



Together in Song



“So rejoice in a rhythm of celebration! Lift your voice with a feeling of satisfaction!” sang Ella Andall in her classic *Bring Down The Power*. The vibrant message was taken to heart by the members of the Signal Hill Alumni Choir during their performance at Ignite: A Benefit Concert on the evening of April 2 at UWI St Augustine. Hosted by The UWI Development and Endowment Fund (UWIDEF), and held at the Daaga Auditorium, Ignite brought the Lydian Singers and the Signal Hill Alumni Choir together in a first-of-its-kind event. The celebrated choral groups performed myriad songs, from spiritual to soul to soca, including Madame Andall’s captivating celebration of love. The sold-out show was one of UWIDEF’s initiatives to raise funds for scholarships and bursaries for students at the St Augustine campus. PHOTO: ULTIMATE MEDIA TT.



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FROM THE PRINCIPAL

BLOOD DONATION, *a Life-changing Service*

At its heart, The University of the West Indies is an institution of service. As we celebrate our 75th year in 2023, it is important to remember and reaffirm that fundamental purpose. The UWI's most obvious role is to provide education and training, advance knowledge through research, and inform policy through its knowledge and expertise. Underlying these immediate services is the essential service – developing the Caribbean, our home, and making it a better place to live, for this and succeeding generations. One of the main ways of fulfilling that fundamental purpose, apart from our core services, is outreach.

As part of this year's commemoration of The UWI's establishment in 1948, the St Augustine campus chose to highlight one of our most consistent and impactful outreach activities – The UWI Blood Donor Foundation's (UWIBDF) Voluntary Non-remunerated Blood Drive. It was held on April 29 at the Mt Hope Blood Bank at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex (EWMSC).

The outstanding team at The UWIBDF is led by Dr Kenneth Charles, one of Trinidad and Tobago's most powerful advocates for the life-saving benefits of blood donation, who has for many years worked to raise awareness on the importance of a national blood supply, and engage our society's charitable instincts. The UWI St Augustine campus, through Dr Charles, led the effort to change the nation's blood donation policy. Trinidad and Tobago's Ministry of Health has now adopted this voluntary model of blood donations.

The blood drive itself is a collective effort. UWI St Augustine worked in close partnership with the Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of Health and the North Central Regional Health Authority (NCRHA) to make it a success. Of course, the blood drive could not have succeeded without the personnel at the event that ensured the environment was safe, secure, and comforting, and that the services were provided to donors and other attendees efficiently.

Apart from giving people the opportunity to donate blood, the blood drive offered several free services – blood pressure screening, blood glucose testing, and body mass index (BMI) calculation.



The blood drive itself is a collective effort. UWI St Augustine worked in close partnership with the Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of Health and the North Central Regional Health Authority (NCRHA) to make it a success.

The work of UWIBDF is an example of not only The UWI at its best, but also Trinidad and Tobago society. Since 2015, UWIBDF has been successfully collaborating on this initiative, consistently collecting over 100 units of blood to add to the national blood supply. That means ordinary citizens are giving of their time and this vital resource with no reward other than the intrinsic benefits of altruism, national pride, and a desire to help others. In this regard, Apart from the material benefit of bolstering T&T's blood supply, The UWI is bolstering the spirit of giving in society. Our desire is to see that spirit spread. Charitable activities and a sense of community are two of the most underrated assets for national development.

As The UWI commemorates 75 years as a Caribbean institution, we should hold outreach efforts like the blood drive as reflection points on the university's truest purpose. We are educators, researchers, experts, advisors, and archivists of the most valuable knowledge. But ultimately, we are agents tasked with making this region a better place. That includes activities to support individuals and communities, informed by selflessness, and guided by compassion.

In closing, I encourage everyone that is able to do so, to donate blood through recognised and legitimate agencies such as The UWIBDF and the Ministry of Health. Your contributions can save lives.

Follow The UWIBDF

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/UWIBlood/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/uwiblood>

Ministry of Health: <https://health.gov.tt/services/blood-donation> to access safe and secure blood donation services.

Rose-Marie Antoine

Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine

Campus Principal



JOB DESCRIPTION: Students from The UWI St Augustine listen intently to a representative of Republic Bank Ltd (RBL) at the UWI/RBL World of Work (WoW) Recruitment Fair on April 14. Hosted by the Division of Student Services and Development (DSSD), WoW brought students together with over 40 companies at the JFK Auditorium and the Engineering Undercroft to meet and discuss job opportunities. Representatives from leading companies in industries like accounting, banking, energy, engineering, financial services, insurance, manufacturing, media, retail, and wholesale among others met with the future job seekers. For years, WoW has given UWI graduates the advantage in T&T's competitive job market through valuable industry insights, job tips, and job opportunities. WoW 2023 was one of the biggest to date. PHOTO: DARIUS AND LIVE VIDEO PRODUCTIONS

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<https://uwi.edu/75/>

■ CAMPUS NEWS

Cocoa and medical education will become very important to the future of UWI St Augustine. This is the hope of Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine who delivered her first Campus Principal's presentation at the 2023 St Augustine Campus Council meeting on March 14.

Speaking at the annual business meeting of the campus, themed "A New Day", Principal Antoine explained that the aim is to "build on our gains", to become more self-sufficient and to fulfill the goal of embracing enterprise.

"In terms of revenue generation, innovation, entrepreneurship and so on, we intend to invest," she said. "Spend the next year – this year in fact – investing in our future both tangibly and intangibly in some of the big projects".

One of these is commercialising the chocolate factory that is being developed by The UWI Cocoa Research Centre, which Professor Antoine described as one of the prime and revolutionary drivers of the local cocoa industry.

The other major opportunity for revenue generation is the new Global School of Medicine at The UWI's South Campus.

"We can leverage the considerable advantages we have already, the reputation of our medical faculty and our accreditation status," declared the Campus Principal. She anticipates that the school will be a high-value asset worthy of investment.

Capitalising on UWI's global reputation and visibility

In his remarks, Vice-Chancellor Professor Sir Hilary Beckles described "the cocoa enterprise" as "a magnificent project primed and ready for the world" and a "source of revenue investment potential for the future". He characterised the medical school as a national project and part of "that medical spine of research and student engagement from Mt Hope through to Couva all the way to Penal/Debe".

"That spine," he said, "will become the medical artery of the country."

Sir Hilary congratulated The UWI community on its progress, affirming that the university's global reputation and visibility has never been greater. As he highlighted The UWI's achievements regionally, he singled out its contributions during the height of the pandemic as the university's "finest hour".

For several years now, The UWI has been developing and implementing revenue streams to make up for funding shortfalls caused by major reductions in government funding, increased competition in the tertiary education space, and the overall economic slowdown in the region. The need for new funding sources have only intensified following the severe economic consequences of the pandemic.

"Despite the fact that the St Augustine campus still offers the lowest costing degrees across all the campuses," Professor Antoine observed, "we are still challenged in relation to our finances."

'WE ARE INVESTING in our FUTURE'

Revenue generating projects like cocoa manufacturing and the Global School of Medicine, intensified alumni outreach – Prof Antoine lays out UWI St Augustine's enterprising agenda

BY DIXIE-ANN BELLE



PHOTOS: ANEEL KARIM



Campus Council Chair Ms Sharon Christopher.

Big projects and a multiplicity of smaller ones

Despite these concerns, Principal Belle-Antoine emphasised the benefits of UWI's projects and highlighted the importance of the Alumni Giving Project going forward.

"We hope to encourage our hundreds of thousands of alumni to be more philanthropic and donate to us," she said.

She also expressed satisfaction with the achievements of the various faculties and said they are all doing their part in attracting funding.

Sir Hilary noted, "University management in difficult circumstances will require a very scientific approach."

He emphasised the importance of the government working with the university and said, "these big projects are going to be very significant structurally in the medium to long term, it is a multiplicity of smaller projects within the faculties that will also add significant value."

He stated that The UWI is starting a new phase of development. "The tide is turning. It is like turning a cruise ship in a small harbour. It is not going to happen rapidly. It's a slow but gradual and determined process."

Echoing the meeting's theme and the importance of reflection and being future focused as UWI celebrates its 75th anniversary, St Augustine Campus Council Chair, Sharon Christopher affirmed, "a new day has indeed come."

Every year, The UWI's five campuses host their Campus Council meetings to report on their finances, operations, and activities. A sixth University Council meeting is held by The UWI's administrative centre at the Regional Headquarters in Jamaica.

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



BANANAS, tomatoes, melons, and much more are now on sale at the Faculty of Food and Agriculture (FFA) Market Place. The Market Place at the FFA's headquarters in the Dudley Huggins Building on the St Augustine Campus was launched in March. It carries locally-grown products such as fresh fruit and vegetables, sustainably

reared gourmet meats, milk, plants, seed kits and many other items, and is also a campus community-building project. One of its goals is to nurture the entrepreneurial skills of FFA students.

The opening of the FFA Market Place is particularly significant because 2023 marks the 100th anniversary of the establishment

of the faculty in its original form as the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture (ICTA). Describing FFA's century-long legacy, Professor Mark Wuddivira, Dean of FFA, said: "Our marketplace is a testament to the vision and dedication of our faculty and staff members, who have worked tirelessly to create a dynamic and engaging environment that fosters creativity and innovation. We are proud to have a faculty that is not only committed to academic excellence, but also to the practical application of that knowledge."

■ **The FFA Market Place is open to the campus community from Monday to Friday between the hours of 10:00 am to 3:00 pm, in Room A on the ground floor of the Dudley Huggins Building.**

PHOTO: MAHERA ALI-SALADEEN



■ CAMPUS NEWS

On April 5, The UWI St Augustine Actuarial Science Club held a ceremony at the Department of Life Sciences Conference Room to celebrate UWI graduate Toni-Marie Bobart becoming a Fellow of the United States Society of Actuaries (SOA).

Joining just over 19,000 other fellows from around the world, Bobart said the achievement was not an easy one, but she wants to be an inspiration to other aspiring actuaries and young people pursuing their dreams.

Though Bobart qualified in 2021, it was difficult to hold any ceremonies at that time because of the pandemic.

Speaking at the event, she said, “Sometimes I have to pinch myself to believe that I am where I am right now, because becoming an SOA Fellow has been a dream of mine for as long as I can remember.”

She added, “The road, or rather mountain, to get here seemed too long and steep at times, but thankfully I didn’t have to do it by myself.”

Bobart completed the over 20 exams needed to become a SOA Fellow while working full-time and completing her studies in the UWI St Augustine Actuarial Science programme. She said the support of her friends, family, UWI lecturers, and God was key to her success.

Now on the other side of the process to become a fellow, Bobart told UWI TODAY her goal is to be a mentor to other up-and-coming actuaries.

Stokeley Smart, Director of The UWI St Augustine Actuarial Science programme, said that Bobart’s achievement is no small feat, given that at least 90 percent of people who start the process to become an SOA Fellow are not successful.

Smart, himself a SOA Fellow, explained that her achievement is even more impressive when placed in the context of someone able to become a fellow in only six years after graduating. The average time to become a fellow is eight years after completing a university programme.

Speaking on his student’s achievement, Smart commented, “It’s said that if the student does not succeed the master, then both the student and the master have failed. It took me a little more than eight years after graduating to become an SOA fellow. So, given I was Toni’s master, and she has done better than I did, that’s

The UWI Graduate Toni-Marie Bobart joins PRESTIGIOUS SOCIETY of ACTUARIES

BY TYRELL GITTENS

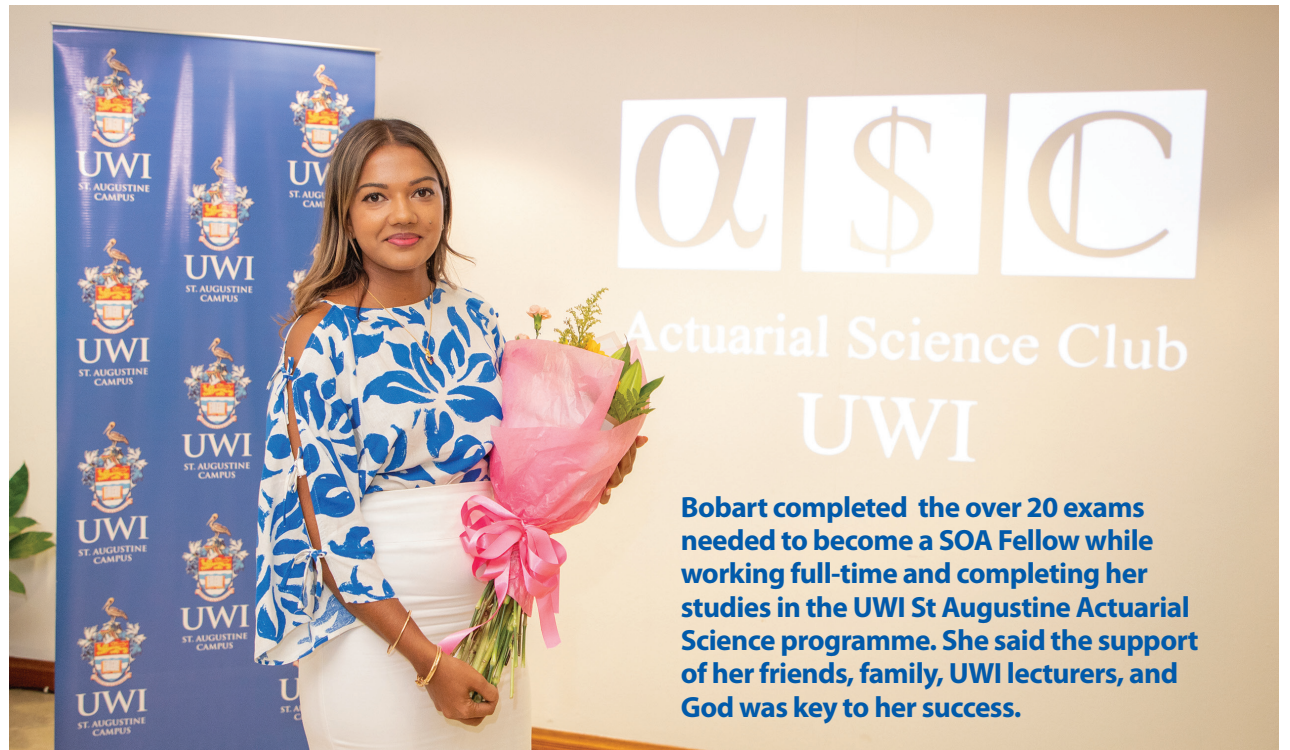


PHOTO: ATIBA CUDJOE

evidence of a job well done.”

He added, “It’s a tremendous achievement because we only started the Actuarial Science programme at UWI St Augustine in 2011.”

Smart said students of the programme are well-equipped to do the exams required to become fellows of both the US Society of Actuaries and the UK Institute and Faculty of Actuaries (IFoA), the world’s two largest professional actuarial societies.

While not every one of the programme’s graduates may go on to become an SOA Fellow, he said data

shows the graduates of The UWI’s Actuarial Science programme are doing well with an estimated 80 percent of graduates gainfully employed at over 40 different organisations.

Smart said five more of the graduates have started the process to become SOA Fellows and are now Associates, which is the designation before becoming a fellow. One graduate is an associate of the IFoA.

He said the fact that the SOA’s current president, John Robinson, is a graduate of The UWI’s Mona Campus should be an added inspiration.

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



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FUTURE

While NASA is looking to the stars, contemplating their next trip to space, the Latin American and Caribbean Space Agency (ALCE) is focusing on the Earth and exploring how a new geospatial observation centre, based at UWI St Augustine's Faculty of Engineering, will fortify the Caribbean against the imminent challenges of climate change.

Established in 2021 to coordinate the cooperative activities of Latin American and Caribbean for the peaceful use and exploration of outer space, the ALCE found the St Augustine campus's Department of Geomatics Engineering and Land Management (DGELM) to be the ideal partner for one of their major projects, the Caribbean Geospatial Observation Centre. The Mexican Foreign Ministry and the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) of Mexico recently signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with The UWI to cement the project.

The centre will produce geographic and statistical information compiled with the aid of satellite images and other data sources. Dr Bheshem Ramlal, Senior Lecturer of Geomatics Engineering at DGELM, explains that these products will support geospatial specialists in addressing regional issues associated with disaster mitigation and management, and climate change. The data will be available for free and will be instrumental in drafting policies related to disaster prevention, urban growth, natural resources and more.

The UWI's involvement in this centre has been growing for a decade.

"The UWI has developed a good working relationship with the United Nations Global Geographic Information Management Americas Committee of Experts," explains Dr Ramlal.

This opened the door to UWI signing an MOU with the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) and INEGI to collaborate on a US \$4.5m project to improve regional geospatial infrastructure. This project was completed in 2018.

DGELM's expertise made it the best choice for the centre. In the previous project, staff members were involved in designing the geodetic infrastructure that has been installed across the region, as well as in delivering training courses. Dr Ramlal notes that because of The UWI's track record and position as a regional institution serving most Caribbean countries, stakeholders approached the university to discuss further collaboration. Since DGELM is located on the St Augustine campus, it was the ideal location for these operations.

Collecting Data from Around the World

The centre's equipment is currently being installed. Once up and running, it will house two high-performance servers supplied by Dell. Major processing and analysis of data will be completed using this equipment.

"The next phase is the installation of specialised software to manage and analyse the Earth observation data that is to be downloaded from several sources," says Dr Ramlal. "At each of these steps, training of UWI personnel will be conducted."

The work at the centre will assimilate resources from around the world. They will collect Earth observation satellite imagery from European Space Agency satellites Sentinel-1 and Sentinel-2. The staff will also have access to datasets collected by US satellites Landsat 8 and 9.

According to Dr Ramlal, "These datasets will be used to undertake research to better analyse land use and land cover changes, mangrove monitoring, assessing desertification, flooding analysis, illegal quarrying, crop mapping and monitoring, Sargassum seaweed mapping and monitoring, mapping forest fires, and other related large scale mapping and monitoring across the Caribbean."

In the years to come, the Caribbean Geospatial Observation Centre has the potential to contribute to major regional research. Once the ALCE becomes fully functional, Dr Ramlal predicts that the centre's team will have access to even more datasets and resources which can be used to meet many of the region's greatest challenges.

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

Looking to space to help SOLVE EARTH'S CHALLENGES

Geomatics Engineering and Land Management department
in partnership with Latin American and Caribbean Space Agency
establishes Geospatial Observation Centre

BY DIXIE-ANN BELLE



The Mexican delegation's visit to campus on March 24, 2023. Pictured are (front row, sitting from left) Prof Krishpersad Manohar – Deputy Dean, Services, Faculty of Engineering; Dr Bheshem Ramlal, Senior Lecturer – Department of Geomatics Engineering and Land Management (DGELM), Project Coordinator; Ambassador Victor Hugo Morales Melendez – Ambassador of Mexico to Trinidad and Tobago; Prof Edwin Ekwue – Dean, Faculty of Engineering; Ambassador Gustavo Alonso Cabrera Rodriguez – Mexican Representative to the Latin American and Caribbean Space Agency. Included as well (second row) are several members of the Faculty of Engineering (including DGELM Head Dr Michael Sutherland, sixth from left), Campus IT Services, members of the Mexican delegation, and other members of the campus administration. PHOTO: ANEEL KARIM



Established in 2021 to coordinate the cooperative activities of Latin American and Caribbean for the peaceful use and exploration of outer space, the ALCE found the St Augustine campus's Department of Geomatics Engineering and Land Management (DGELM) to be the ideal partner for one of their major projects, the Caribbean Geospatial Observation Centre.



HAVE A ROLL: Secondary school students from across T&T line up to enjoy some sushi at the Centre for Language Learning (CLL) Open House 2023. Themed "Explore the World with CLL", the two-day event was held in March at their headquarters on the St Augustine campus. CLL's Open House is their most highly-anticipated event, bringing together young people (and the young at heart) to enjoy a host of cultural and language activities from many peoples and nations. Visitors enjoyed games, live performances, food and drink samples, giveaways, and much more. This year's Open House also honoured CLL's 25th anniversary (see article in the March issue of UWI TODAY).

PHOTO: ANEEL KARIM

■ OUR PEOPLE



Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

The contributions were based on her nearly four decades of research, as well as her experience as a scientist in a region burgeoning with potential but lacking in resources. Her commitment wasn't solely professional – Prof Gobin is committed to making advances for science and marine biology specifically in the Caribbean. In March, her years of advocacy peaked when nearly 200 countries agreed to a historic treaty which has been a point of international contention for 40 years – since 1982 when UNCLOS was created.

Uncharted and unprotected

The Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Treaty will provide a legal framework for protecting the high seas. Presently, nations have jurisdiction over water near their coasts, but the high seas have long been uncharted and unprotected territory, leaving the majority (approximately 50 percent) of the Earth's oceans susceptible to unregulated activities such as deep-sea drilling and overfishing. The treaty would protect up to 30 percent of the waters currently without jurisdiction. Within the next few months, the process for putting the BBNJ treaty into effect will be carried out. Sixty countries must ratify it before BBNJ can be enforced.

Under the BBNJ treaty, marine protected areas (MPAs) will be designated, capacity building for marine technology, research methods and inclusion on research expeditions – all are stipulated with a special focus on developing nations including SIDS. Environmental impact assessments will be required before any engagement in activity in the high seas; and most importantly, a mechanism for profit-sharing of marine genetic resources (MGRs) will be established.

MGRs have long been used in the pharmaceutical industry, however, the processes have been monopolised by countries with wide-reaching resources.

"As a Caribbean scientist, I am extremely pleased that there will now be 'fair and equitable sharing of benefits.' For too long, we have watched 'research ships passing in the night' taking our marine organisms away, and discovering years later, through scientific publications, that a new and valuable pharmaceutical was produced from that organism," said Prof Gobin, who heads the Department of Life Sciences within UWI St Augustine's Faculty of Science and Technology.

Protecting our marine resources

The opportunities open to scientists in the region are numerous, said Prof Gobin:

"SIDS scientists will now have a fighting chance. They can now carry out activities with respect to marine genetic resources and digital sequence information on marine genetic resources of areas beyond national jurisdiction. By working with international scientists on joint projects, in their laboratories etc. This means increased and improved opportunities for development and marine technology advances. For too long, these benefits did not redound to us. Hopefully, they now will."

She added that "Marine resources associated with island territories are often very biodiverse hotspots. SIDS as a group and by their geographic location have their special vulnerabilities: low populations and capacities, and

'What a Historic Moment'



Prof Judith Gobin contributes to decades -in-the making high seas treaty

BY ZAHRA GORDON

reduced resources and/or some rich resources that have great potential for development, but lacking the capacity to develop them. These resources have been the targets of developed countries for too long. SIDS scientists have been waiting to uncover and learn about these ecosystems and their potential for years, as they lack the technical and financial capabilities."

Many of Prof Gobin's lectures and presentations to the UN focused specifically on MGRs as well as capacity building. She has presented on MGRs and profit-sharing, diversity and inclusion, SIDS and preservation. The provisions for MGRs in the treaty are not ideal, however.

"Sure, we compromised at best, but we put aside our differences to deliver a treaty that will be for the good of all mankind – to protect the oceans, build our resilience to climate change, and to safeguard the livelihoods of millions of people. What a historic moment when we laid down our political differences and became a world without divisions," said Gobin.

'Now the real work starts'

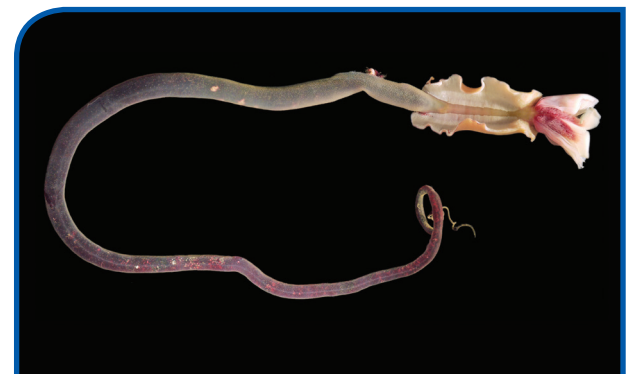
The agreement is only the beginning as the treaty remains to be ratified.

"Now, the real work starts. Within the treaty, there is the need to set up a number of committees and those will be key. The deliberations that are to come will make the difference because, if just one of those falls flat, there will be a loophole in the treaty," said the marine biologist.

Having also served for six years on the Trinidad and Tobago Environmental Commission, Prof Gobin felt at home among the technocrats and navigating legal jargon.

"It was really eye-opening. First off, it was great to be at the UN as a scientist and professor when you're actually there and giving advice, and at the same time, you're also seeing all the bargaining. It was very interesting to see the political bargaining that goes on- that was really outside of my everyday sphere of expertise," she recalled.

Yet for this marine scientist, the outcome of the bargaining process is what matters most, especially for the Caribbean and SIDS around the world.



SAY HELLO TO LAMELLIBRACHIA JUDIGOBINI,

a deep sea tubeworm found in cold seeps and hydrothermal vents at enormous depths (from 964 to 3304 metres). If the name sounds familiar, it's because it was dedicated to UWI St Augustine's own Professor Judith Gobin.

The new tubeworm, which can be found in the deep waters of Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, and the Gulf of Mexico (and possibly also at the Kick 'em Jenny submarine volcano off the island of Grenada) was named by an international group of scientists led by Dr Magdalena Georgieva of the Natural History Museum in the UK. They chose to name it after Prof Gobin for her many important contributions to marine science.

Scientists believe *Lamellibrachia judigobini* is one of many unknown species inhabiting the depths off the coasts of Trinidad and Tobago. Because the sea floor is lightless, extremely cold (or in cases of hydrothermal vents incredibly hot), and has more than 100 times the atmospheric pressure of the surface, the species that thrive there have an usual ecosystem of which tubeworms are a crucial component.

So how does Prof Gobin feel about this rare honour? "This must surely be a crowning point of my extensive marine career, and I am truly honoured," she says. "I sincerely thank the authors."

HERITAGE



Carefully outfitted with antique pieces authentic to the period in which it was built – 1906, specifically – it's a welcoming space, where visitors lunch and brunch in the grand old-world dining room; tour rooms that once housed an overseer's family; and examine relics of a time long-gone – antique hairbrushes, a gentleman's shaving kit, a bride's basket, and a bed warmer.

THE HISTORY KEEPERS

BY SERAH ACHAM

Some things are just meant to be. You feel the tug of possibility, and if you're brave enough, you take the leap of faith and fulfil your destiny. So it was for Carmelita Bissessarsingh as she set out on a journey she didn't know she was taking, one that led her to owning two of Trinidad and Tobago's cherished gingerbread houses and preserving a history that would otherwise have been kept behind their closed doors.

The Angelo Bissessarsingh Heritage House, formerly The Meyler House, and The Boscoe Holder House were built over 100 years ago by famed Scottish architect, George Brown. That they were landmarks along Carmelita's path is fitting. An artist and recent graduate of UWI's Department of Creative and Festival Arts (DCFA), with a degree in Visual Arts and a specialisation in design, she always held a fascination for colonial-style houses. Her chosen thesis topic? Climate Change and Colonial Architecture.

"These old houses were able to stand the test of time," she says. Their "material choices [and] architectural designs... worked for our environment."

Today, we complain about the increasing heat and aggressive rain. Yet "these houses were built... to not have these issues," and she wonders, "Why did it change to what we are existing in now, a box with little windows and air-condition?"

So, when she had an opportunity to view The Meyler House in Belmont last year – she and her aunt, UWI's Professor Ann Marie Bissessar (an imminent scholar and teacher of political science), were in search of a new home – she instantly knew it was hers. Walking through the wooden house, with its elaborate fretwork, high ceilings and 14-foot doorways, one can understand why.



Carmelita Bissessarsingh at The Boscoe Holder House.

"I didn't have to see the inside to make up my mind... It was just 'yes!'"

Professor Bissessar simply asked, "What you want to do?" Carmelita put in an offer. "I was really, really happy."

Continuing the legacy of Angelo Bissessarsingh

Living history was made when passion met foresight, and inspired by her late brother, beloved local historian, Angelo Bissessarsingh, she said to her aunt, "We can't live in a house like this. We have to share it."

That's what Angelo was about, she says. "The mere fact that he started a virtual museum for free, giving out that knowledge, helping people research, tracing [their heritages]... It's about making sure that things are preserved and continued for everybody else to enjoy."

She named the house after him "because he represents preservation. He represents history. It was a joy for him."

And so, in December 2022, Carmelita opened The Angelo Bissessarsingh Heritage House with the support of her aunt; her father, Rudolph; and brother and co-owner, Mario.

Carefully outfitted with antique pieces authentic to the period in which it was built – 1906, specifically – it's a welcoming space, where visitors lunch and brunch in the grand old-world dining room; tour rooms that once housed an overseer's family; and examine relics of a time long-gone – antique hairbrushes, a gentleman's shaving kit, a bride's basket, a bed warmer.

The small library, filled with books and other items from Angelo's historical treasure trove, is a wonder all its own. A World War I helmet hangs behind the door, along with his impressive collection of swords. A cannon ball sits at the foot of an old secretary's desk, and on top is what looks like a stone shard that, Professor Bissessar informs me, is from the year 600 BC.

As I am perched upon an antique damask-covered loveseat in a sitting room lit by an elaborate chandelier, my eyes zero in on pieces that remind me of things I've seen in my own family's homes. The Persian rug under my feet looks like the one my grandmother once had in her living room. The vintage figurines and little houses are like those still on the shelves of the homes I grew up in.

Historically accurate

This, Professor Bissessar tells me, is not by accident. In furnishing the house, they put in hours of research to ensure that each piece is historically accurate.

Carmelita adds that when visitors marvel at ornaments resembling things their mothers and grandmothers once owned, they knew they were relevant to the time.

Observing the thought and care put into composing this house, one would think these women spent a lot of time acquiring these items after the house was bought and its future planned. Not so. About two years prior to her purchase, before having any inkling of the jewel that awaited them, Carmelita was hit by her first bout of insight, this one unconscious, and she began a collection of her own.

"Two, three years before we bought the house we were like, 'we want to hit up some garage sales and see what [they] have,'" she recalls.

She hit the jackpot. Among her spoils: two giant wooden pillars, huge doors and windows, a beaten-up couch set, and a piano.

"I thought, 'this is awesome. I cannot believe it'... I just wanted [them]." Reflecting now, she says, "It just happened. I don't know how to explain it."

It turned out that, unbeknownst to anyone, her path was already set.

"I listen to myself and I think 'nobody's going to believe this,' but it really was very unplanned. If I planned it," she acknowledges, "it wouldn't be as perfect as it is."



Prof Ann Marie Bissessar.

While they set up The Boscoe Holder House, they're busy hosting tours, school visits and events at the Angelo Bissessarsingh Heritage House. They're also preparing Angelo's West Indian book collection to be housed there as a reference library.

The Boscoe Holder House

And still, we've not come to the end of the story. Having been denied the home she thought she would live in, Professor Bissessar said to Carmelita, "Camy" as she affectionately calls her, "you need to find [another] house for us to live [in]."

Carmelita knew The Boscoe Holder House, built in 1888, was on the market and, costly though it was, both women loved it. She made an offer – lower than the asking price, but, she thought, "why not?"

Fate already on her side, she got through. The owner, the late Mark Pereira, wanted her to have it.

"He wanted the artist," Professor Bissessar explains, because the 'law of ancient lights' dictates that "once an artist resides in the house, you cannot put up skyscrapers. The artist has the right to light."

"That house has never not had an artist in it," Carmelita adds.

Good fortune not lost on these women, they have equally high ambitions for the Boscoe Holder House.

"The house will have one room for visiting artists, [and] I would love to do workshops there," Professor Bissessar shares.

Right now, this niece and aunt wonder team are focused on their work at both houses. While they set up The Boscoe Holder House, they're busy hosting tours, school visits and events at the Angelo Bissessarsingh Heritage House. They're also preparing Angelo's West Indian book collection to be housed there as a reference library for anyone who needs it.

"I believe it was meant to be shared," Carmelita says of the Belmont house. She calls it a "time capsule", and explains that few people today may ever experience a house like it.

Her fear, she says, is that part of history will be lost. And the thing she appreciates most about their endeavour is the "shared joy of seeing people come and interact". On entering, some are hesitant – to sit on the couches, soil the carpet with their shoes, eat on the dishes – but Carmelita's response is always "come in".

"We're more about experience. We want people to enjoy this house as much as possible because we enjoy it." If Angelo were alive today, she says, "this house would be booming with people and he would have been extremely proud."

Serah Acham is a writer and editor currently pursuing her MFA in Creative Writing at UWI St Augustine.

■ EDUCATION

In an effort to help educators better understand the intersection of language and learning in the classroom, UWI St Augustine's Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics (DMLL) recently teamed up with the University of Trinidad and Tobago's Centre for Education Programmes (UTT CEP) in a joint initiative to promote translanguaging.

Given that students in a classroom may speak different languages or dialects, translanguaging is a teaching method which incorporates linguistic diversity into lesson planning to help students learn more comfortably, hone their linguistic diversity and stimulate linguistic creativity.

Teachers can practise translanguaging by mixing languages, switching between languages, code-meshing and translating. For example, if a student's first language is English but they also speak Spanish as a second language, a teacher uses translanguaging when they create lessons and assignments by the incorporation of both languages.

From February 27 to March 1, the UWI St Augustine Centre for Language and Learning was transformed into a translanguaging hub as over 100 teachers from primary and secondary schools across Trinidad and Tobago participated in the joint initiative titled "Translanguaging Pedagogy: Every Teacher is a Language Teacher".

Not to be left out, a total of 191 secondary school students from 14 secondary schools were invited to participate on the last day of the initiative.

Throughout the course of the initiative, 35 facilitators – comprising staff from UTT, The UWI, the Ministry of Education, Living Water Community and school teachers – gave practical demonstrations on the application of translanguaging in the classroom.

Activities consisted of a series of 20-minute Language Matters sessions on French, Linguistics, Patois (French Creole), Portuguese, Spanish, and Trinidad and Tobago Sign Language.

Programmes and courses provided by the DMLL were also showcased and participants were also introduced to the UWI's newly implemented Foreign Language Policy which seeks to promote multilingualism.

DMLL Head, Eric Maitrejean and UTT CEP Programme

TRANSLANGUAGING: combining language and learning

UWI/UTT partner to promote teaching method for linguistic diversity in the classroom



Foreign language teachers at the event, "Translanguaging Pedagogy: Every Teacher is a Language Teacher". PHOTO: COURTESY UNIVERSITY OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Leader, Dr Marc Jackman, addressed participants while Dr Elna Carrington-Blaides did a special presentation on Inclusive Education.

UTT's Dr Nicha Selvon-Ramkissoon and UWI's Rómulo Guédez-Fernández also presented their insights on the implementation of Translanguaging Pedagogy in T&T's classrooms.

Mexico's Ambassador to T&T, His Excellency Victor Hugo Morales Meléndez, visited the initiative's second day and the Ministry of Education was represented by Laurence Jaggassar, Curriculum Coordinator for English, who actively participated throughout the event.

The event was organised by a group of representatives from both the UWI St Augustine and UTT including Selvon-Ramkissoon, Guédez-Fernández, Ms Aarti Sharma Persad, Dr

Anne-Marie Pouchet, Dr Benjamin Braithwaite, and Dr Karen Sanderson Cole.

Sponsors included the Embassy of Spain in Trinidad and Tobago, Heritage Petroleum Company Limited, Massy Stores (T&T), the Bermudez Group Limited, the Embassy of Mexico in Trinidad and Tobago, Haphiza's Odyssey Travels Limited, and other anonymous benefactors.

Representatives from the DMLL told UWI TODAY that many teachers found the event to be informative and enlightening as they were equipped with useful tools and strategies for implementing translanguaging in their classrooms in a systematic way.

They added that there are plans to host similar initiatives and that the most recent was the first of many UWI-UTT joint collaborations to support primary and secondary teachers.

ARTS

The course of true love never did run smooth.

So says the character of Lysander to Hermia in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. While the language of Shakespeare may seem, on the surface, distant from the context of modern-day Caribbean culture, the production of the bard's play by the Department of Creative and Festival Arts' (DCFA) Theatre Arts Unit sought to bridge the gap between Shakespeare's world and our own. A gap, which, as it turns out, is not actually that far to bridge. After all, who can't relate to the idea of romantic endeavours not always going smoothly?

"We can access Shakespeare easily, once we get past that invisible wall or block that we put up," says director Michaellean Taylor. For the first and second year students putting on this production, this was the first hurdle that needed to be crossed— to make the material feel accessible and relevant to their daily lives.

Taylor is currently an adjunct lecturer at the DCFA and course lecturer for Production 2, which selected Shakespeare's classic as this year's iteration of their annual production. Not the usual choice of play, considering the last Shakespeare production was held by the then CCFA (Centre for Creative and Festival Arts) in 1999 (a portrayal of *The Tempest*).

Shakespeare through our lens

"The conversation I had with the class was, regardless of what we do, whether it be a Broadway musical, whether it be Shakespeare, whether it be Asian theatre, African theatre, in order to understand and access the dramatic material, we are going to have to look at it through our lens," he recalls.

Angelia Bissoon, who played Hermia in the production, notes that "...the director always stated that it's not a 'Trini version' of the play— it's using our Trinidadian understanding to unlock Shakespeare."

She elaborates, "Using elements of our culture, using folk dances, using bélé, using pique... using these elements to unlock Shakespeare was really exciting for me. I never expected to see a folk dance or hear calypso singing in a Shakespeare play."

For audiences of the production, which ran from March 31 to April 2, this marriage of art forms was also a highlight of the experience. Ambika Assiu, former student at DCFA who attended the Friday night show says that, "infusing aspects of our own culture such as kalinda [stick fighting] movements, shows that, regardless of space, time or cultural barriers, it can be enjoyed and understood by all."

While the second year course, Production 2, was a class of six, the cast was made up of 17 people from the first and second year cohort at the Theatre Arts Unit. This meant that many people in both the cast and crew were wearing more than one hat. Bissoon, in addition to playing Hermia, also was involved in PR for the production. Jamilah Ross, another student in the production, was double-casted for two crucial roles.

"I was both Hippolyta and Titania, playing those roles [along with another cast member]. That entire process was interesting. The challenge was getting their different personality traits. I had to properly distinguish between the two," says Ross, who was performing onstage for this first time (aside from secondary school productions).

A learning experience for students

For many of the students, this was a learning experience that allowed them to see what it really takes to put on a production— the nuances of projecting your voice, learning how to roll with the unexpected punches (like Ross's mic being knocked off on the first night of the show), and exactly how much work it takes on and off the stage to bring everything together.

"In terms of the process and production on a whole,

A Midsummer Night in the Dry Season

UWI DCFA's Theatre Arts Unit unlocks Shakespeare with a very Trinbagonian key

BY AMY LI BAKSH



PHOTOS: COURTESY THE DEPARTMENT OF CREATIVE AND FESTIVAL ARTS.

'The conversation I had with the class was, regardless of what we do, whether it be a Broadway musical, whether it be Shakespeare, whether it be Asian theatre, African theatre, in order to understand and access the dramatic material, we are going to have to look at it through our lens.' – Michaellean Taylor



theatre is not easy. There are a lot of things that have to be done in theatre, and not just acting. We always forget about the technical aspects of theatre, but light plays an important role, sound plays an important role, PR and marketing play important roles. All these parts allow the gears to shift and move. It takes an entire team working together to complete a production," says Bissoon, who was able to get both sides of the experience as a member of both the cast and crew.

"There are so many opportunities now for theatre in Trinidad and Tobago, as opposed to 20 years ago," says Taylor.

So for young thespians-to-be, there has never been a better time to get involved. As we emerge from the unique teaching environments created by COVID-19, this year has allowed students and teachers alike to regain their footing in face-to-face settings — which is crucial for theatre.

"This production was our first production post-COVID," says Taylor. "It really called for the entire department, the entire DCFA, to have all hands on board. I was very happy with the turnout of the production and the way the students embraced the ideas that the production had."

He notes that the Theatre Arts Unit has not just a responsibility to The UWI, in terms of producing quality work, but also to the community. "We continue to try to always be socially relevant in all of the productions that we produce."

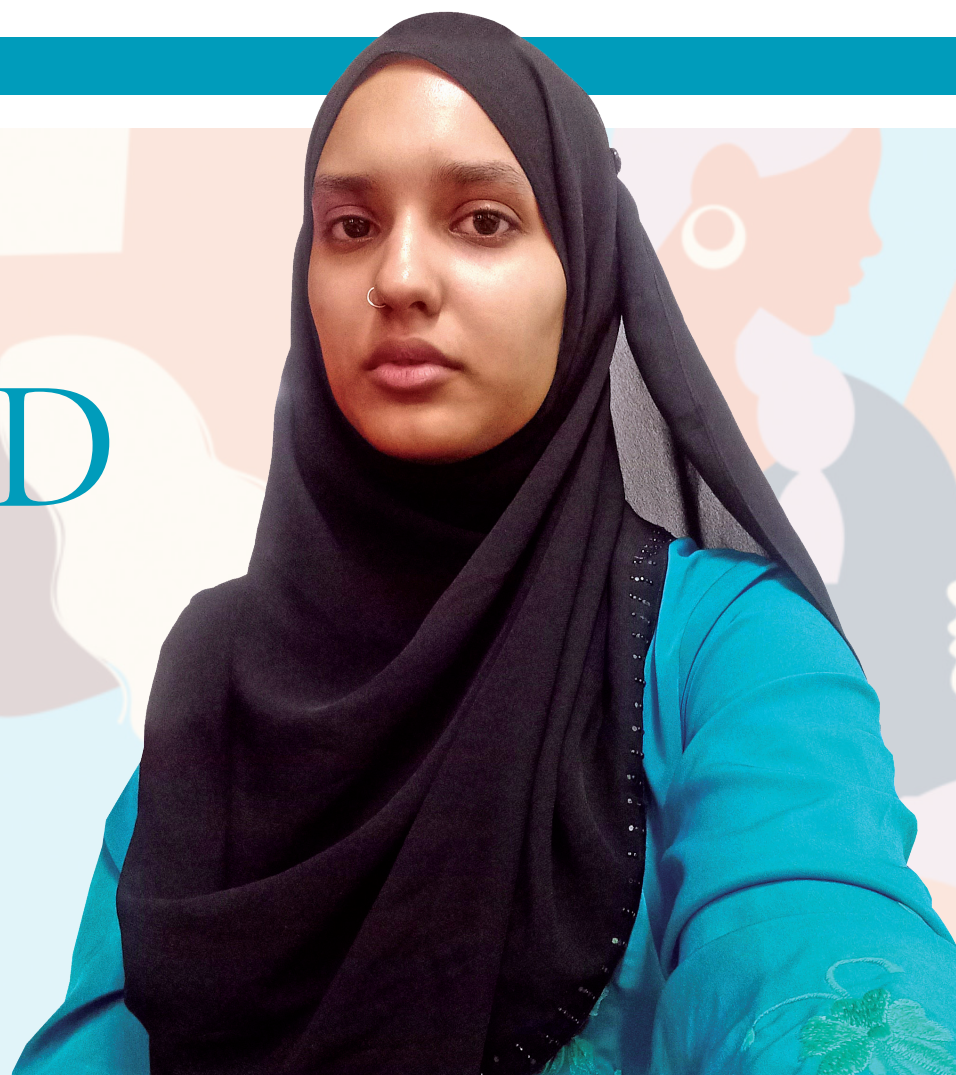
Amy Li Baksh is a Trinidadian writer, artist and activist.

■ OUR STUDENTS

ALYSSA MOHAMMED

fueled by family, faith, and activism

Rhodes Scholarship 2023 awardee is a UWI graduate committed to the fight for gender equality



BY KANISHA VINCENT

“I have a simple goal,” says Alyssa Mohammed. “I want women to be whatever they want to be. I don’t want any woman to be limited by who she is or where she comes from.”

Alyssa, Rhodes Scholar-elect, has a passion for gender studies. Of 11 applicants, she was named the Rhodes Scholar-elect for 2023, and it has been a whirlwind ever since.

“Any of us could have won,” Alyssa stated when asked what, if anything, set her apart from the other scholars, but her passion for women and gender issues came through in her application and interview process.

Alyssa crossed paths with activism for the first time when she fell in love with Sociology at The UWI Open Campus. A young Muslim woman, she layered her faith with activism to begin her advocacy for the rights of women in Trinidad and Tobago.

Most of her Open Campus programme was conducted online during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the virtual setting provided an opportunity for closer contact and a well-rounded Caribbean perspective on social issues, something that students who attended a single UWI campus in person would have missed out on.

A second home at IGDS

Since then, she has continued on at The UWI, pursuing a postgraduate diploma in Gender Studies at the Institute for Gender and Development Studies (IGDS), where she has found a second home.

On her experience at IGDS, Alyssa says, “It is so rare to study in a place where activism informs academia and vice versa.”

With lecturers such as Emerita Professor Rhoda Reddock, Dr Sue Ann Barratt (Head of IGDS), and Emerita Professor Patricia Mohammed, to name a few, IGDS is steeped in “passion, talent, tenacity, love, care, and charisma”. And ultimately, support.

Taking a chance at the Rhodes scholarship, the

Alyssa crossed paths with activism for the first time when she fell in love with Sociology at The UWI Open Campus. A young Muslim woman, she layered her faith with activism to begin her advocacy for the rights of women in Trinidad and Tobago.

application to which landed in her UWI inbox like many other students, Alyssa did not think that she would be the one to win it. The process was extensive, requiring six references and a number of other steps. Alyssa notes that the encouragement of the lecturers at IGDS was everything she needed to push forward.

Of her generation, she says, “So many of us are so used to getting rejected, we [decide] to just throw stuff at the wall and see what sticks.” And stick, it did.

However, Alyssa says, “As far as Rhodes scholars go, I don’t necessarily fit that mould. But, that’s one of the great things about the Rhodes scholarship... it gives people opportunities who may not have otherwise [had them].”

The support of family was instrumental

Established in 1902, the Rhodes scholarship is the oldest scholarship in the world and one of the most prestigious. Sponsored by the Rhodes Trust, it is an international postgraduate award affording its recipients the opportunity to study for two years or more at Oxford University in the United Kingdom.

The only thing about the scholarship that Alyssa laments is her inability to share the news with her grandfather who passed away late last year.

“It was his dream for all his children and grandchildren to be educated, especially the women.”

The support of her grandfather, mother, and father has been instrumental in Alyssa being the first in her family to pursue postgraduate studies.

With all of this at her back, Alyssa is ready for life at Oxford. Within gender studies, her main area of interest is sexual and reproductive health and rights. This will form the core of the kind of research that she hopes to pursue. She anticipates that the opportunity to study internationally will further develop the regional perspective gained at The UWI, and anchor her interests within the context of the wider world.

She is particularly passionate about the introduction of comprehensive sexuality education into Caribbean schools, and plans to learn about how this is delivered in other contexts, so that the region can reap the benefits.

Ultimately, success at Oxford for Alyssa will look like distinctions in her studies, but more importantly, meaningful experiences with scholars, professors, and industry professionals that alter her perspective.

She notes, “Once you have a perspective shift, you have learned.”

Alyssa intends to continue serving her community through activism, with academia being the force that continues to anchor and inspire her.

When asked what we can do to further equality, her response is simple.

“We need a whole-of-society approach [to gender activism]. Everybody needs to be a feminist in order to win the fight against gender inequality and [in turn] other types of inequality.”

Alyssa is certain that we should all take as many chances as are presented to us. With such a mindset, we cannot wait to see what she does next.

FOOD

As global fisheries and fish stocks continue to be affected by climate change, ecocide and overfishing, freshwater aquaculture has become one of the fastest growing practices in global food production.

Defined by the United Nations as the farming of aquatic organisms like fish and aquatic plants, aquaculture plays an increasingly crucial role in bridging the gap between a rising global demand for fish products and a declining global fish stock.

However, UWI St Augustine PhD student Rakesh Bhukal explains, the resources used and nutrient-rich wastewater generated by aquaculture cannot go unnoticed.

As he pursues his doctorate in Food Production at the Faculty of Food and Agriculture, Bhukal's research focuses on the role aquaponics can play in minimising the waste generated by local aquaculture farms, and optimising these systems for the country's tropical climate.

Using nutrient-rich wastewater to feed plants

He explains, "Aquaponics is basically a combination of aquaculture and hydroponics (the cultivation of plants without soil) using wastewater from aquatic species. Aquaculture and hydroponics, on their own, are leading technologies all around the globe. So basically, it is a hybrid technology that utilises the best of both of these technologies."

A large volume of water is used for aquaculture, and as this water recirculates in an aquaculture system, research has found there is a buildup of waste from the fish being cultivated.

Traditionally, Bhukal says, this waste would have been released into the environment:

"What research has found is that the waste produced by fish in those recirculating aquaculture systems actually has an ideal nutrient composition for the growth of many different types of plants. The traditional approach of freely releasing the wastewater wasn't only wasting nutrients, but it produced a significant environmental risk because nutrient-rich water gets into waterways and contributes to eutrophication (harmful algal blooms)."

Bhukal said the indiscriminate release of wastewater and consequential eutrophication is a problem with local aquaculture farms.

If aquaponics practices are applied to local farms, Bhukal believes the generated nutrient-rich wastewater can instead be diverted to hydroponic systems where present.

Farmers without hydroponics systems can set up these systems, where possible, which not only reduces their waste, but can help generate additional revenue if they begin growing crops alongside their aquaculture activities.

Hydroponic systems have become a widespread farming practice due to a global decrease in arable land due to climate change and accelerated land use change.

Reducing farmers' fertiliser bills

"This can also help to reduce the use of traditional synthetic fertilisers in hydroponic systems," adds Bhukal. "The plant will use the nutrients in the wastewater for their growth and development."

If executed properly, and proper filtering systems are



Rakesh Bhukal displays an adult *Macrobrachium carinus* which is found in Trinidad and is one of the largest freshwater prawn species in all of South America. PHOTOS: COURTESY RAKESH BHUKAL

Rakesh BHUKAL

researches aquaponics for sustainability

Faculty of Food and Agriculture graduate student combines aquaculture and hydroponics to minimise waste and optimise for our tropical climate

BY TYRELL GITTENS

developed, the FFA student says the filtered water can even be recirculated to the fish tanks and help reduce water use on aquaculture farms.

Apart from gaining an understanding of how these systems operate, Bhukal is also looking into optimising them to function effectively in Trinidad and Tobago's tropical climate.

"In terms of the aquatic species for the aquaculture systems, I am now looking at local neotropical species in both fish and crayfish," he says. "The advantages for looking into these types of species include the fact they are locally sourced, which eliminates the risk of an imported species being accidentally released and becoming invasive."

From a conservation point of view, Bhukal says using aquaponics to grow local species which are commercially harvested can help protect the population of local fish stocks from further overfishing. Additionally, cultivating local fish also reduces the need for using imported feed and other inputs.

He explains that *Macrobrachium carinus*, one of the largest neotropical freshwater prawn species in all of South America which is found in Trinidad, is a good species to cultivate using aquaponics. It is a local delicacy and fetches a very high price.

Aquaponics educator and entrepreneur

"One of the things I'm hoping to accomplish is to develop a backyard homestead aquaponics system which has an integrated variety of local aquatic species that can be cultivated together," he says. "I want to run some nutrient profiles on them to know exactly what micronutrients they have to ensure these systems are built with the nutrition aspect of food security as well."

Outside the classroom, Bhukal is already applying his knowledge to the real world, and assisting farmers with their aquaponic systems. An entrepreneur, he is the owner of a company called Aquatik Solutions, which specialises in aquaponics, hydroponics, and aquaculture.

"I would have informally done this over the years, but this is what led me to do my PhD research. The whole idea is to spread this work. I actually have models and production systems I would have designed and I have also done a lot of work directly with farmers," he explains.

"I want to have a direct route to apply what the research will find on optimising these systems and putting it directly in the hands of farmers who need it," adds the young aquaponics entrepreneur.

His work is not only about business. To further increase awareness of the systems, Bhukal has also offered his services free of charge to schools. So not only is he engaged in the pursuit of cultivating fish and plants. He's also helping to cultivate the next generation of aquaponics practitioners.



Tilapia is one of the most common fish species cultivated using aquaculture systems in Trinidad and Tobago.

His work is not only about business. To further increase awareness of the systems, Bhukal has also offered his services free of charge to schools. So not only is he engaged in the pursuit of cultivating fish and plants. He's also helping to cultivate the next generation of aquaponics practitioners.



Rakesh tends to seedlings grown using an aquaponics system at The UWI St Augustine campus.

■ MEDICINE



Engineering new methods to study and treat the heart

Dr Shelly Singh-Gryzbon uses computational models to understand, predict, and even inform the design of medical devices for cardiovascular disease care



BY TYRELL GITTENS

Cardiovascular heart disease (CVD) is one of the leading causes of death worldwide, with an estimated 17.9 million deaths recorded annually.

With the advancement of technology, new approaches to treating CVDs have been developed to help reduce complications in patients and extend their life span.

Since 2010, UWI St Augustine Chemical Engineering lecturer Dr Shelly Singh-Gryzbon has used fundamental science and engineering principles to conduct research on CVDs and its treatment.

By combining engineering tools like computational fluid dynamics with medical imaging modalities like Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), and computerised tomography (CT), she has been able to develop computational models. These models can then be used to understand and predict the development and progression of CVDs, knowledge that can inform the design and optimisation of medical devices, as well as for pre-procedural or surgical planning.

She told UWI TODAY, “CVDs have affected so many people close to me, and this work provides me with an opportunity to use my chemical engineering background to improve the quality of life of those affected.”

Engineering principles applied to the cardiovascular system

In 2019, Singh-Gryzbon graduated with an undergraduate degree in Chemical and Process Engineering from The UWI St Augustine campus.

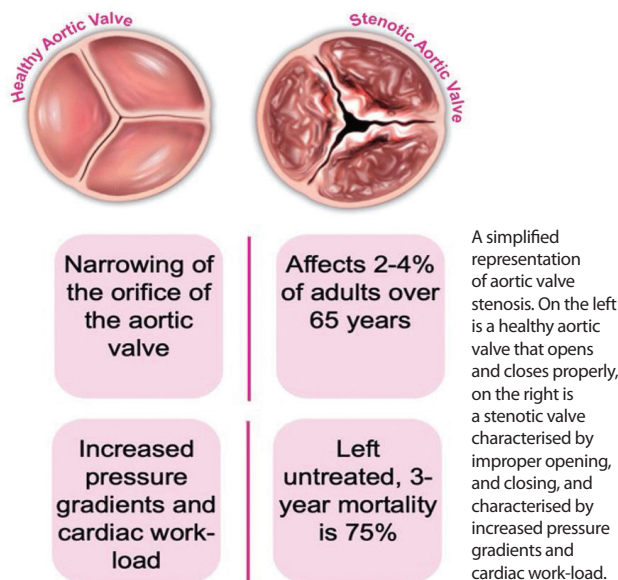
However, her interest in CVD research started during her Master's in Advanced Chemical Engineering at Imperial College London, where she did a course called Transport in Biological Systems.

While fundamental engineering principles can be used to understand the flow of fluids in common mediums like a pipe, similar principles can be used to understand the flow of blood through vessels in the human body.

Dr Singh-Gryzbon developed her first computational model in 2010 for her master's thesis, which looked at modelling the biomechanical stress in the ascending aorta of patients with bicuspid aortic valves.

While doing her PhD in Chemical Engineering, she continued CVD focused research. Her thesis focused on the computational analysis of blood flow and stress patterns in the aorta of patients with Marfan syndrome. After completing her doctorate, she did a postdoctoral fellowship in the Cardiovascular Fluid Mechanics Laboratory at the Department of Biomedical Engineering of the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta.

Aortic Valve Stenosis



During the fellowship, she started developing computational models to understand heart valve disease and the devices used to treat these diseases.

Since returning home, she says, “I’m motivated to use my engineering knowledge to improve or design medical devices that are affordable and accessible to our local communities.”

Investigating heart valve replacement methods

In collaboration with healthcare professionals, mathematicians, and fellow engineers, Singh-Gryzbon is currently developing computational models to investigate potential adverse outcomes associated with heart valve replacement procedures.

“It’s really a collaborative effort, consisting of multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research.”

A normal human heart has four valves which open and close to ensure unidirectional blood flow. Sometimes, one or more of these valves may have a defect that hinders its ability to open or close properly, resulting in increased pressure gradients. In these cases, the heart must then work harder to overcome these increased pressure gradients, and if left untreated, they lead to high mortality rates.

Thus, heart valve replacement procedures are used

to treat these patients, and involves replacing the patient’s defective valve with a prosthetic valve. These prosthetic valves can be implanted using surgical or transcatheter (non-invasive) approaches.

Thus far, Singh-Gryzbon has made headway into understanding the fluid mechanics associated with transcatheter aortic valve implantation (TAVI) which is used to treat patients with aortic valve stenosis. Aortic valve stenosis is a disease in which the aortic valve does not open properly, and often occurs in older patients due to age-related stiffening.

“The use of [TAVI] was recently expanded from high-risk surgical patients to include intermediate and low-risk surgical patients, raising concerns about the long-term durability of the devices,” she explains.

One adverse outcome of TAVI is the development of thrombosis (blood clots) on the device. Various studies have demonstrated that blood flow patterns, particularly low blood velocities, influence the development of thrombosis on the device.

So, Dr Singh-Gryzbon is using her models to understand how the flow patterns are influenced by the device deployment (or positioning) and device geometry.

It is anticipated that these factors can be optimised to reduce the risk of thrombosis. The goal of her current work is to develop a predictive tool to help clinicians determine the risk of thrombosis in TAVI patients.

Advising medical device manufacturers, healthcare professionals

“Based on what we’re finding, we can propose alternative design features to medical device manufacturers,” she says. “We can also provide feedback to healthcare professionals on the optimal deployment of the device.”

To help expose her undergraduate students to these engineering applications, Dr Singh-Gryzbon has enlisted some of them to assist with various aspects of her research. She has also introduced some of these applications in her undergraduate teaching through class projects. In doing so, she hopes some are inspired to apply their engineering knowledge to medical applications.

She says, “the future of medicine is ultimately patient-specific healthcare. To get there, we need a host of tools, including computational modelling, which will facilitate the patient-specific planning of procedures.

“It can be challenging, but it is ultimately something which can improve the way in which patients are evaluated, assessed, and treated.”

Inclusion and Transformation

NODES Conference 2023 focuses on changing attitudes, and the law, to ensure the rights of persons with disabilities

BY DR JEAN ANTOINE-DUNNE

On April 21, 2023 The UWI Network and Outreach for Disability Education and Sensitization (NODES) held its conference at the Teaching and Learning Complex on the St Augustine campus. The one day conference was entitled “Disability Matters: Inclusive Futures – Transformative Structures”.

According to the organisers of the conference, the need for inclusion and structural change in society is an urgent matter. This message of ensuring the full rights of those with disabilities was reiterated by all who spoke throughout the day.

In her welcome address, Campus Principal Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine noted the continuing work of disability advocacy and the introduction of legislation. She also singled out the need to transform perceptions of and attitudes to those with disabilities.

With a disability bill in the process of being drafted, this message is particularly apt. The discussion generated by members of the Disability Legislation Working Group had change in legislation as their primary focus. The group included Mrs Laura Escayg and Mr Glen Niles, led by Senator Dr Paul Richards, who also served as master of ceremonies at the NODES conference.

Enacting change was also a key message for the European Union Ambassador, HE Peter Cavendish, whose feature address outlined the strategies and support put in place by the EU. His speech, entitled “Leaving no one behind – Disability Inclusion in EU External Action – Sharing Best Practices”, highlighted the necessity of using all available means to ensure the rights of persons with disabilities across all areas of life. Access to education, services, health, employment and justice are pillars of such rights, and the EU is committed to this.

Such a mandate, he said, necessitates the involvement of those with disabilities and groups that advocate for persons with disabilities. The EU Human Rights and Democracy Strategy notes that in Trinidad and Tobago, “adequate legislation is lacking, especially to ensure non-discrimination and equal access in sectors such as education”. Moreover, “the education system is not properly set up (personnel training, infrastructure) to host students with disabilities and special needs”.

The question of human rights was at the forefront of the feature address by Dr Jean Antoine-Dunne, NODES founder, who questioned whether it was possible to have rights if there was no consensus that persons with disabilities are full members of society. She outlined the ways in which persons with disabilities had historically been spoken about and even used as objects for experimentation, because they were seen to be “less than fully human”.

According to Dr Antoine-Dunne, the language historically used to describe persons with disabilities generated ideas and attitudes that made persons with disabilities invisible. She, nonetheless, noted the immense changes that had occurred in perception, attitude, and research over the past 12 years.

The message of how to change ways of seeing was brought home with considerable impact by UWI Astronomy Professor Shirin Haque during the highly engaging presentations of a panel entitled “Bringing Astronomy Down to Earth for Everyone”. As Professor Haque noted, “The universe does not care if we cannot see.” This message reverberated with the audience, in particular those with visual impairments.

There were insights into mental health by Literature, Culture and Gender scholar Professor Paula Morgan, who spoke of child sexual abuse. Dr Sylvia Rose-Ann Walker, a Language and Literature scholar, discussed the transformative experiences of blind poet and scholar, Professor Wilfred Cartey. Dr Adanna James, Dean of Studies at the Seminary of St John Vianney and the Ugandan Martyrs, spoke of the importance of communality. Members of the deaf community present were in accord with UWI Lecturer in Linguistics Dr Ben Braithwaite’s emphasis on the need to view disability through an intersectional lens and recognise the crossovers between other forms of discrimination and activism.

The evening closed with a discussion organised by NODES chairperson, Dr Jacqueline Huggins and chaired by Dr Kendra Pitt, Lecturer in UWI St Augustine’s Social Work Unit. Students spoke passionately of support received from Dr Huggins and The UWI as they successfully navigated transport, classes and issues of access while at the campus.



EU Ambassador HE Peter Cavendish (third from left, front row) in conversation with Campus Principal Prof Rose-Marie Belle Antoine (second from left), NODES founder Dr Jean Antoine-Dunne (right), and Ms Eileen Dunne (left), Ambassador for Down Syndrome Ireland. In the background (from left to right) are Programme Manager to the EU Delegation Ms Monica Paul-McLean, NODES Chairperson Dr Jacqueline Huggins, and Deputy Principal Prof Indar Ramnarine. PHOTOS: ANEEL KARIM



Dr Jacqueline Huggins



Dr Ben Braithwaite



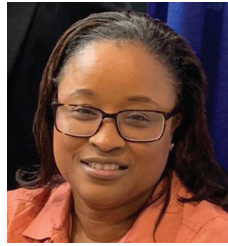
Senator Dr Paul Richards

Dr Jean Antoine-Dunne is the founder of NODES and a Literature and Film scholar.

■ OUR CAMPUS



Professor Edwin Ekwue



Dr Talia Esnard



Professor Adesh Ramsubhag



Professor Kit Fai Pun



Professor Terence Seemungal



Professor Hariharan Seetharaman



Dr Chris Maharaj



Professor Christine Carrington

'Be proactive and take responsibility'

UWI STA School of Graduate Studies and Research brings together some of the campus's top scholars to give inspirational and practical advice on doing research and getting published

BY JOEL HENRY

How important is research and publication to an academic career? In the words of **Professor Terence Seemungal**, renowned scholar and Dean of the Faculty of Medical Sciences at UWI St Augustine, "If you want to be a leader in your field, that's how you do it."

He was speaking at a special session titled "Managing Research with Work and Life's Responsibilities" that brought together deans, department heads, and other senior administrators with some of the most outstanding research and publications credentials on the campus and in the region.

The event was held to give attendees – many of them researchers and research students – an opportunity to "learn from the experiences of our panellists who are excellent researchers", explained host **Dr Chris Maharaj**.

Dr Maharaj, Deputy Dean of Research and Postgraduate Student Affairs at the Faculty of Engineering, said the panellists "have built up a reputation of research that most academics aspire to".

The session was held by The UWI St Augustine School of Graduate Studies and Research.

Publish or Perish

"Nobody will accept the excuse that you do not have enough time to do research," **Professor Edwin Ekwue**, Dean of the Faculty of Engineering, advised the virtual audience.

He shared his own academic journey, which included full teaching schedules and many administrative duties. Early on, he thought he did not have time for research. "I was trying to use that as an excuse," he said. But, a career in academia, he explained, requires research and publication. It is "publish or perish".

"You must find a way around the problem," he said.

All of the panellists shared stories of the difficulties in research, from time constraints, limited resources, and even mishaps like loss of information and theft.

"I had to wonder is that the end or is this going to be a very rough road," recounted **Dr Talia Esnard**, Head of the Department of Behavioural Sciences and accomplished scholar and author.

Dr Esnard told attendees the story of her struggles with academic work and parenting. However, she was not only able to overcome these challenges, but would eventually go on to use her own experiences as a catalyst for research and writing.

She explained, "My work is my passion. My passion becomes my practice. My practice is my basis of research."

'You have to love what you are doing'

Professor Christine Carrington, Head of the Department of Preclinical Sciences, and one of the most visible faces of the national response to the COVID-19, also emphasised the importance of passion as a motivator.

"When you are doing your PhD," she said, "you have to love what you are doing and you have to be fascinated by it. I love viruses. I find them intriguing. I enjoy learning about them. I enjoy talking about them."

Prof Carrington also spoke of the importance of collaboration, both local and off campus, with other researchers.

"It keeps you current. It keeps you engaged. It keeps you in a network of like-minded people," she said, adding that these partnerships should be mutually beneficial and respectful.

Research partnerships was a major theme of the event, both with other scholars and students.

Professor Adesh Ramsubhag, Senior Lecturer in Microbiology and Plant Pathology in the Department of Life Sciences, told the audience that, during his time as a department head, he developed a strong research culture among the students.

"I believe that once you have a motivated and well-trained student, you have a highly productive unit," he said, "not only for generating research output, but also contributing to national development."

Prof Ramsubhag said he has supervised many students and "does not turn away any students" in need of a supervisor.

Research heroes, supervisors, and mentors

Programme Coordinator for the BSc in Industrial Engineering **Professor Kit Fai Pun** spoke as well about the importance of supervisors. However, he also focussed on the student's role in the relationship.

"Be proactive and take responsibility," he advised researchers. "You cannot simply wait until your supervisor is ready to see you. Establish a positive, professional relationship with your supervisor."

With hundreds of publications, Prof Pun has an awe inspiring record of scholarship. Yet, he was quick to point out that he was also a winner of the UWI/Guardian Life Premium Teaching Award. Despite the time constraints, he achieved excellence in both research and teaching. This, he said, provided "good evidence" that it can be done.

Professor Hariharan Seetharaman, a Professor of Anaesthesia and Critical Care Medicine at the Faculty of Medical Sciences, also told those in attendance that, despite the many difficulties, successful research and publication can be achieved.

Prof Seetharaman, who is UWI St Augustine's Director of Graduate Studies and Research, said, "There are so many myths and misconceptions about the difficulties of research and publishing. I can tell you there is a knack to it. It is a skill any academic can acquire. Most research is publishable, once you get the knack."

It was an encouraging message, one welcomed by the up and coming researchers at UWI St Augustine. And as Prof Seemungal pointed out in his presentation, despite all the practical tips for a successful research career, internal characteristics like determination and drive are essential.

"In retrospect, it was tough," he said of his own journey, "but it didn't feel that way at the time. If you have that interest, the energy comes."



Practical Tips for Researchers

- Find a good research hero/mentor
- Form mutually beneficial collaborative research relationships
- Join regional and international research networks
- Encourage and work with students
- Find a niche research area
- Read about the experts in the field beforehand
- Be flexible and realistic about your research environment and resources
- Ensure publications and conferences are genuine and reputable
- Know the university regulations pertaining to research
- Create and follow a study plan
- Create contingency plans
- Keep good records of your data (and backups)
- Don't try to do it all alone. Have a support system
- Keep up to date with the relevant technology
- Recognise that being published is a skill. Get the knack

The UWI Calendar of Events **May 2023**

UWI Basketball League 2023

May 13 to June 4
UWI SPEC
St Augustine Campus

Come out and show your support for the teams competing at The UWI Basketball Tournament scheduled for May 13 to June 4, 2023. Hosted by the St Augustine Academy of Sport at The UWI SPEC, the tournament will allow eight men's teams (ages 17 to 23) to vie for trophies, medals, and championship shirts.

For more information, email nadia.james@sta.uwi.edu



Fourth Regional Mixed Methods Research Conference

July 10 to 12
School of Education Auditorium
St Augustine Campus

This conference, themed "Mixed Methods Matter! Charting the Course towards Full(er) Integration", brings together scholars from across the globe to take part in a forum for researchers at all levels and diverse disciplines. They will learn, share, and collaborate on topics related to mixed methods research.

Keynote speakers include Professor Anthony Onwuegbuzie, Senior Research Associate at the University of Cambridge; Professor John Hitchcock, Associate Director at research services agency Westat, and Professor Loraine Cook, Professor in Educational Psychology at UWI Mona. The conference is hosted by the Mixed Methods International Research Association – Caribbean Chapter (MMIRA-CC).

For more information, including registration dates and fees, visit <http://conferences.sta.uwi.edu/mmira>

Benchmark, Analysis, and Financial Trends of European Football Clubs

May 20
Management Lecture Theatre
Department of Management Studies
St Augustine Campus

Want to know more about the business of European football? This free public lecture hosted by the Department of Management Studies will provide an analysis and comparison of revenue trends and expenses of European football clubs and the impact on clubs' profitability. It will be presented by Michel Lukasiewicz, a former professional footballer, now turned investment banker with a focus on sports.

For more information, email calisia.gregoire@sta.uwi.edu



UWI-NEDCO Innovation and Entrepreneurship Boot Camp

May 31 (Registration Deadline)
Faculty of Social Sciences Lounge
St Augustine Campus



Are you a currently registered UWI St Augustine student with a business? Here's an opportunity for you! The Entrepreneurship Unit of the Department of Management Studies in collaboration with NEDCO is hosting this innovation and entrepreneurship boot camp. You have the opportunity to win \$15,000 to be used as a capital injection in your business.

Registration closes on May 31, 2023.
For more info and to register, visit <https://sta.uwi.edu/entrepunit/>



SNAKES AND LEARNERS: Members of the Rio Claro-based wildlife sanctuary Rennie's Orphanage and Animal Rescue (ROAR) introduce students to some slithering friends at Volunteer Open Day at the St Augustine campus. Hosted by the Careers, Co-curricular and Community Engagement Department within the Division of Student Services and Development (DSSD), Volunteer Open Day exposed students and staff to the value of volunteerism and the many opportunities to volunteer in T&T.

Volunteer Open Day brought NGOs and other charitable organisations in areas like agriculture, beach patrolling, coaching and mentorship, environmentalism, family law, literacy and many others to the campus's spacious Learning Resource Centre Greens, where they shared information on their valuable work with students. PHOTO: ANEEL KARIM