for reform, and for governments around the region to collaborate with institutions like The University of the West Indies to envision a future where our transportation system is accessible and equitable for all.

My journey served as a microcosm of the challenges and opportunities inherent in navigating our island’s public transport network. Every journey, no matter how mundane, holds the potential to inspire change and drive progress in our quest for a better tomorrow.

*Katherine Agong is a Senior Transportation Planner and Transportation Engineer undertaking research and leadership in the transport sector in Trinidad and Tobago. She is also a PhD student in UWI’s Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering whose research focuses on public transport in the Global South. She is the Transport Expert on the Board of Directors of the National Planning Authority of Trinidad and Tobago.*



## Saved by the Bus

Public transportation emerges as a Caribbean asset in the fight against climate change

BY LEAH WRIGHT

**On the heels of the COP28 meeting**, there was a global consensus to make a full and immediate transition from gas-powered vehicles to electric vehicles (EVs). This action aims to address the climate change issues in transportation in a more rigorous manner and to meet the targets set in the near future. While this effort is applauded, it is important to address the many challenges that will need to be dealt with for this transition to be environmentally effective.

Even though EVs generate fewer greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions than gas vehicles throughout their lifespan, the manufacturing process may offset this difference. Presently, the production of EV batteries consumes a substantial amount of energy, often derived from fossil fuels, resulting in the production of approximately 70 percent more CO<sub>2</sub> compared to traditional car battery production methods.

Furthermore, the disposal and recycling of EV batteries can also contribute to the levels of CO<sub>2</sub> pollution. The economic feasibility of not recycling these batteries, coupled with their current limitations for recycling, makes addressing these issues important to maximising the positive impact of the shift to EVs.

### A sustainable and effective solution

There is a practical and long-term solution to mitigate climate issues stemming from GHG emission in transportation – public transportation. At COP28, emphasis was placed on the need for a shift from private cars to active travel modes, such as walking and cycling, and public transportation. The beauty of public transportation is its capacity to transport more people in a single trip compared to private cars. Even with the incorporation of EVs in public transportation fleets, it allows us to minimise the production of EV batteries. Public transportation emerges as a sustainable and effective solution.

While the solution is clear, it’s not a straight road. Here in the Caribbean, the public transportation systems have structural problems, limited maintenance, and are often regarded as an afterthought by many travellers.

At present, we are seeing the impact on our transportation system from planning decisions made as early as the 1970s. The decision to have single use, rather than mixed land use developments (the policy of having solely commercial and solely residential land development), has led to the auto-centric travel behaviour of the region. Many people believe that the car is a necessity.

Currently, the public transportation system primarily caters to captive travellers (those without alternative means of transportation). To decarbonise the system, reduce environmental degradation, and encourage a modal shift, we need to optimise public transportation in the Caribbean. It can be the hero that we need, in this climate change fight.

*Ms Leah Wright is an Assistant Lecturer in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at UWI St Augustine’s Faculty of Engineering.*



# The UWI Calendar of Events | March 2024



**Ask UWI**  
**March 26**  
**and 28 | April 3**

**ONLINE**

Interested in personal and professional growth by taking the next step in your education? Submit your questions to the departments and faculties with the information you need at the *Ask UWI* sessions. The upcoming sessions are:

**Pre-engineering** (Faculty of Engineering): **March 26**  
**Physics** (Faculty of Science and Technology): **March 28**  
**Veterinary Medicine** (Faculty of Medical Sciences): **April 3**

**For more information on the Ask UWI sessions, stay tuned to UWI St Augustine's social media pages [facebook.com/UWISTA/](https://facebook.com/UWISTA/), [instagram.com/uwi\\_staugustine/](https://instagram.com/uwi_staugustine/), and [twitter.com/UWI\\_StAugustine](https://twitter.com/UWI_StAugustine)**

## China Caribbean Trade Trends and Implications for Regional Growth March 28

**ONLINE**

Join some of the thought leaders in economics and business to discuss the trade and development impact of China-Caribbean relations over the last few decades. This session is part of a National Conversations series hosted by the Trade and Economic Development Unit of UWI St Augustine's Department of Economics. National Conversations focus on key macroeconomic issues, exploring policy and governance.

**Host:** Emeritus Professor of Economics Patrick Watson

**Feature Speaker:** Dr Mark Wenner, Assistant Professor of Economics at the University of Virgin Islands

**Other Speakers:**

Dr Bhoendradatt Tewarie, former UWI St Augustine Campus Principal and Minister of Planning

Prof. Roger Hosein, Professor of Economics at UWI St Augustine

**To register, visit <https://bit.ly/TEDUCHINATRADE>. For more information, visit the Department of Economics site at [sta.uwi.edu/fss/economics](https://sta.uwi.edu/fss/economics)**



**Open Days 2024**  
**April 13 and 14**  
**St Augustine Campus**

Join us at UWI St Augustine for our exciting and informative Open Days. This is a fantastic opportunity for prospective students to explore the multitude of programmes the campus has to offer. Engage with faculty members and current students, who will share their experiences and insights about life at UWI. Whether you're a secondary school student pondering your next steps, a parent seeking the best for your child, or simply curious about what makes The UWI a leading institution in the Caribbean, our Open Days are the perfect event for you. We can't wait to welcome you to our campus and help you embark on an exciting educational journey!

**For updates on Open Days, visit The UWI St Augustine website at [sta.uwi.edu/](https://sta.uwi.edu/), or on social media at [facebook.com/UWISTA/](https://facebook.com/UWISTA/), [twitter.com/uwi\\_staugustine](https://twitter.com/uwi_staugustine), and [tt.linkedin.com/school/uwistaugustine/](https://tt.linkedin.com/school/uwistaugustine/)**



**Oliver Cromwell Cox**  
**Conference 2024**  
**April 25 – 27**  
**Learning Resource Centre**  
**St Augustine Campus**

Hosted by the Department of Behavioural Sciences, this conference, under the theme "Caste, Class, and Race", is dedicated to the exploration of the work of Trinidadian-American sociologist Oliver Cromwell Cox. Topics will include a study of Cox's life and work, the role of race and class in contemporary Caribbean social thought, the concept of racial capitalism, and intersectionality and feminist theory in Caribbean sociology.

This conference is an opportunity for researchers, tertiary-level and secondary level students, and policy-makers to learn about this impactful Caribbean scholar and his work, which still has great applicability today.

**Keynote Speaker:** Professor John H McClendon III, Michigan State University

**Registration Link:**

Individual: <https://bit.ly/Cromwell-Cox> | Group: <https://bit.ly/CCGroupReg>

**For more information, email [STABehavioural.Sciences@sta.uwi.edu](mailto:STABehavioural.Sciences@sta.uwi.edu)**

## Caribbean Climate and Health Responder Course April 2 – May 2

**ONLINE**

The Faculty of Medical Sciences, in collaboration with other entities, invites you to register for the Caribbean Climate and Health Responder Course: Education for Action - Second Edition. This course aims to enhance health professionals' knowledge, self-efficacy, and communication skills regarding the climate crisis, giving them the tools to enhance patient care, and public health practice, and serve as trusted messengers within their institutions and communities.

Registration is free and the course takes place every Tuesday and Thursday from 6 to 7:30pm.

**Register now at <https://bit.ly/49GLPaE>**

## (U)We outside: The Carnival Series – Under the Samaan Tree April 12, 19, and 26 St Augustine Campus

What does the future hold for the national festival? This discussion series, hosted by the Department of Literary, Cultural, and Communication Studies, will look at the public conversations on Carnival and its role as a critical site of liberation and justice. From the levels of public participation and its rising costs; to the divides between traditional and contemporary mas, and urban and rural resource allocation; and even the corporatisation of Carnival will be discussed.

The Carnival Series conversations will include:

1. Who Owns Carnival – April 12
2. Carnival as Love and Liberatory Practice – April 19
3. (Re)stating carnival's place in society – April 26

**For more information, visit the Department of Literary, Cultural, and Communication Studies' site at <https://sta.uwi.edu/fhe/dlcc/>**