



We Made It!

Selena Mohammed, member of the UWI St Augustine Graduating Class of 2021 and valedictorian for the Faculty of Engineering, leaps in celebration of her well-deserved success. Selena and students like her have not only overcome the years of study, assignments and examinations, but also the year (and counting) of COVID-19.

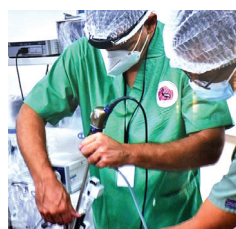
From October 28 to 30, the graduating class, their friends and families, the campus community, and well-wishers from T&T and beyond took part in the Virtual Graduation Ceremonies streamed on UWITV and Facebook. PHOTO: ATIBA CUDJOE



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Caribbean Solar Scientist

Dr Indra Haraksingh
wins Life Pioneer Award



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Medicine and Machines

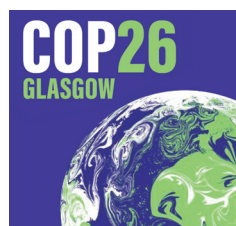
UWI Surgeons perform
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honorary degree awardees



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Climate scientists
represent the region at
pivotal conference





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FROM THE PRINCIPAL

Go Forth, Make Magic

At the time of writing, the celebrations (at least the formal ones) have been completed. The graduation gowns have been put up. The inspirational speeches have all been read. The proud loved ones have given their tearful congratulations. The UWI St Augustine 2021 Virtual Graduation ceremonies were a successful recognition of the achievements of our students and a poignant moment with which to close this chapter of their life journeys.

For the second year in a row, the ceremonies took place virtually, a result of the pandemic and the need to ensure the safety of the campus community. Of course, we all miss the fellowship of in-person ceremonies and the resonance of the grand gathering. Nevertheless, I am very pleased with the quality of these online ceremonies, and I wish to congratulate everyone involved in bringing them to fruition – from organisers to the graduates themselves.

For the graduating class of 2021, I wish them great success, prosperity and happiness. Attaining a university degree from a quality institution such as The UWI is no simple task. Even in the best of circumstances, they have been required to perform at a very high level to complete their programmes. As we all know, these are not the best circumstances. We are in the second year of a disruptive pandemic that has upended nearly all facets of life – including education. It has been a struggle, but our graduates prevailed.

American statesman, orator and writer Frederick Douglass, who escaped from slavery and went on to become a national leader of the abolitionist movement, said, “If there is no struggle, there is no progress”. I would like our graduates to remember this quote as they go forward. It may be hard to believe, with their backs still sore from the monumental effort to complete their degrees, but they will look back on their UWI days, hardships and all, as some of their best.

One of the ironies of life is that we find purpose and meaning from struggle. For many of our younger undergraduate degree holders in particular, the world they are entering for the first time is no longer one of constant academic pursuit and assessment. They spent the majority of their lives on an educational quest, and although that quest was work intensive and filled with pressure, it was a quest all the same, a life adventure through which they could experience progress.

Now, they are required to shape their own quest. This is one of the frightening, yet essential, aspects of adulthood. We are all called upon to be self-directed, and take responsibility for our fulfilment in work and life. Understand, failure is not the only risk in life. There is also the risk of stagnation.



I want all of our graduates, for their own sake, to have lives filled with successes based on their discipline and hard work. Of course, they should take time to rest and reflect, and engage in spiritual and emotional regeneration.

I want all of our graduates, for their own sake, to have lives filled with successes based on their discipline and hard work. Of course, they should take time to rest and reflect, and engage in spiritual and emotional regeneration. However, the same effort they put into attending classes, working with their peers, studying for hours upon hours, spending sleepless nights preparing for exams, and giving their very essences to complete projects, should be put into their life pursuits.

Create art, build a business, revolutionise an industry, become a master teacher, rescue communities, save lives, or just give their best for the people and organisations that rely on them, live life with the same passion and commitment that got them to the virtual stage in their UWI robes to receive their degrees.

It sounds like hard work. It certainly is, and they will look back, just as they looked back at their time at the St Augustine Campus, and smile at the time well-spent, and the quest well completed.

On behalf of the campus community of UWI St Augustine, I congratulate the graduating class of 2021.

Brian Copeland

PROFESSOR BRIAN COPELAND

Campus Principal

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■ OUR PEOPLE

UWI St Augustine's Dr Indra Haraksingh, one of the region's leading scientists in renewable energy research and policy, has been recognised for her work with a Life Pioneer Award for Solar Energy from the World Renewable Energy Network (WREN). She is one of 12 people, and the only one from the Caribbean, to receive this honour.

Dr Haraksingh, a lecturer from the Department of Physics within the Faculty of Science and Technology (FST), received her award virtually at WREN's World Renewable Energy Congress (WREC), held in Portugal in July 2021.

"This recognition is really much appreciated," says Dr Haraksingh. "I have been working very tirelessly [in renewable energy] in the region and also Trinidad and Tobago for decades."

She has been deeply involved in renewable energy for almost 40 years now – producing award-winning research, providing her expertise in the development of regional policy, and training several generations of professionals in the field, both on and off campus. Dr Haraksingh sees the Life Pioneer Award as one representation of her efforts, particularly when looking back at the challenges faced by those in the movement for renewable and alternative energy sources.

"Sometimes you feel as if you are bouncing your head against a concrete wall, especially in the earlier days," she recalls. "There was not that much interest at that time. However, you have to keep trying. I never gave up. That is one of the things that has brought me to this point."

Based in the United Kingdom and affiliated with UNESCO, WREN is a major non-profit organisation with over 168 member countries/regions. Its purpose is to support the implementation of renewable energy sources worldwide. WREC is held biennially. Dr Haraksingh, who regularly takes part in the Congress, opted to attend virtually this year due to COVID-19. Up to a few days into the event (it was held from July 26 to 30), she did not know she would be an award recipient.

"I was following the event and suddenly on the 28th of July I received an email from WREN telling me that I was going to be presented with this Life Pioneer award and the ceremony was going to be on the 30th," she recounts, adding, "I was extremely pleased to hear this."

The award is not the only one that Dr Haraksingh has earned over her career. In 2002, she received the Outstanding Scientist Award from WREN for her solar energy-related research publication. She won their International Pioneer Award for Solar Energy in 2008. In 2012, she was the recipient of the NIHERST Award for Excellence in Science and Technology, and in 2017 she received The UWI Vice Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Public Service.

Dr Haraksingh has been just as active outside of the lab as an advocate and expert in renewable energy. The UWI lecturer is a member of CARICOM's Caribbean Renewable Energy Development Programme (CREDP), and has served as president of both The Caribbean Solar Energy Society and the Trinidad and Tobago Solar Energy Society. She was also a member of T&T's cabinet-appointed Renewable Energy Committee that was vital in formulating the national policy in 2009. Internationally, she has coordinated renewable energy projects with several universities for the benefit of The UWI and its students.



'We are so vulnerable. Small island ecosystems are very fragile. We must preserve and protect Mother Earth.'

Dr Indra Haraksingh

Leading Caribbean scholar and advocate for renewable energy, wins Life Pioneer Award

BY JOEL HENRY

"A lot has been going on in the region," she says of the Caribbean's progress in finding sustainable solutions to our energy needs. "CARICOM has played a crucial role in accelerating the growth of renewable energy. We have been making strides. [Through CREDP], we worked on renewable energy policy and many other projects."

Dr Haraksingh says there has been great momentum in energy policy in islands like Barbados, St Lucia, and others. T&T has been "a bit slower in the uptake," most likely because of our low energy costs, but "is forging ahead to honour its international commitments and our national interest," she explains.

Some of her most impactful work has been as an educator. She provides training throughout the Caribbean to both private and public institutions. At UWI, she led the development of the Master of Science in Renewable Energy Technology programme. Established in 2013, it is the first of its kind in the region.

"In the Physics Department, we have never had an MSc programme. We had MPhil and PhD programmes. These programmes can provide a limited number of graduates. However, with the expansion of renewable energy deployment in the Caribbean, I felt that the region needed to have trained personnel [in the field of renewable energy] in a short space of time. So, I started working on the MSc," she says. "We started it in the 2013/2014 academic year and it has been going strong since."

Research, advocacy, teaching – it seems like a monumental workload, especially when you consider she is also the Country Team Leader for T&T's Math Olympiad Team, and now a grandmother. How does she find time for it all?

"I think it's my whole work ethic," she says, pointing to the importance of her parents in contributing to her character from a young age. She points as well to her faith, Hinduism, which places a strong emphasis on education.

Although, she does admit that during her undergraduate years at UWI she wasn't the best student: "Just coming out of high school and coming to UWI, it was such a big experience. I was part of the choir. I was part of the dance troupe. I used to play tennis more than anything else. In fact, I represented UWI at tennis."

She adds: "I pride myself on being a much better teacher than student."

Two of her greatest motivators, however, are life experience and passion. As a young educator and scientist she did face gender bias, which prompted her to prove her worth and succeed. In 1991, she was badly injured in a car accident, an incident that led her to reassess her life and pursue her PhD in solar energy.

Then, there is her concern for the planet and her understanding that we need to live more sustainably.

"We are so vulnerable," she says, "small island ecosystems are very fragile. We must preserve and protect Mother Earth."

Dr Haraksingh is also clear about the role of UWI in her professional development and the impact of her work, naming in particular the late Professor Oliver Headley, another solar energy pioneer and also chemistry professor at the St Augustine and Cave Hill Campuses:

"He was very much an inspiration for me," she says, adding that, "Everything I have done, I have done at UWI - my first degree, my diploma, and my MPhil and PhD. The UWI has been my light."

She adds: "I also wish to recognise the role my family played in my development. My husband (Dr Kusha Haraksingh) and my daughter (Dr Rajini Haraksingh) have been constant sources of inspiration, motivation and support for me."

Asked if she has any advice for people who want to become involved in work or study related to vital, world-changing fields such as climate change, Dr Haraksingh looks around her room, rises to read something off camera, and then returns to her seat.

She says, "My daughter has on the wall of her room from a child, the message 'your imagination has no limits'. I think that's a good motto to follow. Think big. You can do it. You just have to put your mind to it and focus. However, there is no replacement for hard work and dedication."



Dr Haraksingh speaking at the Vice-Chancellor's Awards for Excellence ceremony in 2017. She was an awardee for her outstanding performance in the area of public service.

■ EDUCATION



“How do we help our students learn in a disrupted world?” asked Dr Nancy Gleason, a scholar in the areas of teaching and learning based in the United Arab Emirates.

As the world is still forced to deal with a pandemic that has lasted over a year and a half and continues to surge in some regions, it's a very timely question. COVID-19's impact on education at all levels has been massive. The response has been a near-global shift to online learning. So how do societies gain the maximum benefit from that shift while avoiding the pitfalls?

On September 30, Dr Gleason shared her insights on the topic at the 2021 UWI/Guardian Group Virtual Premium Open Lecture with a presentation entitled “Navigating the Realm of the Electronic Classroom: Creating an Effective Culture for Innovation and Change”. She spoke on the online educational landscape and stressed the need for teaching and learning to satisfy the requirements of the new working environment. The lecture was delivered online for the first time via YouTube to attendees throughout the Caribbean and around the world.

Dr Gleason, who is the Associate Professor of Practice of Political Science and the Director of the Hilary Ballon Center for Teaching and Learning at New York University in Abu Dhabi, noted that society was moving from more conventional work to work-from-home opportunities. This required training in online interaction and technology.

To the question of learning in a disrupted world, as well as connecting education to employability, she presented the solutions of lifelong and active learning. Queens University in Canada defines active learning as:

COVID-19 changed teaching and learning—how do we make the best of it?

Dr Nancy Gleason gives 2021 UWI/Guardian Group Virtual Premium Open Lecture

BY KANISHA VINCENT

“... an approach to instruction that involves actively engaging students with the course material through discussions, problem solving, case studies, role plays and other methods.”

The challenge that presents itself with lifelong and active learning, however, is how we apply ourselves and our knowledge. This is where technology helps. Dr Gleason noted that, “technology needs a purpose if [it is] to enhance learning.” Remote learning gives new ways to address knowledge and teaching through technology.

Speaking on the importance of an evolutionary approach to education in this new environment, Mr Anand Pascal, President of Guardian Life of the Caribbean, quoted educator Peter Drucker:

“The greatest danger in times of turbulence is not the turbulence—it is to act with yesterday's logic.”

UWI St Augustine Campus Principal Professor Brian Copeland, in his presentation to the virtual audience, referenced an article by Poornima Luthra and Sandy Mackenzie, that gave four ways COVID-19 could transform education: the need to continue to educate citizens in an interconnected world is pressing; the role of the educator would need to be redefined to meet the current demands; life skills for the future have to be

taught today; and technology, when used to its fullest potential, would be the key to delivering education.

Professor Copeland also vowed that The UWI will be a “driving force in this pivot to online teaching and education”.

The UWI/Guardian Group Premium Open Lecture Series is a collaborative initiative spearheaded by UWI St Augustine's Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) in partnership with the Guardian Group. Created to host high-level discussions on learning and teaching. Its sister event, the UWI/Guardian Group Premium Teaching Award, was created to recognise outstanding educators.

The Guardian Group, through Mr Pascal, expressed its gratitude and pleasure to be able to partner with The UWI in the delivery of the lecture and its transition to the online platform.

“Guardian Group is no stranger to change and evolution, and is happy to share this journey with The University of the West Indies,” he said.

■ To view the **2021 UWI/Guardian Group Virtual Premium Open Lecture**, visit the **UWI St Augustine YouTube channel**.

Kanisha Vincent is equal parts sport scientist, storyteller, poet and freelance writer.



Professor Raphael Heffron has been appointed as the new Dean of the Faculty of Law at UWI St Augustine. His term began on November 1, 2021.

The new dean is a qualified barrister-at-law, and a graduate of both Oxford and Cambridge universities. His work focuses primarily on achieving a just transition to a low-carbon economy, and combines energy law, policy and economics. He has been published over 150 times and is the most cited scholar in his field worldwide.

Professor Heffron was formerly Professor for Global Energy Law and Sustainability at the Centre for Energy, Petroleum and

PROFESSOR RAPHAEL HEFFRON appointed Dean of the Faculty of Law

Mineral Law and Policy at the University of Dundee. He is also the Jean Monnet Professor in the Just Transition to a Low-Carbon Economy, a post awarded by the European Commission. In 2020, he was appointed as Senior Counsel at Janson law firm in Brussels.

Professor Heffron's research has involved funding from UK national research councils, the UK Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the British Academy, and, currently, the European Commission. He has given professional expert advice on energy law and policy issues to the EU,

UN, Commonwealth Secretariat, World Bank, and various international think tanks.

Dean Heffron is a reviewer for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Report. He is also the Consulting Editor of the current *Halsbury's Laws of England* volumes on Energy Law, co-editor of the upcoming *Oxford University Press Handbook for International Energy Law* and editor-in-chief of the Edinburgh University Press journal *Global Energy Law and Sustainability*.

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SPECIAL REPORT

In late September, six surgeons gathered at an operating theatre to remove three damaged gall bladders. They were all experienced hands at these laparoscopic cholecystectomies so, ordinarily, it would be a routine procedure. But on this Monday morning, something novel was happening, something that elicited the interest of medical students and other practitioners. These surgeries had an additional feature: the Freehand Panorama CoBot, a robotic camera-holder that would precisely capture images at the slightest swivel of the surgeon's head.

"The robotic arm uses infra-red technology placed on the surgeon's forehead to control the laparoscopic camera," explained Dr Ravi Maharaj, head of the Department of Clinical Surgical Sciences. "The camera is hooked onto the robotic arm and the movement of the surgeon's head controls the movement of the camera. These operations can therefore be performed with a surgeon and scrub nurse only and with the highest degree of precision of sight."

It's not that cameras had not guided laparoscopies before; but they were usually directed by an assistant's hands, sometimes slow, sometimes shaky, and often prolonging the duration of the process.

After months of planning and pulling together the multitude of components to make it happen—no mean feat under pandemic restrictions—the laparoscopy experts were ready to see what kind of difference it would make. Working in teams (a lead surgeon and assistant doctors), Prof Shamir Cawich, Dexter Thomas, Patrick Harnarayan and Jason Rattan operated successfully on the first patient. By the time the second patient was wheeled in, Prof Dilip Dan, and his team of Michael Jimmy Ramdass, Ravi Maharaj and David Milne were gowned and masked and ready to go. For patient number three, the team was led by Yardesh Singh, with Adi Rambhajan and Jonathan Jarvis. The teams received technical support from Dirk Cabral, Medical Clinical Manager at AA Laquis Ltd. AA Laquis owns the CoBot.

It was a classic teaching moment, observed by many, including a consultant at the Port-of-Spain General Hospital, Shastri Sookhai, as well as theatre nurses, anaesthetists, AA Laquis staff, surgical house officers and medical students. Because the primary intent was to demonstrate how the robotic arm camera could function—it was practically a lecture room—the duration was longer than it would be in a regular situation, but everyone was impressed by the possibilities that could come from this approach.

To be precise, it was not the first time a robotic camera had been used in a surgical procedure locally. In 2012, a team of urological doctors had done a laparoscopic radical prostatectomy using what they called a "robotic camera holder" at the San Fernando General Hospital. Drs Lester Goetz, Paul Rouse, Michael Rampaul, S. Sarker, Uche Okuli and Rajiv Bagaloo were involved in this process, and the latter five had presented a report at the tenth annual conference of the Caribbean College of Surgeons.

Globally, robot-assisted surgeries have become increasingly popular, especially in the more developed countries. In the Caribbean, it has not yet taken off, despite the initial foray nearly a decade ago.

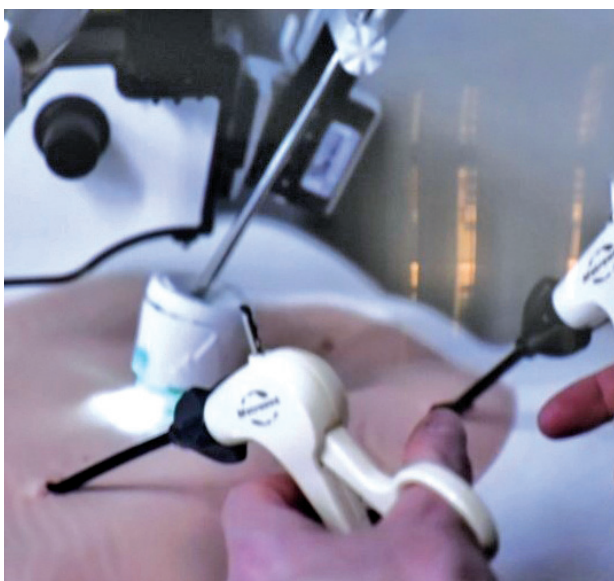
However, the Freehand Panorama CoBot, made available through AA Laquis, is a far more sophisticated piece of equipment, based on the growing use of robotic technology in the medical sphere.

"Usually, a human assistant will hold the camera and react to verbal instructions from the surgeon. With FreeHand CoBots, the camera is brought under the direct control of the surgeon, providing him with a 360°, tremor-free image, eliminating the need for the camera-holding assistant and optimising operating theatre resources," the regional healthcare company described. Essentially, it "allows the surgeon to operate the camera to ensure accurate and unhindered vision during surgery. The surgical robot responds accurately to the surgeon's commands, removing any possibility of human error."

A Different Kind of Selfie

Robotic-assisted surgeries change the way we see ourselves

BY VANEISA BAKSH



One of the key outcomes has been the potential for remote training in this and other surgical fields. As you can imagine, much of a surgeon's training depends on a hands-on approach, learning under the close supervision of experts. With the complications wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic, conventional training methods had been hampered. Freehand, the UK company based in Surrey who makes these robotic camera controllers, worked with The UWI to develop a remote training programme.

The company noted that it also worked with the Port-of-Spain General Hospital, Imperial Medical Solutions (IMS), project coordinator, AA Laquis Ltd, and Digital Resilience UK (DRUK). DRUK, another British company, was responsible for the virtual training methodology which can be adapted to various programmes.

For the team involved in the three surgeries on September 20, it was the culmination of months of collaboration, led by Prof Jimmy Ramdass as Deputy Dean of Continuing Professional Development and Outreach at the Faculty of Medical Sciences.

"We were strongly supported," said Prof Ramdass, "by the Dean, Prof Terrence Seemungal, and Dr Shaheeba Barrow, Medical Chief of Staff at the Port of Spain General Hospital."

It had begun, as many enterprises do, through a serendipitous encounter. Dr Ram Senasi had seen media reports of the "largest laparoscopic gallstone removal in the world," said Dr Yardesh Singh. Senasi got in touch with Prof Ramdass, to discuss the idea of deploying robotic-assisted surgery in the region, inviting him to become the project lead on this venture.

Using his co-ordinating skills, he roped in the various elements, and branded this specific enterprise: Project Chaconia. A similar one for the Mona Campus in Jamaica, was called Project Lignum Vitae, and they have since done their robotic-assisted surgery as well. It is a collaboration that is envisaged to grow and mushroom into other projects, all connected by the common thread of developing medical care within the region.

SPECIAL REPORT

The Surgical Team



■ **Project lead, Michael Jimmy Ramdass**, is the Professor of Vascular Surgery, and Deputy Dean at The UWI. He is an Honorary Consultant General and Vascular Surgeon at the Port-of-Spain General Hospital. He is a course director for the Royal College of Surgeons of England, and for basic surgical skills and students surgical skills courses in this region.



■ When **Professor Dilip Dan** completed his undergraduate training at The UWI, he did his residency in General Surgery at SUNY, Buffalo, NY. He completed subspecialty training in Advanced Laparoscopic and Bariatric Surgery in Washington DC. He is currently Professor of Minimally Invasive Surgery and Deputy Dean of Graduate Studies and Research at The UWI.



■ **Shamir Cawich** is the Professor of Liver and Pancreatic Surgery at The UWI. He is a Consultant Laparoscopic and Hepato-Pancreatico-Biliary Surgeon at the Port-of-Spain General Hospital. After his surgical training at The UWI, he pursued sub-specialty training in laparoscopic hepato-pancreato-biliary surgery at the Southampton General Hospital in Southampton, UK. He is President of the Caribbean College of Surgeons.



■ **Dr Yardesh Singh** is a lecturer in Surgery at The UWI. He is also a consultant in General and Advanced Laparoscopic Surgery at the San Fernando General Hospital as well as a Fellow of the Caribbean College of Surgeons, American College of Surgeons and Caribbean Society of Endoscopic Surgeons. Locally, he pioneered Single Incision Laparoscopic Surgery (SILS) or scarless surgery by describing the SILS TT technique which he used to perform scarless colectomies, gastrectomies and bariatric surgeries.



■ **Dr Patrick Harnarayan** is a peripheral vascular surgeon who is Division Head at the San Fernando General and Teaching Hospital. He is a senior lecturer at The UWI, tutor in Basic Skills Courses for the Royal College of Surgeons, and lecturer for the Advanced Trauma Life Support (ATLS) courses.



■ **Dr Ravi Maharaj** is the Department Head for Clinical Surgical Sciences, and a senior lecturer at The UWI. He is a Consultant Surgeon at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. He was appointed to the Ministry of Health National Cancer Control Coordinating Committee. His special interests include cancers of hepato-pancreato-biliary, gastrointestinal, and mammary systems.



Laparoscopy explained

Dilip Dan is a Professor of Minimally Invasive Surgery and Deputy Dean of Graduate Studies and Research at The UWI. He was part of the team involved in the use of the robotic camera holder for the laparoscopies, having participated as the other members did, in the training workshop. He was asked to share some background on the development of laparoscopic surgeries regionally.

“When I returned in 2003, laparoscopic surgery was done in an extremely limited way with the most basic procedures being done by few surgeons,” he said. That same year, an advanced laparoscopic service was started at San Fernando General Hospital and a surgical residency was established in 2004. Training also began at all public and most private facilities, as well as around the Caribbean. Although he does not say it, it is no coincidence that this flurry of activity began after his return from his training.

“Today all public and private facilities offer advanced laparoscopic surgery,” he said. There are variations because of costs, or the absence of someone trained in advanced laparoscopic surgery, which result in minimal laparoscopic surgeries. Still, he said, “The use of laparoscopy has broadened over the years, even in areas not previously done. Laparoscopy

is just a technique used to perform surgery using tiny incisions with the aid of a camera system and small instruments. The advantages are less pain, blood loss, and quicker recovery and rapid return to normal activities.”

Prof Dan also explained the finer points of robotic technology. “True robotic surgery involves a robot at the bedside with the instruments controlled at a console by a surgeon in another room with an assistant at the bedside.” It’s completely different from the purpose of the Freehand CoBot. This, he explained, “is a device to hold the camera with movements of the camera controlled by nodding the head. It allows for more dexterity in difficult locations.”

He said one of the promising outcomes of the entire project was, “the fact that in this very COVID-restricted world we live in, the dry-lab workshop to train the surgeons in the use of the camera-assist device was done online. This is one of the pandemic positives the University is using and will continue to use and expand on for teaching of undergraduate and post graduate students. Simulation labs will become a major tool for teaching surgery,” he said.



Dr Senasi attended UWI St Augustine in the late 1990s.

The IMS Factor

Dr Ramdas Senasi exudes the zealotry of a missionary. If he didn’t, he wouldn’t be as convincing to the people he persuades to try the innovative ideas that buzz around in his head. He is a classic example of someone who emerged from obscurity on the basis of visions driven by unwavering conviction and boundless energy.

Dr Senasi was born in Malaysia, attending a boarding school there before being offered the option of either India or the West Indies to pursue his medical degree. He succumbed to the allure of the Caribbean and landed up at the St Augustine campus of The UWI in the late 1990s, where he formed friendships that would endure long enough so that when the prospect of a collaboration with one of his alma maters came up, it was an easy decision.

In the interim years, he went to Sheffield, England to do specialist radiology training—he is actually a paediatric radiologist, trained at Alberta Children’s Hospital. At 43, he is a Fellow of the Royal College of Radiologists and a member of the Royal College of Surgeons. Not surprisingly, he is a member of several organisations related to imaging and radiology, and is part of a wide range of connected activities.

When I asked him why he had made the leap to IMS (as a paediatric radiologist), he bristled. Yes, he was a medical doctor, but he did not believe one should limit oneself by imposing boundaries. “I have some

core skills, like networking, like team-building, like project management,” he said, and the combination of these, alongside his passion for breaking barriers and moulds, led him to the formation of Imperial Medical Solutions in July 2020.

A shrewd observer of growing trends, he had seen the trajectory towards digital transformations in the medical field. As the wealthier countries invested heavily, “I saw a massive growing divide in digital health care. Developing countries would be left behind and we needed to find a way to start bridging that gap.”

Leaning on his strengths and his medical background, he saw that IMS could be like a design house, customising solutions for its clientele, based on its professional networks.

The company was formed with two surgeons, CEO Prof Tan Arulampalam and Medical Director Mr Ahsanul Haq, and solicitor Mrs Nazia Aftab. They have brought together all the components to make this project succeed, a true exercise in networking.

It’s all about developing health care systems, said Senasi. We’re doctors talking to doctors.

■ THE UWI ST AUGUSTINE CAMPUS GRADUATION CEREMONIES 2021



The Return of October

BY JOEL HENRY

Graduation reclaims its traditional date a year and a half after the pandemic's rise

Like a warm wave wending its way down the Caribbean Sea, Graduation 2021 brought tides of celebration to the St Augustine Campus. Starting in early October at the Five Islands Campus in Antigua and Barbuda, the graduation ceremonies then took place for the Open Campus, then the Cave Hill Campus, and from October 28 to 30, here in Trinidad and Tobago, before concluding at the Mona Campus in Jamaica.

"Here" has a special meaning. The UWI St Augustine ceremonies, like all the others, took place virtually for the second year in a row because of the restrictions on social gatherings. COVID-19 has had such a destabilising effect on society that even "year" has a special meaning. The 2020 graduation ceremonies had to be moved from the traditional month of October to January 2021. Not only has the campus' signature event been reimagined from in-person to online, it had to be executed twice in the space of 10 months.

That's quite an achievement. And though members of the campus community, particularly some students, miss the ambiance and connectedness of the massive gatherings to recognise the achievements of the graduating class, the virtual ceremonies were still powerful and deeply moving.

The valedictorians shared their personal stories and collective experiences with their fellow students. UWI Chancellor Robert Bermudez not only congratulated the graduands, he made a forceful call for them to contribute to the society and the institution. UWI's performers - musicians, dancers, and singers, entertained the online audience. The honorary graduands - four citizens of T&T that have made major contributions to national life - shared their words, and in one case, mastery of the steelpan.

But most magical of all, was the virtual distribution of diplomas, as each dean painstakingly read the names of every single graduate from their faculties. The names, and many times the pictures, of the graduates filled the screen. Hearts flooded the chat box. "That's my sister!" "That's my son!" "Look my friend!" "I'm so proud!"

A year and a half after the rise of the pandemic, welcome back October.

■ **For more graduation coverage**, including links to the ceremonies, visit the **UWI St Augustine** or **UWITV Facebook** pages.

The 2020 graduation ceremonies had to be moved from the traditional month of October to January 2021. Not only has the campus' signature event been reimagined from in-person to online, it had to be executed twice in the space of 10 months.



UWI St Augustine has a new Public Orator on the (virtual) graduation stage. **Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw**, Professor of French Literature and Creative Writing in the Faculty of Humanities and Education, was appointed on August 1, 2021. She succeeds **Christine Carrington**, Professor of Molecular Genetics and Virology. Each campus has its own Public Orator who acts as its voice during public occasions. At The UWI, the Public Orator writes the citations for the Honorary Graduands and presents them to the University Chancellor.



UWI Chancellor applauds graduates, invites them

UWI TODAY is pleased to share an excerpt of the address of the Chancellor of The University West Indies Mr Robert Bermudez at the 2021 Graduation Ceremonies.

My heartiest congratulations are extended to every single graduate of the Class of 2021!

I applaud each one of you for staying the course and completing your degrees. You have done well and it is truly my honour and pleasure to greet you all on this special day in your academic careers.

First and foremost, I ask that you take the opportunity to thank the loved ones who have made this journey with you – your parents, partners, spouses, children – they have watched you burn the midnight oil and supported you through assignments and exams. For many of you, this is a collective achievement and I urge you to express your gratitude to your most ardent supporters and cheerleaders.

A graduation ceremony is a time of celebration and represents a moment when, as comrades who have toiled together, you reflect on your academic journey and breathe a collective sigh of relief. It is done. What next?

Graduation represents your transformation from student to graduate. As you view with enormous pride the procession of graduates, of brilliance representing so much promise for the advancement of our society.

Since March 2020, the pandemic has impacted how we conduct a significant ceremony such as your graduation. This is a time of celebration, and this is my central message to you to continue to take place, whatever you do in the future must be in line with advancing not only your personal interests but those of the community.

We have accepted the inevitability of change. How we adapt to constant changes will be the measure of our personal and collective resilience. UWI has adapted to drastically changed circumstances and I am in shifting to online and blended teaching and learning. Two words of testimony to the dedication and commitment of the academic staff whom this would not have been possible. I will ask that at an event where staff who have worked with you to ensure that you reached the finish line.

However, I believe that the best way in which you can thank UWI is by continuing to do well in whatever you choose to do and prosper!"



PHOTOS: ATIBA CUDJOE

Robert Bermudez

m to make an impact on society



ts to alumni. It is a time when those of us who are on this side graduates across the many disciplines, the wondrous gathering ment of our societies and economies.

to so many things – how we work, how we learn, and how we change in mode does not in any way diminish the significance day – that despite the changes that have taken place and will impactful. It must be done to a high quality, with commitment e wider community in which you exist.

as individuals and as societies adapt to those persistent and collective resilience and success. Over the past 20 months, The applaud the leadership of the institution for taking bold steps o cohorts have since completed their programmes and this is lemic staff and the administrative and technical staff, without opportune time, you thank your lecturers and all the support is point in your life, this moment, this graduation ceremony. ank your loved ones as well as the leadership and staff of The o. I use the well-known phrase to encourage you to “Go forth

Honouring Our Change-makers

BY SERAH ACHAM

Each year, along with the thousands of students whose hard work and dedication The University of the West Indies celebrates at its graduation ceremonies, a few select individuals are honoured for their contributions to society.

The tradition of conferring honorary degrees began in 1965 when UWI granted the first to Queen Elizabeth II. Holding fast to a belief in honouring those “who support or advance the work of The University and are committed to regional development and excellence”, says Mrs Lois Graham, Senior Assistant Registrar at The University’s Vice Chancellery, Mona Campus, Jamaica, the institution has since granted over 500 honorary degrees across all campuses, to deserving individuals throughout the Caribbean and the world.

This year, The UWI’s St Augustine Campus is honouring four individuals who have made impactful and lasting contributions to public life.

2021 HONORARY GRADUANDS



A Desire to Help

Dr Roshan Parasram

Chief Medical Officer, Ministry of Health, Trinidad and Tobago

Before he embarked on the journey that would make him Trinidad and Tobago’s Chief Medical Officer (CMO), Dr Roshan Parasram, knew he wanted to help people. After graduating from UWI with his medical degree in 2002 and taking his first post at the Chaguanas Health Facility’s Accident and Emergency Department, he knew he wanted to effect change.

He began “to think about going into public health in terms of policy and looking at ways to improve the public health system as a whole,” he shares.

That thought became a mission. He worked extra hours, took no-pay leave, settled for decreased salaries, took risks and kept his eyes and ears open for opportunity.

Eventually he was offered a newly minted posting that gave him oversight of a cluster of health centres, including the rebuilding of the St Joseph Health Centre, launching his career in the direction of public health. At St Joseph, he influenced public health policies, staffing and structures, contributing to the creation of an enhanced health centre that included an accident and emergency section.

“It is really something that I take a lot of pride in as one of my first public health postings,” he says.

Dr Parasram has not only moved up the career ladder, he accomplished the goal he set out to, turning his desire to help people into a life of helping individuals, communities and an entire population. He attributes his success to persistence and resilience. “You have to keep trying,” he says.

On being bestowed an Honorary Doctorate of Science degree by UWI, Dr Parasram says that it means a lot. Not only is UWI our Caribbean university, it was the first tertiary institution he attended and he has also lectured there part-time. “I have a special place in my heart for UWI”.



An Advocate

Mrs Lynette Seebaran Suite

Attorney-at-Law

Coming of age in the heart of the global women’s movement, with parents who were activists, a path along the fight for change seems to have been written into Mrs Lynette Seebaran Suite’s life story.

From the onset of her law career, she fought against discriminatory laws and for rights to equal opportunities for society’s most vulnerable groups. She was particularly instrumental in charting the course for women’s rights in our legal system, advocating for and demonstrating the importance of laws surrounding divorce, sexual offences, gender-based violence, the custody of children, inheritance, and abortion.

Throughout the decades of her career, she acknowledges, “there has been a lot of advancement ... in the status and condition of women at the legislative level”.

In 2014, she was appointed as Chairperson of the Equal Opportunity Commission and broadened her advocacy to other vulnerable groups in Trinidad and Tobago, including the LGBTQ+ community – one of the twin highlights of her career, she says. The other is the “ASPIRE abortion law campaign”, which pushed for women’s rights over their own reproductive health.

“I would like to think that my contribution [is] impacting normative change and advocating within the [spheres] of human rights ... equal opportunity, non-discrimination and the women’s movement,” she says.

She makes clear, however, that she is not solely responsible for the strides made in women’s rights. With the women’s movement being very active locally and internationally, “there were many, many organisations that rose to the fore and carried the torch for the advancement of women”. Mrs Seebaran Suite dedicates this Honorary Doctor of Laws degree to “all of the many champions of women’s rights [and] vulnerable groups, across the board, in Trinidad and Tobago,” acknowledging that “it is a recognition of all their work, as much as mine.”

THE UWI ST AUGUSTINE CAMPUS GRADUATION CEREMONIES 2021

2021 HONORARY GRADUANDS



A Philanthropic Spirit

Mr Sieunarine Persad Coosal

Chief Executive Officer of the Coosal's Group of Companies

Well-known for his philanthropic spirit, Mr Sieunarine Coosal has never forgotten the hardships he endured throughout his life. This, perhaps, is why his definition of success doesn't include financial wealth or accolades, but is built on his contribution to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Growing up as one of the youngest of 14 children of a widowed mother, during the days when school was an afterthought to household chores and working on the estate, Mr Coosal never availed of higher education. Rather, he embraced and learned from his experiences. From enduring "humble beginnings", to taking on heavy responsibility as a young teenager in the early days of the Coosal's company, and being "subjected to unyielding adversity", he needed no higher-level training to inspire his team to strive for excellence, building one of Trinidad and Tobago's most successful and longstanding institutions.

His company's success is based on respect and value for people. Among his philosophies is to "treat everyone who works for you as potential stars" and you'll see them live up to those high expectations. He extends this thinking to his philanthropic work, not only wanting to provide those in need with food and shelter, but also to support their success.

"Some of the most creative, innovative and entrepreneurial minds are housed but untapped in the poor and needy of our society," he says. "We need to collectively, as a society, [tap into] this locked-up potential by providing the necessary support in whatever form or fashion." His life's mission, he says, is "nurturing minds and changing lives through philanthropy".

Mr Coosal says that he is "proud yet humbled to have been bestowed" the Honorary Doctor of Laws degree by UWI, and intends to use it as a "catalyst ... to bring about the required sustainable societal transformation for which we all yearn".



A Cultural Icon

Mr Ray Holman

Musician

As a little boy, Mr Ray Holman would visit the Queen's Park Oval with his friends to watch cricket, paying no mind to the Invaders Panyard he regularly walked past. Little did he know, that lot was where he would learn to play the instrument with which he would embark on a much-celebrated career.

Exposure to a wide and eclectic range of music from childhood, including classical, jazz, American pop, Cuban, Venezuelan and Indian music, afforded him "a good musical background ... [and] accounted for my success as a musician," he reflects.

Also contributing to his career's success was simply being in the right place at the right time. When he did enter the pan yard at 12 years old, "there were so many great pan players," including master tuner, Ellie Mannette, and he says, "that was a good start for me."

Add talent, hard work, determination and a positive attitude to the mix and Mr Holman was set to soar. He didn't just play the steelpan; he became a composer and arranger, even a lyricist in later years, introducing elements like "jazz harmonies and voicings" that "[uplifted] the standard of music". He also encouraged the steelband to create and play original music – the contribution of which he is most proud, he shares. "It was like liberating the movement from playing what everybody else was playing," which was important because steelbands didn't have music that was their own until then.

A career highlight, he recounts, was when the Crossroads Theatre in New Jersey commissioned him to write the musical score for a production of Black Orpheus. "When the play opened on the first night ... and I saw my name in lights ... 'Composer – Ray Holman', I had to pinch myself".

Mr Holman is grateful to be granted the "prestigious" Honorary Doctor of Letters degree. That people consider his work "worth honouring," he says, "means so much to me."



Reaching the Higher Heights of Education



"I owe it all to Jehovah," says Renelle Lovell about her graduation success. It wasn't easy. Not only did she earn her Master of Science degree in Project Management from the Faculty of

Engineering, a very challenging programme of study, she did so while dealing with three degenerative, incurable diseases. Renelle was one of several students who shared their inspiring graduation stories (you can read them all at the UWI St Augustine blog at <https://medium.com/@uwisocialmedia>). She is also one of the graduates to overcome the rigours of pursuing a higher degree or postgraduate diploma. Postgraduate education produces the true leaders in their field – master's degree holders, doctors, and professors. For more information on higher degree programmes at UWI St Augustine, visit <https://sta.uwi.edu/admissions/postgrad/>.



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

THE UWI ST AUGUSTINE CAMPUS GRADUATION CEREMONIES 2021

Class of Resilience

BY SABRINA VAILLOO

Every year at graduation time, UWI St Augustine selects some of its high-achieving graduates to represent their faculties and share messages of inspiration with the campus community. UWI TODAY is pleased to profile the 2021 Valedictorians.

2021 VALEDICTORIANS

“Now that I’m graduating, what I think the world needs to know about me is that I am brave, I am bold, I am focused on achieving all of my goals to arrive at where I want to be at in life.” These are the words of an assured Weston Maharaj, graduating with first-class honours in a BSc Accounting (Special), and one of two of this year’s valedictorians representing the Faculty of Social Sciences.

Maharaj, a native of Malabar, Arima, recently turned 21 and feels especially privileged to be awarded valedictorian of the graduating class most affected by the pandemic in terms of online learning being foisted upon this cohort in the middle of their degree programme.

His older sister, his strongest influence, taught Maharaj the necessity of following his own path. He recalls playing school as a toddler and today he still holds strong to the desire to become a teacher. “Teaching is one of the noblest and most rewarding jobs a person can have – you are able to give back everything you’ve learnt.”

Failure builds courage, says Maharaj, who advises even to anticipate it. And like many of his peers, he wants to assure undergrads that success in UWI life requires balance, participation to the fullest, and establishing relationships built on trust and mutual support.



Mr Joshua Ramjattan

Bachelor of Science in Mathematics (Special)
First Class Honours
Faculty of Science and Technology

Originally from Penal, Trinidad, Joshua Ramjattan, 22, recalled the many sacrifices made and struggles endured during the pursuit of his BSc Mathematics (Specialisation) at the Faculty of Science and Technology. He received first-class honours.

“To me, the entire 2021 graduating cohort is an inspiration when you consider ... the stress brought on by the knowledge that whether you passed or failed a course relied on the ability of your Wi-Fi to hold out for the duration of an online exam, or simply being isolated from the people who sat in the same classrooms as you did.”

Ramjattan, who’s fascinated by the applied aspects of mathematics, would like to pursue a career in education. At present, he’s an Associate Professional at the Department of Mathematics and Statistics at The UWI, St. Augustine.

“The UWI has not just provided me with a rigid foundation in my field, but also with the practical tools necessary to apply the knowledge I have gained in the workplace.” He says that one mistake undergrads should especially avoid is ignoring their mental health, and admitted to periods of overworking himself. “Mental well-being is just as important as physical health, even if it means taking a short break when studying, or scrolling through Twitter while burning the midnight oil.”

For Ramjattan, the transition to virtual learning was a difficult period. “I felt like giving up many times but somehow managed to convince myself that this could not be the thing that would break me. The mathematician in me knew that success was a function of hard work, so I did the only thing I knew would improve my chances for success – to continue working hard. I made many personal sacrifices, studied for unhealthy amounts of time, and had to reignite the zeal I once had for school. Today, I’m proud to know that it was all worth it.”

True to Gen Z values, Rondell Mungal, 24, cares deeply about community. “I am guided by a core belief in the power of radical love and freedom, and I am committed to uplifting my community and continuing the work of Caribbean creatives in our region and the diaspora.” Mungal is from Princes Town, Trinidad.

“To be recognised by The UWI ... is a validation of four years of hard work. It is also the recognition of the academic and artistic excellence of the Department of Creative and Festival Arts, which I proudly represent.” Mungal received first-class honours at the Faculty of Humanities and Education with a BA, Theatre Arts with Music and Psychology.

Mungal extols Jessel Murray, Dr Dani Lyndersay, and Louis McWilliams as sources of inspiration and guidance at The UWI, and thanks personal influences Rayshawn Pierre, Cynara Dube, and Reverend Sanya Beharry for their love and support.

Mungal described himself as “someone who likes to meticulously plan out his life”. While not knowing what lay ahead “induces some anxiety, it also feels liberating—there is no script to follow.”

“The UWI has prepared me to wear my Caribbean heritage as a badge of honour, to dare to be messy in the pursuit of higher standards of innovation and excellence, and to be bold and unapologetic as I take up space.”

“Although your university journey may seem quite long, one day it will be over. So make the most of it! Don’t limit your university experience to just attending lectures and writing papers. Get to know the people around you – make friends! Sign up for a club or take a co-curricular course. Get involved!”



Mr Rondell Mungal

Bachelor of Arts, Theatre Arts (Major), Music (Minor), Psychology (Minor)
First Class Honours
Faculty of Humanities and Education



Mr Weston Maharaj

Bachelor of Science in Accounting (Special)
First Class Honours
Faculty of Social Sciences

THE UWI ST AUGUSTINE CAMPUS GRADUATION CEREMONIES 2021

2021 VALEDICTORIANS

**Mr Jensen Samaroo**

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

Jensen Samaroo, 22, graduating with a BSc

Political Science with International Relations describes his home village of Port Kaituma, Guyana as his “Garden of Eden”. Greatly inspired by his love for people and his childhood friend Chelsea James, Samaroo believes that friendships are what make life worthwhile. He is proud of his Caribbean heritage and is committed to advancing the call for Caribbean integration.

He names the most influential person in his time at The UWI as Amilcar Sanatan, who “played a very critical role in shaping my thinking as a citizen of the Caribbean and also greatly helped shape my activism and influenced the eventual leadership roles I took up”.

Samaroo advises to “avoid living through the fears of others” as people “set themselves up for failure when they allow the projected fears of others to influence how they approach courses and university life in general.”

Pandemic challenges brought “an opportunity to reflect even more on what my strengths and weaknesses were... You know what you’re capable of, what your limitations are, and how much work you need to put in to turn those limitations into capabilities.”

Unique to Samaroo’s cohort is having had the pandemic disrupt their course of study midway into their degree. “The drive was not there for many who preferred face-to-face interaction and learning, which the virtual space tried to mimic but could not fully replace. If anything, my cohort is perhaps one of the best examples of perseverance and resilience in the face of challenges.”

Having obtained first-class honours, Samaroo is now enrolled in the LLB programme.

Dr Ryley Vernon, one of two female valedictorians this year, is 24 and from Montego Bay, Jamaica. She says that like most other graduates, she is not sure where she will end up, but “won’t be stressing as I continue my journey in finding out who I am.”

Vernon earned her DVM With Distinction at the Faculty of Medical Sciences, Mt Hope, Trinidad. She says that “It was an unexpected honour to be awarded valedictorian of my faculty; a little cherry on top of my experience at this establishment. I carry great pride with me that I have earned my wings as a Pelican in the best way.”

Her grandmother Marguerite influenced her the most, often checking in on her and supporting her with “her persistent, diligent nature”.

She says that one mistake that undergrads should especially avoid is overloading. “Trying to maintain a balance is easier said than done but it is very crucial to keeping your sanity when doing a degree.” Consistency is what carried Vernon through her studies.

“One of the biggest challenges I had to face was travelling back to Trinidad from my home country to finish my studies in the middle of the pandemic. My final year was mostly practical and I could not complete it online. I had to face lockdowns, numerous quarantine periods and take extra safety precautions all while being away from my family at a very crucial time. I have discovered a level of strength in myself that I did not know I had, and I would like everyone to know that they have it in them as well. My high school motto that has stuck with me throughout my life is Ad Astra per Aspera – To the stars through difficulties.”

**Dr Ryley Vernon**

Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM)
With Distinction
Faculty of Medical Sciences

**Ms Selena Mohammed**

Bachelor of Science in Petroleum Geoscience
Upper Second Class Honours
Faculty of Engineering

“Your word is your bond – so if I say I’ll do something, I commit to it!” – this is Selena Mohammed’s personal philosophy that she takes with her from The UWI. Mohammed, 22, is from Diego Martin, Trinidad, and describes herself as “determined, dedicated and resilient”. This disposition proved essential to “the biggest obstacle along the journey of my degree”, her final year project. She often thought of quitting, but prayer, therapy and her support system propelled her to the finish line. “Never underestimate the power of seeking help! We weren’t designed to do everything on our own.”

Mohammed received upper second-class honours for her BSc in Petroleum Geoscience at the Faculty of Engineering. “We operate at our optimum when our lives are balanced,” she said.

“Being awarded valedictorian...proves to me that being the smartest, or the best at everything is not what’s important. What’s important is being balanced; having academia as a priority while also having a social life, knowing how to converse with others and how to listen.”

Mohammed, who admires her sister’s determination in the pursuit of her own studies, cites her as being the most influential person in her UWI life. She says while the workload didn’t get easier, life became more bearable as it became infused with happiness from her supportive parents, friends, and her dog Bo. She is currently employed at the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries (MEEI).

“Everything will not always be laid out in front of you, and the path you should take will not always be clear...mistakes are inevitable and usually produce important tools that we can take with us.”

Mohammed offered more words of wisdom for undergrads. She says to avoid “sticking to yourself and not trying to help others! You make your life unnecessarily harder when you decide against being a team player. Manoeuvring through your university experience is significantly better when you have friends and people you can depend on.”

THE UWI ST AUGUSTINE CAMPUS GRADUATION CEREMONIES 2021



Slow and Steady Wins the Race

A Graduation story about love and support

BY OMEGA FRANCIS

Ask Leana and Satyum Rampersad how they were able to achieve success in their UWI journey, and they will tell you that, while it was an emotional rollercoaster, the time was cushioned by the unconditional love and support they had for each other. Their journey began in 2012, when they met at the UWI Open Campus while pursuing a Certificate in Social Work, and it continued at the St Augustine Campus a year later. Following lecturers' advice, and using the Open Campus certificate as a steppingstone, Leana applied to the St Augustine Campus to do a Major in Psychology, while Satyum made a last-minute application and got through to read for a degree in Public Sector Management (Special). Not a semester into their first year at UWI St Augustine, they decided to get married and subsequently took a year off to enjoy newly wedded bliss. They restarted their UWI journey in 2014.

Working full time jobs and going to the Evening University, their calendars were packed, and their schedules did not leave them much breathing room, but their love and support for each other was always able to give them that extra needed push forward. Then, 2017 brought a new addition to their lives: their beautiful son, Prince Shivum. Due to the physical needs of new motherhood, Leana decided that it was best to take some time off and focus on her son, but her mind never strayed far from UWI. She was left with the hard decision of balancing her work life, family life, and school life and, with that, a sacrifice had to be made. With the support of Satyum, she quit her job and re-entered school, this time changing her degree programme to Sociology, with a minor in Psychology.



Once again, the couple were journeying through higher ed together, but they were not alone. Due to certain constraints, they often had to take their son to school and juggle their schedules so that when one was in a lecture, the other would take care of him. They were even supported by Dr Anand Rampersad who allowed them to split his lecture time in half; Leana taking the first hour, Satyum the second. This level of support from the faculty and staff throughout their time at The UWI allowed them to press on. When COVID-19 measures caused the campus to move online, it was indeed a blessing in disguise for the couple as it removed the daily arduous commute from Princes Town to St Augustine; giving them even more time at home to take care of their son and pursue their studies. Satyum's online schedule was not as booked up as Leana's, but she is grateful for his presence every day: "He waited for me! I think Satyum could have graduated in 2020, but he waited." Even during this time, they both kept abreast of each other's schedules and encouraged each other to keep going.

"We just don't want to settle, there is always room for improvement and betterment and that is what we are striving for," Satyum says when he asked about their future. For this young couple, progress is still progress, no matter how small, or how slow. In 2021, they have achieved what they had set out to achieve so many years earlier, and they will continue to push forward to become better; to do better. With the love and support that they have for each other, nothing is impossible.

Omega Francis is a writer, editor and blogger based in Trinidad and Tobago.

UWI Scientists make representation for **CARICOM at COP26**



Dr Donovan Campbell



Dr Hugh Sealy



Professor Tannecia Stephenson



Professor Michael Taylor



Professor John Agard

UWI scientists joined leaders and technical experts from the Caribbean and wider world for the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) held from October 31 to November 12. While the urgency of climate action is dire across the globe, the livelihood of the Caribbean region continues to be threatened by global warming.

“The outcomes from the November 1 to 12 COP26 can have profound impacts on our earth as we know it, and many view it as the last best chance for political leaders to avert a climate catastrophe, which would be unavoidable if global warming exceeds 1.5°C,” said Professor Michael Taylor, Climate Scientist at The UWI.

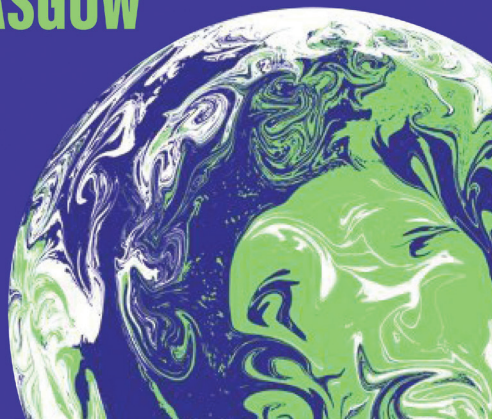
Professor Taylor is Dean of the Faculty of Science and Technology at the Mona Campus, and co-leads the Climate Studies Group at Mona (CSGM). Over the past few months, he and Professor Tannecia Stephenson, who is Head of the Department of Physics at UWI Mona and co-lead for the CSGM, have been the lead technical experts among a CARICOM team that prepared the key issues and positions that the 15-member group presented at COP26. Professor Stephenson also presented on Small Island Science at the COP26 Science Pavilion event organised by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

Professor Taylor described COP26 as a “politically significant moment”. He quoted the IPCC’s Sixth Assessment Report (AR6), which states that “global warming of 1.5°C and two degrees Celsius will be exceeded during the 21st century unless deep reductions in CO₂ and other greenhouse gas emissions occur in the coming decades.” Professor Taylor cautioned that heading to 2°C is too much for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) such as the Caribbean, noting that even at 1.5°C, “we are only guaranteed half a chance of a liveable future”.

UWI environmental scientist, Dr Hugh Sealy, served as the technical lead of the Barbados delegation and lead negotiator for the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), charged with coordinating AOSIS positions on matters

**THE UWI’S SCIENTISTS
HAVE BEEN SPEAKING
OUT ON CLIMATE AND
ENVIRONMENTAL
ISSUES FOR ALMOST
FIVE DECADES.**

**COP26
GLASGOW**



related to raising the mitigation ambition of all countries to limit global warming to less than 1.5°C. Dr Sealy was also a co-facilitator of the negotiations under Article 6 of the Paris Agreement. Article 6 is one of the most complex concepts of the global accord that could help the world avoid dangerous levels of global warming or let countries off the hook from making meaningful emissions cuts. Its implementation is one of the outstanding issues to be resolved since the Paris Agreement was established in 2015. Dr Sealy will have a direct responsibility to attempt to bring all of the parties to a consensus on how to advance it.

Other UWI experts that participated in virtual COP26 events included Professor John Agard, Professor of Tropical Island Ecology and Executive Director of the University’s Global Institute for Climate-Smart and Resilient Development; as well as Dr Donovan Campbell, a Senior Lecturer and Head of the Department of Geography and Geology at the Mona Campus.

The UWI’s scientists have been speaking out on climate and environmental issues for almost five decades. Thirteen of them have contributed to the IPCC Sixth Assessment cycle to produce the three-volume global assessment report, known as “The Sixth Report” and “Three Special Reports”, which will be presented at COP26.

According to Dr Stacy Richards-Kennedy, Pro Vice-Chancellor for Global Affairs at The UWI, “Strengthening research, innovation and the science-policy interface, so that knowledge produced by universities can be translated into policy and practice, is one of the most significant contributions that The UWI makes to advancing SGD-13 (Climate Action). We have heard the clarion call of our UWI scientists and our governments. Our region is on the frontline and faces disproportionate levels of vulnerability and risk, but we cannot solve the climate crisis alone. What is urgently needed is moral and decisive leadership, increased financing for Small Island Developing States, and demonstrated collective action”, she said.

“The outcomes from the November 1 to 12 COP26 can have profound impacts on our earth as we know it, and many view it as the last best chance for political leaders to avert a climate catastrophe, which would be unavoidable if global warming exceeds 1.5°C”

UWI/UNIVERSITY OF BERGEN sign research and action agreement on UN Sustainable Development Goals

The UWI and Norway's University of Bergen (UiB) have signed an agreement committing the two universities to advancing research and action on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs). The partnership, formalised on November 13, focuses on SDGs 13 (Climate Action) and 14 (Life Below Water).

The signing ceremony aboard Norwegian training vessel *Statsraad Lehmkuhl*, docked at Jamaica's Port Royal, was among the highlights of a welcome reception hosted by Norwegian Ambassador Beate Stiro, for the crew of the *One Ocean Expedition*. Beginning in August of 2021, the *One Ocean Expedition* carried out a 55,000-mile world voyage, organised by UiB, and recognised as part of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. The floating academy comprises students, teaching and research faculty, as well as representatives of scientific and development institutions.

Its Jamaica port stop is the product of an almost two-year planning event, and culmination of conversations between The UWI and UiB on the framework of the Global University Consortium on SDG-13.

Commenting on the collaboration with the University of Bergen, UWI's Pro Vice-Chancellor of Global Affairs Dr Stacy Richards-Kennedy stated, "The UWI is very proud of its partnership with the University of Bergen. Our strategic alliance, as lead institutions for SDG 13 and SDG 14, is already creating opportunities for increased teaching and research collaborations for faculty and students, new discoveries and research applications in marine science and global advocacy on the challenges faced by Caribbean islands that are on the frontline of the climate crisis".

Signatory on behalf of UiB, Professor Kerim Nisancioglu said that "by joining forces, the two universities will solidify our joint leadership in climate and ocean science, and further strengthen our efforts to fulfil the goals set by the UN Agenda 2030."

Initiatives on the horizon for the two universities include creating a new multidisciplinary Caribbean research programme on ocean science and climate action; and strengthening linkages for North-South and South-South research advocacy and partnerships between Norway, the Caribbean and the South Pacific to advance ocean science, climate action, science diplomacy and the global policy impact agenda. The work programme involves exploring the creation of a network of future ocean leaders through a unique UWI-UiB Graduate Research Trainee Programme.

The development of the relationship between UWI and UiB began in 2018 through their International Association of Universities membership. The two have jointly hosted high-level political forums on sustainable development as well as a range of reciprocal faculty seminars.

The *One Ocean Expedition* includes two postgraduate researchers from The UWI Mona Campus—Chauntelle Green from the Department of Life Sciences and Deron Maitland from the Department of Physics. From September to October 2021, they were enrolled in the One Ocean Field Course webinar series, coordinated by UiB, which also featured faculty experts Professor Judith Gobin and Dr Michael Burn from The UWI's St Augustine and Mona campuses as facilitators.

On Tuesday, November 16, UWI Mona hosted 33 participants from the ship for a tour of the campus' Port Royal Marine Lab, followed by a Knowledge Exchange Forum hosted by the Faculty of Science and Technology.



The University of Bergen's Professor Kerim Nisancioglu and The UWI's Dr Stacy Richards-Kennedy display signed copies of the memorandum of understanding.

RETOOLING and RESTRUCTURING Caribbean Economies Post-Covid-19

*Conference on the Economy 2021
looks at equipping the region for
accelerated development*

BY CHANTELE THOMAS AND
ROXANNE BRIZAN-ST MARTIN

The COVID-19 pandemic requires the Caribbean to find new tools and techniques to drive our development agenda. It has presented opportunities for fostering more meaningful integration, boldly advancing our development agenda with a focus on areas such as digital transformation, nutrition and food security, energy security, education and training, and creating an environment where innovative ideas can be used to enhance productivity in our region.

From November 24 to 26, the Conference on the Economy (COTE) 2021 will look at regional development in the post-COVID world. Hosted by the Department of Economics of UWI St Augustine's Faculty of Social Sciences, COTE will bring together policymakers, academics, students, and the private sector to discuss themes such as manufacturing, energy and renewables, new agriculture, the blue economy, and cultural industries.

The theme for COTE 2021, now in its 15th year, is "Accelerating Caribbean Development - Retooling and Restructuring Caribbean Economies Post COVID-19".

Dr Roxanne Brizan-St Martin, Instructor with the Department of Economics, in referring to the work of the CARICOM Commission on the Economy, highlighted that:

"Retooling and restructuring Caribbean economies involves equipping the region with strategies to manage our challenges and vulnerabilities. While our challenges are real and we are hindered by structural inequities 'embedded in our history' or by other factors, it is a call to action in which the people of the Caribbean are placed at the centre of the development dialogue for a stronger, more sustainable, resilient, inclusive and equitable development path. This requires adjustments, moving from strategic thinking to strategic action."

Investing in people, as our most valuable resource, is critical in this process. The pandemic and many of the measures implemented to mitigate its spread have resulted in many people becoming unemployed and in poverty. Addressing this requires employment creation beyond short term relief programmes and furnishing people with skills and training for their long-term well-being. Navigating the effects of the pandemic requires a people-centric development approach, one in which the people of the region are placed at the centre of the development dialogue. It requires a human touch.

"As we move towards retooling and restructuring, it is important to highlight that the pandemic is ongoing, and its full impact will depend on its duration," said Dr Brizan-St Martin. "In moving forward, we need an innovative, efficient and collaborative response guided by a spirit of solidarity in which consultative decision-making and social values take priority."

COTE, hosted annually by the Department of Economics, is one of Trinidad and Tobago's most prominent events that focuses on the national economy, as well as regional economic matters. COTE 2021 events started in October with its Youth Armchair Discussion and Youth Debate Knockoff Competition (the finals took place on November 11). COTE will hold its Youth Graduate Poster Competition on November 22.

The Conference on the Economy takes place virtually from November 24 to 26. For more information on COTE 2021, visit <https://sta.uwi.edu/fss/economics/conference-economy-2021>.

Chantelle Thomas is the research analyst for the Economics Society and undergraduate student with the Department of Economics, Faculty of Social Sciences.

Dr Roxanne Brizan-St Martin is an Instructor with the Department of Economics, Faculty of Social Science.

UWI Calendar of Events

NOVEMBER 2021



Workshop: Leveraging The Power of Digital Marketing November 10 to December 1

ONLINE

More than ever, digital marketing is crucial for organisations seeking to gain the maximum benefit from the online space. This workshop series, hosted by the Business Development Unit of UWI St Augustine's

Faculty of Social Sciences, gives participants the knowledge they need to make the most of digital marketing as well as measure their results. Organised into two core modules, the virtual workshop will teach participants to identify the elements of a compelling brand story, create content for effective communication online, optimise content for specific social media platforms, and measure the impact of digital marketing on achieving business goals. The workshop will be facilitated by Dr Barney Pacheco, Lecturer in Marketing at the Department of Management Studies.

Cost: TT\$2,800/US\$400

For more information or to register,
email STA-FSSBDU@sta.uwi.edu

2021 National Health Research Conference November 23, 24 and 30 | December 1

ONLINE

Diabetes, cancer, mental health issues, and now pandemics like COVID-19 – we are confronted with many health challenges. Research is key to solving them. The UWI's Faculty of Medical Sciences and Caribbean Centre for Health Systems Research Development, partnering with the Ministry of Health, UTT, the University of the Southern Caribbean, and the Regional Health Authorities, will host the second National Health Research Conference to address these issues. This year's theme is "Building Resilience through Research in a Pandemic". The virtual conference will feature 37 oral and 37 poster presentations, and is a forum where local research findings and policy relevant messages can be shared with policymakers. It will take place on the Hubilo platform.

Cost: Students: TT\$100 | All Others: TT\$200

For more information,
email Shelly-Ann Hunte at Shelly-Ann.Hunte@sta.uwi.edu or
Nikisha Headley at Nikisha.Headley@sta.uwi.edu



Conference on the Economy (COTE 2021) November 24 to 26

ONLINE

COTE 2021, one of Trinidad and Tobago and the region's most important economic/academic conferences, will focus this year on equipping the region for the post-pandemic reality. Hosted by the Department of Economics within UWI St Augustine's Faculty of Social Sciences, this year's theme is "Accelerating Caribbean Development: Retooling and Restructuring Caribbean Economies Post COVID-19". Discussion will focus on the themes of manufacturing, energy and renewables, new agriculture, the blue economy, and cultural industries. COTE 2021 will take place virtually.

Individual Delegate (3 Days)

TT\$800/US\$114 per delegate

TT\$700/US\$100 per delegate for groups in excess of four people

Individual Delegate (1 Day)

TT\$400/US\$57 per delegate

Community-Based / Non-Governmental Organisations (3 Days)

TT\$400/US\$ 57 per delegate

University Student Delegate

TT\$100/US\$14 per delegate

Secondary School Delegate

FREE

For more information, visit the COTE 2021 website at
<https://sta.uwi.edu/fss/economics/conference-economy-2021>

