



## Resilience, then Reward



Aakif Isaac receives his degree (BSc in Management Studies with Human Resource Management) from Campus Registrar Dr Dawn-Marie De Four-Gill at the Faculty of Social Sciences' graduation ceremony on Friday, October 24 at the Sport and Physical Education Centre (SPEC), UWI St Augustine Campus. Looking on and applauding are (left) Dr Francis Severin, Pro Vice-Chancellor and Principal of The UWI Global Campus and UWI St Augustine Deputy Principal Professor Derek Chadee. This year's graduation ceremonies were dominated by themes of resilience and community, and a shared desire among the graduating class to make a positive contribution to the world. PHOTO: ALEJADRO LOPEZ



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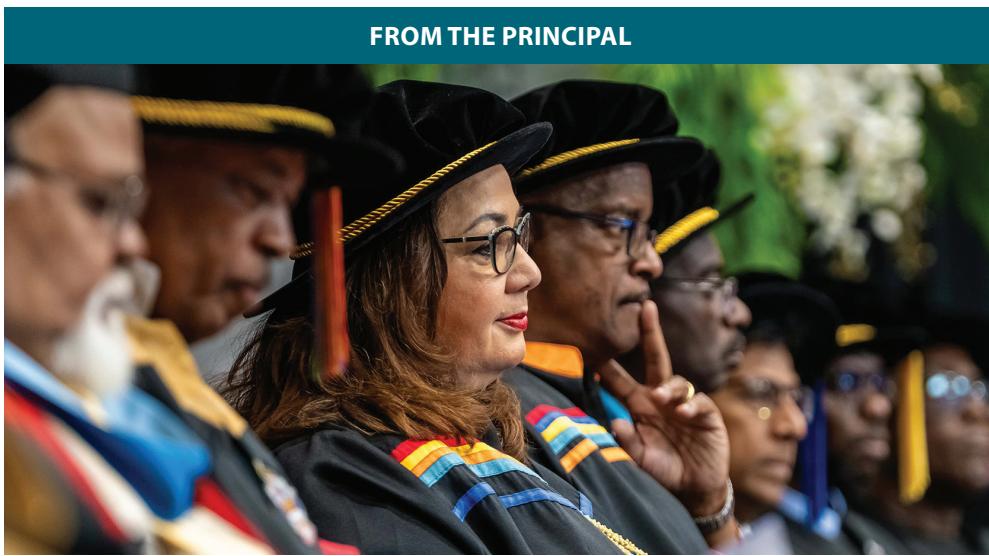
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## FROM THE PRINCIPAL



# The 8th Attribute: RESILIENCE

**Graduation season has ended for most of The University of the West Indies.** Thousands of graduates have been recognised and celebrated. They are prepared to enter society (or perhaps return to the university), find their fortunes, and make their contribution to the region and world.

We held six ceremonies over three days at UWI St Augustine, each of them potent with happiness, relief, and pride from our graduates, their loved ones, and the campus faculty and staff. This campus has the largest graduating class across the regional UWI, with more than 3,000 students awarded this year.

It was a monumental effort, executed flawlessly by this campus community. Best of all, it was a collective effort from faculty and staff at all levels. Everyone played their part to ensure our students and guests enjoyed an experience that matched the significance of the moment. As I said in my thank you note to the campus, my deepest appreciation goes out to you all for making your campus shine brightly.

Yet even as we celebrated, there was another emotion that persisted over the ceremonies: concern for the future.

As I write, Jamaica is being bombarded by hurricane-force winds. Trinidad and Tobago is pensive about possible world conflict seeming more close to home. These tensions play out against a backdrop of climate change, international struggles, economic uncertainty, and a host of other domestic and international challenges that have persisted for years.

The theme of this year's ceremonies was "Pelicans in an AI-Driven Future—Where Tradition Meets Tomorrow". But there was a second theme underlying Graduation 2025, one that matched this moment of peril, and also opportunity, for the Caribbean.

The UWI has what it calls "Seven Attributes for the Ideal Graduate". They can be viewed at the university website here: <https://www.uwi.edu/uop/strategic-plan-7-attributes-ideal-uwi-graduate>. They include critical and creative thinking, interpersonal skills, and strong ethical values among others. However, there is an eighth attribute, one needed in these times.

Resilience, willpower, fortitude, internal strength—I am speaking about the ability to overcome difficulty, despite the circumstances, to achieve a worthy goal. It was the subject of most of the messages delivered at the graduation ceremonies, and the substance of the graduates themselves.

"Look at us now!" exclaimed valedictorian Dante Gains in his message to the graduands, "not bowed, not broken, but blazing. We are the children of calypso and code, of cane and courage, and the light rising from the West does not ask permission to shine; it commands the dawn!"

Dante and the other valedictorians shared messages of hope and grit on behalf of the thousands-strong graduating class.

UWI graduates are resolute. They spent years in programmes of study that require extreme effort and commitment to successfully complete. Some of them were impacted by the pandemic and the restrictions it imposed on UWI campuses. Some had personal struggles: the deaths of loved ones, illness, financial hardship, and disabilities. Still, they succeeded, and that success culminated in the receipt of their degrees as they crossed the graduation stage.

Of course, many of them did have support systems such as family, close friends, and their lecturers and support staff at the campus. Some also benefitted from the financial support of individuals and organisations interested in the development of the region. But no investment is more effective than the investment in oneself, and a degree from our world-class university, The UWI, is a dividend.

Going forward, emphasising resilience will become more important. Yes, we have technologies like AI with great potential benefits, but we are also faced with many threats, existing and to come. The Caribbean needs a generation willing and able to confront them calmly and purposefully, able to move themselves and their region forward despite what stands in their way.

I am confident that one day I will see our graduates taking up the mantle, hoisting the banner of our collective development, and leading the Caribbean towards new horizons.

Congratulations, graduating class of 2025!

*Rose-Marie Belle Antoine*

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

## Aneel Karim Wins APEX Grand Award

**UWI St Augustine Marketing and Communications Office's winning message resonates with Apex, Educational Advertising Awards**

The UWI St Augustine campus community has countless stories to tell, and in 2025 its Marketing and Communications Office (M&C) has won several international awards for sharing those stories with society.

M&C has won two APEX Awards and five Educational Advertising Awards (EduAdAwards) in categories such as outdoor design, video, photography and publications. Among the winners are office assistant and photographer **Mr Aneel Karim**, whose breathtaking photo of *Jab Molasses* at The Old Yard carnival event, won him a prestigious APEX Grand Award. Only 100 Grand Award winners are selected out of more than a thousand-plus from across the globe.

"We are very pleased with this result," said **Ms Wynell Gregorio**, Director of M&C. "Over the past few years, we have been undertaking restructuring to better meet the needs of the campus as the higher education market evolves and the priorities of both the institution and the society change. These awards are a recognition of the value of all our planning and execution."

M&C's publication team won both an Apex Award and an EduAdAward (Gold) for the UWI St Augustine Annual Report 2022/2023, titled *Creating Change Together*. A 2024 ten-episode postgraduate video series spearheaded by the student recruitment team and outdoor design led by the events unit also won gold EduAdAwards. A 2024 special video by M&C graphic artist **Atiba Cudjoe** won a silver EduAdAward. UWI Today was also awarded a silver EduAdAward.

To Ms Gregorio, the awards are the result of the collective effort of M&C.

"We are a team and we succeed through teamwork," she says. "We also rely on our strong relationships with the various faculties, departments, units and individuals that make up this campus community. Going forward, we will continue to give our best in representing this campus to the region and the world."

APEX is the Annual Awards for Publication Excellence Competition. Now in its 38<sup>th</sup> year, the competition is open to corporate, nonprofit and independent communicators in 100 categories. Currently in its 40<sup>th</sup> year, the EduAdAwards is a US-based international competition for educational marketing and advertising.

**M&C at UWI St Augustine is responsible for branding, recruitment, advertising, events, internal and external communications, publications, and digital strategy and social media.**



Aneel Karim's award-winning photo taken at The Old Yard 2025.

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# Timely, Relevant, Attuned to Tomorrow

## Principal's Research Awards and Festival 2025 promises fresh ideas and opportunities

Once again, UWI St Augustine invites industry, government and the public for its research expo. From November 26 to 28, the campus will host the Principal's Research Awards and Festival 2025. This annual event recognises the outstanding work of UWI researchers, facilitates opportunities for partnerships and investments, and puts a national spotlight on campus ideas and innovation.

This year's festival is themed "Research Innovation for Present and Future", and as the campus marks its 65th anniversary, it showcases the strong tradition of research that has been its hallmark.

Enhancing research and making it more accessible to stakeholders and the public is a key strategic objective of Campus Principal Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine. The Principal's Research Awards and the hosting of Open Research Days [the Festival], as well as media series like UWI Scientists Speak and UWI on the Ground, are mechanisms to achieve this objective.

Research and publication are also key to maintaining The UWI's preferential world-university rankings. The Principal's Programme Officers and the Director of Research were assigned the task to implement this mission. The Awards and the opportunity to display cutting-edge research are means to motivate the culture of research and innovation on the campus.

Since the launch in 2023, the Principal's Research Awards and Research Festival has grown exponentially. Director of Graduate Studies and Research Professor Duraisamy Saravanakumar now has the prime responsibility for the event and is responsible for pulling together the multitude of strands that weave the fabric of the multi-disciplinary projects that will be on display.

The Principal's Research Festival is now squarely in sync with another key strategic objective—innovation and entrepreneurship. As the campus strives to be more self-sufficient, revenue generation is conceived of as premised on meaningful research that can lead to new commercial products and services. Under the UWI Made brand, several campus research outputs have been developed into products and services, and are being promoted on the market.

To do this effectively, partnerships between public and private sector investors are key to providing funding for research projects and, in some cases, practical, real-world expertise. This year, that synergy will be on display at the Research Festival.

### A mega research expo

The awards ceremony and opening of the festival will be held on Wednesday, November 26. On Thursday and Friday, the Festival will morph into a mega expo. Booths featuring research aligned with economic diversification in areas like agriculture and value addition, tourism, manufacturing and trade, creative industries and the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals will be set up at the campus's JFK Quadrangle. Panel discussions, oral and poster presentations, guided tours, and a cultural showcase, exhibiting research through music, dance and films will fill the day.



Booths featuring research aligned with economic diversification in areas like agriculture and value addition, tourism, manufacturing and trade, creative industries and the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals will be set up at the campus's JFK Quadrangle. Panel discussions, oral and poster presentations, guided tours, and a cultural showcase, exhibiting research through music, dance and films will fill the day.

The second instalment of the Principal's High Level Business Breakfast is also a feature of this year's activities. UWI Made products from the campus will be highlighted, giving executives unique opportunities to invest in them.

On Friday, about a hundred delegates will also be invited to attend the University-Industry-Government Partnerships for a Research Innovation workshop to inform them of the opportunities for collaboration ahead.

### Relevant Caribbean research

The campus will hand out awards in 12 categories such as Best Researcher, Most Impactful Community Research, Best Team Research, Most Outstanding Regional/International Research Project, and many more.

The UWI has covered a lot of ground with areas of absolute relevance to regional and international development, said Professor Saravanakumar: climate change mitigation and adaptation, disaster management, regional health, agri-food technologies for food and nutrition security, social issues, and communication and digital technologies, including AI and its applications.

The final day, on November 28, will also feature oral presentations, and varied sessions on manufacturing, trade, tourism, and financial well-being. ICTs for digital islands, and AI for multidimensional research and development

will be followed by a focus on education, culture, equality, law, and governance for a better life and sustainable environment.

Prof Saravanakumar believes the challenges of our time are significant spurs to action for researchers. Trinidad and Tobago imports a high percentage of its food, and that leaves us vulnerable to vagaries in global production. The devastation caused by the recent Hurricane Melissa to Haiti, Cuba and especially Jamaica's landscape and economy is immense and a grim warning that the region has to develop more protective systems.

Tellingly, last year for the first time, Principal Antoine designed a new research award—the Hurricane and Earthquake Alleviation Research (HEAR) Award. With its TT\$10,000 prize, and in the wake of Hurricane Melissa, the HEAR Award is very timely. It was specifically created to be open to anyone—secondary school students, teachers, other tertiary level institution—as a means of signalling that disaster preparedness is all of our business.

Research has the potential to make a difference in these and many of the other challenges and opportunities faced by the region. The Principal's Research Awards and Festival bring the work of UWI St Augustine's researchers to the forefront.

## ■ OUR PEOPLE

Awards ceremonies are such a glamorous affair. Celebration, shimmering outfits, smiles all around. It's easy to look at the level of support at the International Women's Forum of Trinidad and Tobago's (IWFTT) Inspirational Women Awards and forget that the people being celebrated would have started off their journey much more quietly. Their support would have been not so glamorous, but instead fuelled by an internal resolve to make a difference.

For this year's awardees, Dr Catherine Minto-Bain, Suzan Lakhan-Baptiste and Maya Kirti Nanan, their paths have one unifying core: observing a need within their communities and becoming the change they wanted to see.

Minto-Bain, recipient of the Inspirational Champion of Women Award, describes herself as a "detective", not the first word that comes to mind when one thinks of a fertility specialist, obstetrician and gynaecologist.

"Being a fertility nurse, doctor, or scientist is very much being a detective and figuring out what's going on," she says. For the past 25 years, she has supported families on their fertility journeys. "I love helping patients understand what's causing their infertility."

Another descriptor she is proud of is her role as teacher. Of her 20 staff, 19 are women and her goal is to help them along their own career journeys. This drive to mentor the next generation of women is what led her to teach at The UWI when she first arrived in Trinidad in 2004.

"I taught at UWI for 15 years. I was a lecturer in the [Obstetrics and Gynaecology] Department [in the Faculty of Medical Sciences]," she says.

When Minto-Bain found out that she had gotten the award, her first instinct was to reach out to some of the people she mentors. "I was trained and taught by so many amazing doctors over the years. To be able to give back to others, particularly to women, is so great."

Unite, inspire, and celebrate accomplished women

For Lisa Agard, President of the T&T Chapter of the IWF, building these community networks of support is central to what they do.

"Really, our purpose as enshrined in our bylaws is to unite, inspire, and celebrate accomplished women advancing exemplary leadership, championing equality, and empowering and elevating the next generation of women leaders in our country."

When we spoke, it was amidst a flurry of activity as she prepared for the 2025 Inspirational Women Awards Gala (held on September 30). But her excitement was palpable as she talked about the work being done by Minto-Bain and her fellow awardees, Suzan Lakhan-Baptiste and Maya Kirti Nanan.

Lakhan-Baptiste, whose unfaltering work in conservation earned her the moniker of "crazy turtle woman" and the Inspirational Advocate Award, has spent the last three decades protecting the leatherback turtle population in T&T, particularly on Matura Beach.

"We knew that if nothing changed this endangered species could disappear forever," she says. But through her team's



Inspirational Women Awards 2025 winners (from left) Ms Suzan Lakhan-Baptiste, Ms Maya Kirti Nanan, and Dr Catherine Minto-Bain. PHOTO: COURTESY THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S FORUM OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

# Becoming the Change

## IWFTT highlights three resolute women

BY AMY LI BAKSH

education efforts, reaching out to the community and even to poachers to help them understand the ecological importance of turtles, they changed the face of Matura.

"It wasn't easy... but through consistent outreach, data collection, and enforcing a permit system, we helped transform Matura Beach from a turtle 'graveyard' into a maternity ward."

Working alongside her community has meant not only focusing her attention on the turtles, but also opening doors for others.

"As a woman working in a field traditionally seen as a man's domain, I'm proud that today more than half of our office and field staff are female leaders," says Lakhan Baptiste.

### The next generation of leaders

But the younger generation are not just waiting for doors to be opened. Maya Kirti Nanan, one of the youngest ever recipients of the Inspirational Emerging Leader Award, was drawn to outreach work from childhood.

"When I was just 12 years old, I founded the Autism Siblings and Friends Network (ASFN)," she says. "At the time, I wanted to create a space where young people like myself, siblings, friends, and allies, could come together, share experiences, and support one another while also learning how to be advocates and youth leaders."

A graduate of The UWI Open campus, for the past three years, her work has grown into an organisation known as Rahul's Clubhouse—named after her brother.

"My journey in advocacy began with my younger brother, who is on the autism spectrum. Growing up alongside him opened my eyes to the challenges that children with autism and their families face every day... He remains at the heart of everything I do. My goal is simple but powerful: to build a world where every child, regardless of ability, feels seen and valued, and has the chance to thrive."

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

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## ■ BOOKS



FROM LEFT: The author with Acting President of Guyana Gail Texeira and Mrs Nadira Jagan-Brancier at the book launch in October 2024.

An online search for women who have served as Prime Ministers in the Caribbean immediately shares a list that includes Dame Eugenia Charles of Dominica, Portia Simpson-Miller of Jamaica, Mia Mottley of Barbados and Kamla Persad-Bissessar of Trinidad and Tobago.

Janet Jagan of Guyana is also there. What is noticeable in the search are the years that mark the start or end of their tenure. But for Jagan, there's none except to say, "Served as Prime Minister and later as President".

Her contribution to Guyana's politics and consequently her positioning in the Caribbean landscape has been met with mixed views. For some, she was the least favourite President of Guyana. For others, she was the boss lady, the white Jewish woman in charge while her husband was the mouthpiece. Then, there is another group trying to fill the gap and connect events as Janet Jagan helped give Guyana its voice.

It is that gap that Professor Patricia Mohammed, Emerita Professor at The UWI and celebrated scholar in Caribbean feminist theory, has tried to fill in the biography, *Janet Jagan: Freedom Fighter of Guyana* (Ian Randle Publishers, Kingston, 2024).

"There existed a huge gap in my own understanding of Guyana's social and political history," she said. "I only knew Guyana through the people who came and worked in Trinidad. We knew about the socialist rule. We knew about the later dictatorship. We knew about the problems of money and inflation. I had been to Guyana once or twice for conferences, so this was a sheltered view. Guyana was one space in the Caribbean that I really had not understood or written about considerably as I have done for other territories."

### Jagan's duality

Just as important to Mohammed was the presentation of Jagan's duality.

"I generally found most people with very public lives have to cultivate a space that is guarded and private to survive in the public," Mohammed explained.

This was no different, she said, to what she found when she published her first biography on Trinidad and Tobago's first Prime Minister, *A Very Public Private Man: Sketches in a Biography of Eric Eustace Williams*.

Janet Jagan, an American from Chicago, met her husband Cheddi at a students' rally in the United States. He was at Howard University, studying dentistry while she attended the Cook County School of Nursing. Married at 23, she migrated to Guyana in 1943 to help set up her husband's dental practice. Politics was not their plan. However, observing the treatment of the Guyanese people, they were activated. Applying their working class political philosophies, they pushed against British rule.

They co-founded the People's Progressive Party in 1950, which won the 1953 elections. Cheddi became Chief Minister. However, his radical social reforms led to British authorities sending in troops shortly after, claiming there was the threat of a Marxist revolution.



Janet Jagan being taken to jail during the British crackdown in 1955. "She was stoic," says Professor Mohammed. "She read a lot and listed with brief annotations all the books she read during the many months in jail."

In writing Jagan's biography, Mohammed unearthed the personal face behind the political. She found consistent stories of Janet Jagan's thoughtfulness and kindness with the people she worked and met with, and the people who came to her office in need of assistance. She fought on many fronts for the rights of Guyanese people, for housing, health and the right to free speech.

"That, in a sense is the kernel. She was not putting on a public face. I found that was something actually important about her personality and I think the book does bring that out," Mohammed said.

### 'She was in the trenches'

The book was commissioned by the Board of the Cheddi Jagan Research Centre with Indra Chanderpal, who led the PPP's Women's Progressive Organisation (WPO), taking the lead along with Hydar Ally, and with the full support of Nadira Jagan-Brancier, the Jagan's daughter. The objective was to demystify the misrepresentations of Janet Jagan, and to place on record her contribution to Guyanese history.

"It is the reason why I actually gave the title to the book," said Jagan-Brancier. "My mom was asked how she would like to be described, and she said, 'I would like to

# Understanding Janet Jagan

Feminist scholar Prof Pat Mohammed illuminates the under-examined life and legacy of a Caribbean leader

BY JOANNE BRIGGS

be described as a freedom fighter'. Because that's what she fought for her whole life, freedom for Guyana and people around the world."

She added. "A lot of people like to say she became president because of who my father was. There wasn't a family dynasty. She was in the trenches. She went to prison. She was side by side with him.

"I would have been two years old when she first started. She was Minister of Labour, Health, and Housing. She did a tremendous job during those years. She was able to eradicate malaria," Jagan-Brancier recalled.

The greater revelation was her mother's hand-written diaries, which have a dedicated chapter in the book. One particular diary focused on her incarceration, following the British ouster after 133 days of rule in 1953.

"She kept the diary for the period in jail, and it was absolutely amazing the way she would list all the details of her time in the cell — the rats, the people, helping others and so on," Mohammed noted.

"She was stoic. She read a lot and listed with brief annotations all the books she read during the many months in jail. She was a great archivist. That whole period of Guyanese politics was so weighted in what we call now fake news. I think she understood the value of records. She was aware that these diaries would be used to tell another story. She wrote, I think, in a measured way."

### An advocate for women

Mohammed also tried to bridge the gap of Caribbean gender studies. Neither the WPO nor Jagan-Brancier saw Janet Jagan as a feminist. But to Mohammed, she was consistent in her understanding of gender equality, specifically in the value of women's work and their time.

"Janet's efforts have to be credited as one of the reasons Guyanese women gained the right to vote so early under suffrage. She arrived in 1943 and by 1944 she had written the first paper [on women's equality]," Mohammed noted.

Launched in Guyana last year, the book's 556 pages present new insights into Jagan's life, including her primary role as a journalist.

For Nadira Jagan-Brancier, the book offered her a time for reconnection and admiration.

"I got to know so much more about my mother. Her life is one of those amazing things. It's hard to believe that this is my own mother. Now looking back at what she accomplished and what she did, and the hardships—a lot of people wouldn't put up with all of it," she said.

For Mohammed, the book was meant to redeem Janet Jagan's legacy in Guyana and the areas of freedom that she fought for that were pertinent to all Caribbean people.

"I felt we in the Caribbean had done her a great disservice and to Guyana. We knew about her, I don't think it was deliberate erasure, but it was time to put the record straight and claim her as a Caribbean leader," she said.



# Doing, and becoming, more

UWI Student Volunteering Programme shapes the lives of participants and communities

BY TYRELL GITTEENS

**When an alumni of UWI St Augustine paid a visit to Dr Kathy-Ann Lewis** at the Division of Student Services and Development (DSSD), they told her of the transformational work they were doing as a social worker in one of the children's homes in Trinidad and Tobago.

The inspiration for this career path, they said, was their participation in DSSD's annual Student Volunteer Programme, an initiative managed by Dr Lewis.

As manager of the DSSD's Careers, Co-Curricular and Community Engagement Unit, Dr Lewis frequently receives these courtesy visits. Students and alumni alike are eager to share how their time in the programme has shaped their lives and communities.

With hundreds of students participating every year, Dr Lewis says that the programme aims to ensure UWI students become changemakers, which is aligned to the university's commitment to service to community, regional and global development.

"When we look at the attributes of a distinctive UWI graduate," she explains, "we can see how community engagement helps in fostering critical and creative thinking, problem-solving and leadership skills."

"Volunteerism assists students in becoming more socially, culturally, and environmentally responsive, which also sensitises them to the roles they play in contributing to the achievement of global Sustainable Development Goals."

Created under UWI St Augustine's 2012-2017 Strategic Plan, Dr Lewis says the activities of the programme fall under three categories.

Under the service learning category, students/departments collaborate with others to solve a community issue using their degree-specific knowledge, like social work, psychology, or engineering. The community-based research category lets students undertake socially relevant research that can generate data and other actions to address community needs. The community service category lets students collaborate with others in any activity that meets community needs but doesn't require discipline-specific knowledge.

To participate, students can either reach out to the DSSD or sign up during the division's annual Volunteer Open Day.

## Volunteer Open Day

"Every year, we have over 20 NGOs and community-based organisations that come on campus, so our students have the opportunity to engage with a diverse array of NGOs. This is a great opportunity for our students to understand themselves a bit more and acquire skills they wouldn't normally recognise they possess. It's also about service, giving back, advocacy, and activism," says Dr Lewis.

Over the years, the programme has worked with organisations like the Caribbean Youth Environment Network, the Arrow Foundation, the Adult Literacy Tutors Association, the Breastfeeding Association of Trinidad and Tobago, and the Trinidad and Tobago Transparency Institute.

Green Enviro TT was one of the organisations that the DSSD partnered with for the 2024/2025 academic year. Founded in 2018, they are a youth-led environmental NGO that fosters environmental awareness and action across Trinidad and Tobago, inspiring people to adopt sustainable practices.

Currently in his final year of his BSc in Biology studies, Elijah Vesprey was paired with Green Enviro TT. He participated in the volunteering programme to gain hands-on experience in the environmental field and contribute to a cause larger than himself.

Vesprey works with Green Enviro TT in their beach cleanups and social media campaigns, starting with an April cleanup in Chaguaramas.

"It is a nice place, but there was a lot of pollution which we had to clean to see the beauty of the environment again," he says, adding that "as part of the social media team, we also do educational posters which promote sustainability."

"We also have upcoming activities like making a children's book of local animals, taking part in more beach cleanups, and visiting STEM camps."

Even though he is in his final year, Vesprey remains committed to the programme and Green Enviro TT. He wants to continue raising awareness on the importance of adopting environmentally sustainable practices.

Another student of the volunteer programme, Nitya Dhanrajh, has become the team lead of Green Enviro TT's social media, marketing, and communications group. A recent graduate of the BSc Environmental Science and Sustainable Technology programme, Dhanrajh oversees the development of digital content and outreach strategies and assists with community outreach and event planning.

## More than just an NGO

"I chose to volunteer with Green Enviro TT because it's more than just an NGO—it's a community where I feel I truly belong," she says. "With an environmental background in academics, I wanted to apply my knowledge in real-world projects, but I also wanted a space where I could learn, grow, and even make mistakes without fear of judgment. Green Enviro TT provides exactly that. Being part of this team often feels less like attending a formal meeting and more like friends coming together with a shared passion for the environment."

Dhanrajh is encouraging everyone to embrace volunteering. She says everyone can collectively shape a brighter future for communities.

When reflecting on the work of Vesprey, Dhanrajh, and other students, Lewis is proud of their contributions and dedication to becoming distinctive UWI graduates.

"I think these two students are really good examples of how our community engagement unit has motivated and fostered our students to go out and meet the needs of our communities," she says. "Whether it's sociological, psychological, environmental, or spiritual, they are out there advocating for people, and they have a genuine passion to see the lives of people improved."

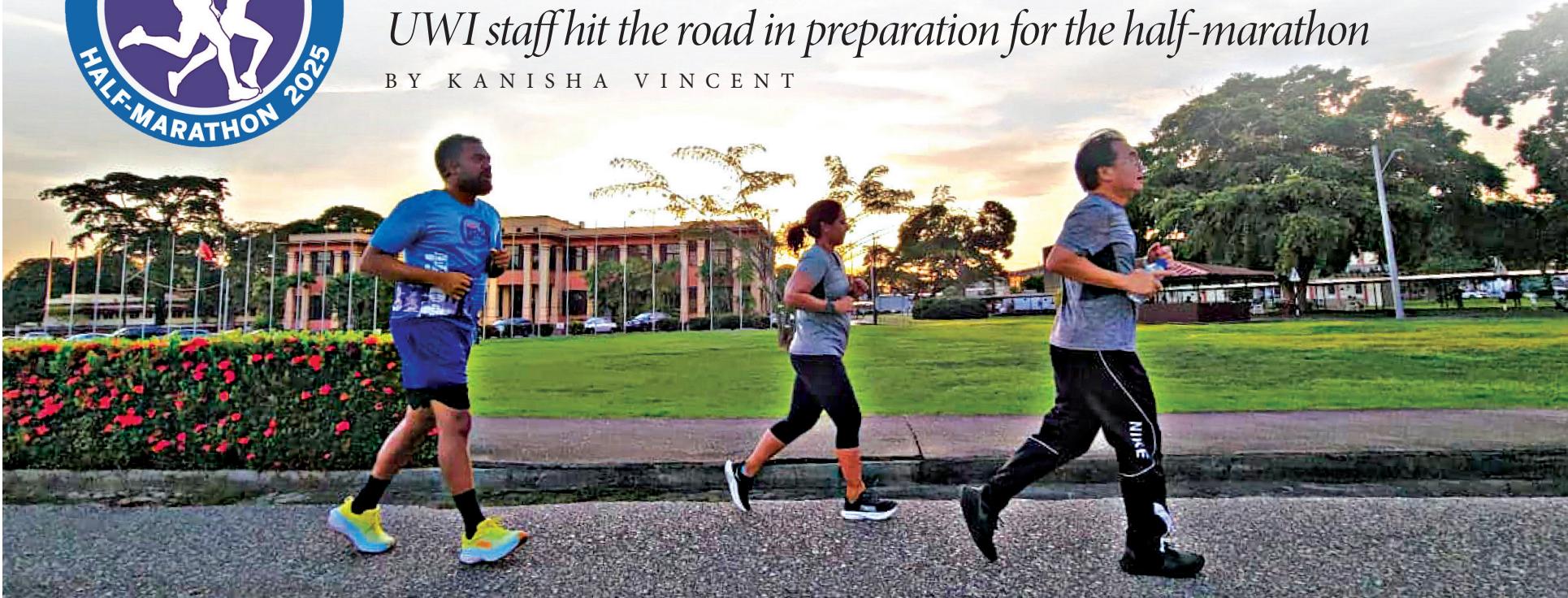
Dr Lewis encourages the nation to get more involved in community-based efforts to build the country, region and world.



# The Resonance of a Good Run

*UWI staff hit the road in preparation for the half-marathon*

BY KANISHA VINCENT



Campus IT Services staffers and half-marathoners (from left) Richard Chhangur, Geeta Kissoon, and Frank Yee on a training run. Richard Placed sixth in the Overall Male Staff Category and Geeta Placed eighth in the Overall Female Staff Category.

**Running a half-marathon isn't just a test of endurance;** it's the performance of community and connectedness. In 2024, over 1,900 runners crossed the finish line at UWI St Augustine's International Half-Marathon and 5K. This cohort included elite athletes, recreational runners, regional contenders, and UWI staff. Inaugurated in 2004 by UWI's Sport and Physical Recreation Centre (SPEC), the event marked the 19th edition of the race on October 26, 2025.

Among the staff participants were Aneel Karim, office assistant and photographer at the Marketing and Communications Office; Frank Yee, network systems administrator at Campus IT Services (CITS); Geeta Kissoon, ICT trainer at CITS; and Kevin Snaggs, Manager of Student Accommodations. Staff involvement has grown steadily over the years.

It was Geeta who encouraged the staffers from CITS to break out their running shoes: "I got Frank involved, I got the whole of CITS involved."

Forming their own running group, they have approximately 10 representatives for the 5K and three for the half-marathon. Running has become part of the CITS identity, focusing on wellness and community.

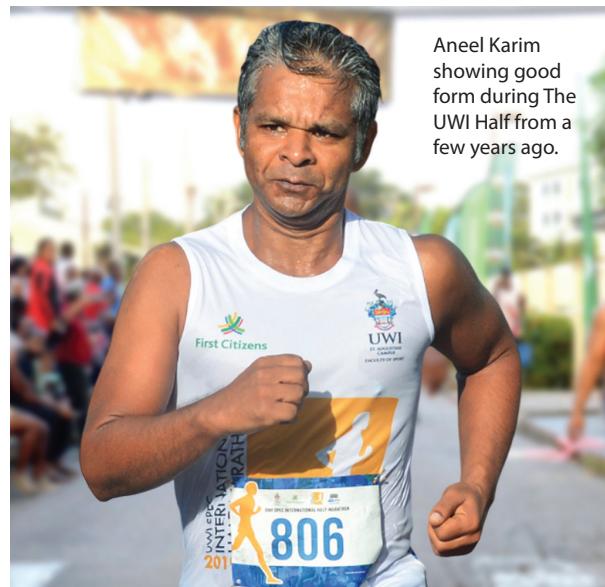
"We try to rope in people to actually get fit," says Frank. "Everybody wants to join us."

Kevin and Aneel prefer a more solitary approach. Prioritising morning runs and valuing quiet and cooler conditions, both describe running as a time for mental clarity and emotional reset.

Kevin shares, "It's an opportunity to switch off. You're focusing one step at a time."

Aneel's outlook is the same. "When you wake up to run at 5 am on the bus route," he says, "it's just you. 'When I am running, it is like I am free.'

Both train independently, without music or coaching, and rely on self-guided routines. Kevin uses structured programmes from platforms like Garmin (a sport and fitness tech company) and Runner's World (one of the leading running publications). Aneel draws inspiration from elite athletes like Eliud Kipchoge and online resources.



Aneel Karim showing good form during The UWI Half from a few years ago.



A weary but triumphant Kevin Snaggs after completing the UWI Half-Marathon in 2023. Kevin usually finishes in the top three of all UWI staff. In 2024, he was the staff winner.

Motivation is where they diverge. Though they both plan to finish strong, Kevin hopes to improve on his previous times, while Aneel, having seen the toll the half-marathon takes on the body, prefers to focus on finishing the race without injury, regardless of the time it takes.

Kevin, the defending staff champion, reflected on his recent performances: "I usually place in the top three, so it was nice to win." He trains specifically for the event. "I am only training for The UWI Half-Marathon," he said. "I start training somewhere around May/June, run the half, and then that's it until next year."

One Sunday, he was up at 4:30 am, running a straight 11 miles. "I was back before 6:30," he said casually.

Aneel follows a similar routine, often simulating the course on the bus route at 5 am. "I ran the course, starting where you turn off and ran straight up to the turning point," he recounts.

Facing 13.1 miles (21.1 km) requires preparation. Geeta and Frank apply a combination of consistent racing and other activities like badminton and hiking. Their preparation begins early in the running season.

"We probably covered more than 20-something races this year," Frank says.

It's difficult to debate the resonance of a good run as Geeta reflects, "joy and excitement. You just keep going and going," and more so on race day with friends and family along the route, cheering and encouraging you on. She shares her race-day recipe for success: the sideline support of friends with juice boxes and hearty cheers.

Despite training alone, Kevin and Aneel also acknowledge the sense of community on race day.

"In a nice race, there's a bit of a crowd at the end," says Kevin. "You get cheers, shouting of your name, and stuff like that."

Aneel says, "Runners, it's a brotherhood; everybody looks out for one another. It's a really wonderful experience."

But even with the runner's high, The UWI half-marathon ends, leaving a bit of sadness in its wake. As Geeta says, "It gets sad because you don't have a plan... then you start training for next year."

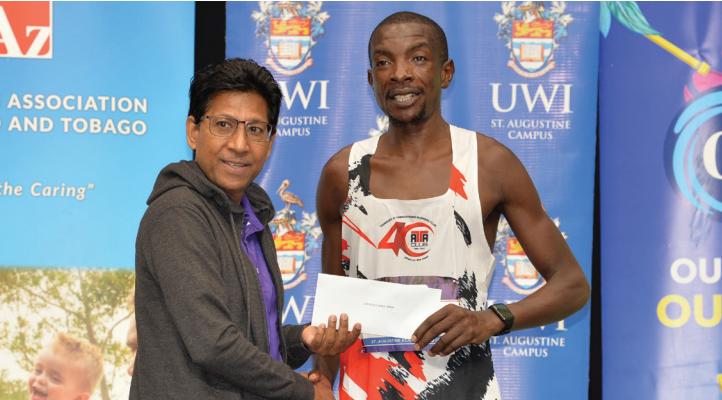


# UWI St Augustine International HALF-MARATHON AND 5K

*A record-breaking race*



Trinidad and Tobago distance runner and first place winner of the women's category of the UWI Half-Marathon Aniqah Bailey with Dr Roy McCree, Dean of The UWI Faculty of Sport. PHOTOS: ROBERT TAYLOR.



Men's first place winner Alex Ekesa (right) with UWI St Augustine Deputy Principal Professor Derek Chadee.



Campus Principal Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine with one of her two dogs (regular attendees of the half-marathon) and members of staff from Campus IT Services. From left are (back row) Kohl Hosein, Shivan Ramdhanie, Daren Dhoray, and Navin Sanathan. In front is Marlon Raghunanan.



An estimated record-breaking 2,100 participants ran, jogged, walked and wheeled their way through the 2025 UWI St Augustine 19<sup>th</sup> International Half-Marathon and 5K, helping to raise awareness (and funds) for the Trinidad and Tobago Alzheimer's Association (AzATT).

A renowned international race, The UWI International Half-Marathon attracts veteran and other long-distance runners seeking to challenge their physical and mental fortitude. The 5K race caters to a far-reaching audience aiming for a fun-filled event.

Registered participants of the half marathon started their 13.1-mile challenge at 5 am, while the 5K started 15 minutes later.

AzATT, celebrating its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, raises awareness about Alzheimer's disease and dementia in an effort to challenge the stigma around the diseases and provide support to those who live with them. This year's half-marathon and 5K finisher's medals included the forget-me-not flower in its design as a tribute to those living with Alzheimer's and their families.

Kenyan runner Alex Ekesa clinched first place at the half-marathon over 2024 champion Tafari Waldron, who came in second. Nicholas Romany rounded off this year's top three. In the women's category of the half-marathon, Aniqah Bailey took first place, Alexia John finished second, and 2024 champion Samantha Shukla came third.

It was a photo finish in the male category as Kerry McLean won with a time of 18:18, and Zidan Hamid followed in a close second with a time of 00:18:19. Ashtin Torres rounded off the top three. Ziya Hosein-Livingstone was the top female runner in the 5K, followed by Angela Curatas in second and Jaliyah Celestine in third place.

Many participants achieved personal best times and took pride in ringing the celebratory bell. Enthusiasts unable to cheer on the runners in-person did so via livestream on Facebook. The UWI's social media pages gave timely updates.

Some of the sponsors for this year's marathon included AA Laquis, ACADO Foods, AS Bryden & Sons (Trinidad) Ltd, Bermudez Group Ltd, HADCO Ltd, Holiday Snacks Ltd, Subway, SM Jaleel and Company Ltd, and the National Flour Mills Ltd. Some of the funds generated by the marathon will go to providing essential scholarships for student athletes.



## ■ NATURE



The Golden Tree Frog – an endangered species found only at high elevations such as the peak of El Tucuche. PHOTO BY ZAK ALI

## Bake & Biodiversity?

Discovering the hidden wonders of Maracas Bay at Bioblitz 2025

BY AMY DEACON

**When we think of Maracas Bay, its palm trees, waves, and bake and shark.** However, Maracas has a lot more to offer than a good beach lime.

In late September, more than 250 scientists, naturalists and enthusiasts gathered at the Maracas Bay Community Centre to embark on the most intensive biodiversity survey ever conducted in the area: a Bioblitz.

Organised as a partnership between UWI St Augustine's Department of Life Sciences (DLS) and the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club (TTFNC) for the last 14 years, and funded by First Citizens, the event consists of teams exploring a five kilometre radius area for 24 hours to record as many species as possible: plants, birds, bugs, mammals, fungi, reptiles and amphibians, aquatic creatures, and even microbes.

### Climbing El Tucuche, swimming La Vache

The coastal stretch between the Maracas Lookout and Las Cuevas Bay, the upper reaches of Maracas Valley and the mountains in between were included in this year's survey area. At 936 metres high, Trinidad's second highest peak, El Tucuche, presented an irresistible challenge to some of our more intrepid bioblitzers, especially as many unique species live only within the high elevation 'elfin' woodland habitats the peaks provide.



The Mammal Team, getting ready to leave basecamp and set up their bat nets. T&T has 70 different species of bat, and eight of these were recorded during the 24 hours. PHOTO: BRYAN RAMDEEN



Some of the 250 volunteers at Basecamp, just before we announced the grand total of 1,083 species. PHOTO: J PETERS IMAGES

## NATURE

These expeditions contributed some of the most prized finds of the weekend, including the golden tree frog, an endangered frog found inside bromeliads above 800 metres and classified as an Environmentally Sensitive Species.

Even more exciting for some was evidence of the luminous lizard, a legendary reptile that has not been seen on El Tucuche for 40 years. Saifudeen Muhammad, a second-year undergraduate in the DLS, led one of the El Tucuche missions along with Dr Mark Hulme, Zoology lecturer in DLS, who went in search of birdlife and to retrieve a remote audio recorder placed at the peak two days earlier, capturing the sounds of several high-elevation birds, as well as the calls of the golden tree frog.

Back on the coast, teams were snorkelling around the headlands, fishing rivers, sweeping vegetation for insects, and conducting bird banding. One group took a fishing boat around the headland near the Maracas Look Out to explore La Vache Cave with one very special species in mind: the oilbird. These birds roost in caves in the day, then head out at night in search of palm fruits—sometimes travelling as far as Venezuela.

To get to the cave, you need to swim from the boat until you bob up to find yourself engulfed by the ghostly screeches and putrid smells of the oilbird colony. Although the efforts were just to add one more species to the list, it was a worthwhile addition and reassuring to hear that the population in the cave seemed to be doing well, with several hundred birds seen.

Another highlight was a sighting of a neotropical river otter, just a stone's throw from basecamp!

### Searching for the night life

As night fell, the focus shifted to nocturnal creatures. One team set up bat nets, catching eight different species over several hours. Another team used a white sheet and bright light to attract moths, resulting in more than 200 moth species being recorded, several of which were new records for the country. Three different scorpion species were spotted, including T&T's most venomous species, the endemic Thick-tailed Scorpion.

The Plant Team, led by Dr Mike Oatham, plant ecologist and the current Head of the Department of Life Sciences, had a record-breaking year, finding and meticulously identifying more than 400 plant species.

On Sunday morning, while many volunteers were still adding species to their lists, basecamp was transformed into a biodiversity fair, with displays and activities from the Environmental Management Authority, Institute of Marine Affairs, UWI Zoology Museum, TTFNC, the Wildlife Section of the Forestry Division, the El Socorro Centre for Wildlife Conservation, SpeSeas, ARC Environmental, Mushrooms of Trinidad and Tobago, and Garden with Wings.

We welcomed visitors from all over T&T who had come to see the displays, as well as residents of the survey area itself, who had learned about the event through a series of visits by the Bioblitz Outreach Team to schools and community meetings over the previous few weeks. We were delighted to welcome the Minister of Planning, Economic Affairs and Development, Dr Kennedy Swaratsingh, who was visibly impressed by both the mission of the weekend and the passion displayed by the participants.

At 1 pm on Sunday, an excited crowd gathered to hear the final totals: 14 mammals, 34 reptiles and amphibians, 48 fungi, 83 fishes and crustaceans, 148 birds, 337 bugs, and 419 plants! The announcement of a total of 1,083 species was met with applause and cheers. It was the highest total of any Bioblitz, and one that is sure to rise as we continue to count some of the harder to identify specimens over the coming weeks. Maracas didn't provide us with any sharks (in the sea or in a sandwich), but it is certainly brim-filled with biodiversity!

### For more information on T&T's Bioblitzes

find us on Facebook and Instagram, and check out <https://sta.uwi.edu/fst/lifesciences/bioblitz-events-trinidad-tobago>



Bioblitz committee members welcome Minister Kennedy Swaratsingh to Basecamp. To his left are UWI postgraduate student Bryan Ramdeen and UWI alumni and Bioblitz committee chair Jernella Chedick. To his right are Dan Jaggernauth of the TTFNC and Dr Amy Deacon, scientific coordinator of the event.



A metalmark butterfly (*Alesa prema*) that is rarely seen. This is one of only a handful of sightings of this species in T&T in recent years.  
PHOTO: JASON-MARC MOHAMED



Herpetology volunteer Oneil Daniel handling a parrot snake that was caught in the area. All specimens were returned to the wild after the event.  
PHOTO: BRYAN RAMDEEN



Giselle Ragoonanan shows visitors how she bands birds, such as this bananaquit, to learn more about them.  
PHOTO: AMY DEACON



Bioblitz Chair and Department of Life Sciences (DLS) alumni Jernella Chedick, and DLS zoologist Dr Amy Deacon bring welcome remarks to the volunteers to kick start the event.  
PHOTO: BRYAN RAMDEEN



Members of the Fungi Team, led by Jeffrey Wong Sang, photograph some mushrooms so they can be added to the iNaturalist project.  
PHOTO: COURTESY JEFFREY WONG SANG



A luminous lizard, one of the species that made the list over the weekend. This species had not been confirmed on El Tucuche for 40 years.  
PHOTO: ZAK ALI

## ■ RESEARCH

# A Soldier (Fly) in the Fight for Sustainability

Faculty of Food and Agriculture researcher

Rakesh Bhukal uses native black soldier flies to reshape sustainable agriculture and organic waste management

When most people think of flies, they think of buzzing, annoying household pests. But this insect with well over 120,000 species plays a valuable ecological role. One type in particular is showing great promise for sustainable agriculture and organic waste management: *Hermetia illucens*, the black soldier fly. And its many uses are being researched by UWI St Augustine Faculty of Food and Agriculture (FFA) PhD student Rakesh Bhukal.

Bhukal's research harnesses the larvae of native black soldier flies (BSF) to consume organic waste and create "high protein larval biomass and nutrient-rich biofertiliser". Essentially, they eat waste and produce livestock feed and plant fertiliser.

"BSF larvae's voracious appetite enables rapid bioconversion of various organic waste streams—including animal manure, vegetable waste, food/restaurant waste, and Sargassum seaweed—into valuable protein for livestock and aquaculture feed, in addition to a highly nutritious biofertiliser which reduces dependence on expensive synthetic fertilisers while improving soil health," he says.

## Circular Bio-Economy: Turning Waste into Value

Bhukal calls his pioneering approach "circular bio-economy", focusing on resource efficiency by turning waste into valuable inputs, reducing dependence on imports, and fostering environmental sustainability. Previously, he was covered in the May 2023 issue of UWI TODAY for his aquaponics research and commercial enterprise, combining aquaculture and hydroponics by using wastewater from fish in a recirculating system as nutrients for plants.

"Bio-economics contrasts with traditional linear systems that generate waste and deplete resources," he says. "Adopting a circular bio-economy is critical for the Caribbean to build climate resilience, enhance food sovereignty, and stimulate sustainable economic growth."

Another important aspect of Bhukal's research is the use of native instead of imported black soldier flies. He captures them locally and optimises their production in captivity. Using native flies, he says, "is advantageous due to their better adaptation to the Caribbean climate and ecosystems, which enhances efficiency, survivability, and ecological balance". This approach also reduces invasive species risk and preserves local biodiversity.

So far, Bhukal's preliminary trials have shown the potential of the black soldier fly. Work with Sargassum seaweed for example is currently being undertaken, with optimisation and research continuing in areas such as salt management, pre-processing and heavy metal accumulation. These early results, he says, hint at a practical pathway to turn an environmental problem into a valuable by-product using a nature-based solution.

## A Caribbean metamorphosis

In fact, he believes that this research has the potential to transform sustainability efforts in the region, significantly reducing organic waste accumulation, producing high-protein animal feed at lower costs, generating biofertiliser alternatives to expensive synthetics, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and water use, and fostering agri-entrepreneurship and job creation.

This research is part of a Food and Agriculture Organisation-



Researcher Rakesh Bhukal feeding food waste to black soldier fly larvae. The larvae have voracious appetites, enabling them to rapidly convert waste that can then be used as livestock feed and plant fertiliser. PHOTOS: COURTESY RAKESH BHUKAL



led (FAO) initiative to advance BSF farming across the Caribbean for livestock and aquaculture feed working with T&T's Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and The UWI. Bhukal was instrumental in establishing the Caribbean's first BSF production facility at The UWI Field Station using native flies under a FFA project. This UWI Insect Bioreactor (IBR) continues applied research with recent postgraduate projects exploring BSF-based broiler and aquaculture feed trials using Bhukal's native BSF strain.

And he has moved from researcher to educator. Bhukal developed a Black Soldier Fly Production training course, soon to be offered through the FFA's Business Development Unit, to enable farmers and agri-entrepreneurs to acquire hands-on skills. He is also lead facilitator for the Agriculture Ministry's "Train-the-Trainers Workshop", helping to develop expertise in the public sector.

His work is not limited to T&T. He also spearheaded the establishment of the first BSF production colony at UWI Cavehill in Barbados. The colony will soon be incorporated into the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Nutritional Security in Barbados's pilot BSF production facility. Additionally, Bhukal has made a significant contribution to the Black Soldier Fly Knowledge HUB, a UWI/

FAO digital platform that provides information to BSF farmers across the Caribbean.

Incredibly driven, Rakesh Bhukal describes his research as revolutionary.

"By leveraging native flies, integrating with aquaculture, aquaponics and poultry production, and promoting a circular bio-economy, this project offers scalable, impactful solutions to regional challenges—ushering in a new era of resilient, resource-efficient farming for the future," he says.

One day soon, flies may no longer be viewed as pests, but as a powerful and cost-effective solution to some of the Caribbean's sustainability challenges.

Rakesh Bhukal's PhD thesis is titled "Developing a Circular Bio-economy Model Using Native Black Soldier Flies (*Hermetia illucens*): A Nature-Based Solution for Organic Waste Management and Sustainable Food Systems in Trinidad, WI."

■ For more information on the research at the Faculty of Food and Agriculture, visit <https://sta.uwi.edu/ffa/>

# ‘We See You’

## UWI Social Work Students Shine a Light on Hidden Struggles

BY CHERISSE LAUREN BERKELEY

**Each March, something meaningful unfolds at The UWI St Augustine campus.** The Faculty of Social Sciences undercroft becomes more than just a busy walkway. It transforms into a space of advocacy, healing and community-building as first-year social work students host the annual World Social Work Day Expo.

Since 2013, this event has allowed students to step into the real world of social work, putting their studies into action as they engage directly with their peers on issues that matter.

World Social Work Day is officially recognised across the globe on the third Tuesday in March, with events taking place from UN headquarters in New York and Geneva to communities worldwide. At UWI St Augustine, the Social Work Programme has built its own tradition by observing the day on the following Thursday, which this year was March 20. For the students, it is an opportunity to create real conversations and offer meaningful support to their campus community.

**Rooted in Visibility and Care** This year's international theme, “Strengthening Intergenerational Collaboration”, inspired the students to develop their own local focus, “We See You”. These simple words carried profound meaning, capturing the heart of what social work stands for, recognising and supporting those whose struggles often go unnoticed.

The expo highlighted issues that many students on campus quietly face, including dating violence, harassment, mental health challenges, and the importance of self-care. By addressing these topics openly, students created a space where conversations could take place safely and honestly.

“We wanted to highlight issues that people do not always feel comfortable talking about,” shared first-year social work student Sherion Rogers. “It is about letting people know they are not alone, and that others see and care about what they are going through.”

**Interactive Advocacy in Action** The students designed a variety of interactive activities to engage visitors and encourage reflection. Confession booths invited participants to share their experiences anonymously, offering a safe outlet for personal stories. Visitors were also encouraged to write down negative self-talk and exchange it for uplifting affirmations, while games and self-care activities promoted positive mental health habits.

“It is one thing to learn about these issues in class, but engaging with people directly brings the learning to life,” Rogers explained.

The expo attracted a steady flow of visitors throughout the day, drawing not only students

from across the Faculty of Social Sciences, but also staff and students from other faculties, along with support staff who joined in the conversations and activities. The undercroft was filled with energy, empathy and a shared sense of purpose.

**A Tradition of Leadership and Mentorship** At the heart of this annual event is Social Work lecturer Dr Karen-Anne Nathaniel-DeCaires, who introduced the practicum expo in 2013. Each year, she works closely with her students, guiding them as they bring the expo to life and navigate their first real-world experience in the field.

“Dr Nathaniel-DeCaires really encouraged us, especially those of us who were nervous at first,” said final-year student Jerissa Sennon, who participated in the 2023 expo under the theme “Be Well”.

Sennon's cohort created a range of engaging activities, from a positivity wall to self-care bingo and anonymous message exchanges, all designed to promote hope and encouragement.

“It was rewarding to see people leave feeling a little lighter and more positive,” she recalled.

**A Meaningful Learning Experience** While the expo continues to make an impact, it remains largely student-funded, with students and Dr Nathaniel-DeCaires covering the costs for materials, banners, T-shirts and other essentials. Yet their commitment has never wavered, fueled by a shared belief in the importance of the work they are doing.

“I hope the event continues to grow and that, with more support, future first year students can keep expanding and reaching even more people on campus,” Rogers said.

This year, the Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPS) unit provided valuable support by equipping each table with information about on-campus mental health resources, ensuring that students who needed further assistance knew where to turn.

For the students, the practicum offers invaluable preparation for their future roles as social workers. “The expo gives us real experience advocating for people, educating others, and working through real situations we will face in the field,” Rogers added.

As Sennon prepares for graduation, she carries forward the lessons learned through her practicum experience. After completing her external practicum at the Children's Authority, she hopes to continue working with children in need.

“It was a great learning experience, and I hope to continue making a difference for vulnerable children,” she said.



UWI St Augustine's Dean of the Faculty of Engineering, Professor Bheshem Ramal (centre), shakes hands with Chairman of Kenesjay Green Limited Mr Philip Julien (left), and Mr Tadashi Watanabe, Director of Energy Business Strategy at Niterra Co, Ltd, at the signing ceremony for the MOU. PHOTO: ANEEL KARIM

## UWI joins partnership for Green Hydrogen Initiative

**The UWI has formalised a memorandum of understanding with Niterra Co Ltd of Japan and Caribbean energy transition company, Kenesjay Green Limited (KGL), for a green hydrogen initiative in Trinidad and Tobago: the H2-TTransform Project.**

This project represents a major milestone in Trinidad and Tobago's journey toward sustainable energy transformation, and positions the country as a regional leader in green hydrogen research, technology development, and low-carbon innovation.

The partnership will develop and pilot advanced solid oxide electrolyser cell (SOEC) technology, a high-temperature electrolyser designed to significantly improve the efficiency of green hydrogen production. Niterra's SOEC system utilises steam to generate hydrogen and oxygen and has demonstrated up to 30 percent higher efficiency compared to conventional electrolyzers.

Recognising Trinidad and Tobago's robust petrochemical infrastructure and access to process waste heat, Niterra identified the country as an ideal site for its hydrogen technology pilot study. The company engaged The UWI as its academic research partner and Kenesjay Green Limited as its green energy industry collaborator, together launching the H2-TTransform Project.

This initiative embodies the vision of The UWI's Hydrogen Research Collaborative (H2RC), established in 2023 to strengthen collaboration between academia and industry in developing a hydrogen economy for Trinidad and Tobago and the wider Caribbean.

The partnership will focus on two major components:

1. Establishment of a Green Hydrogen Centre of Excellence: Building upon the existing H2RC framework and Trinidad's National Green Hydrogen Road Map, this centre will conduct model-based studies on green hydrogen systems, and support the creation of a hydrogen laboratory at UWI St Augustine for research and innovation.
2. Facilitation of the Pilot Study: The project will involve the installation and operation of production-scale SOEC electrolyzers and the collection of performance data over two phases, with a view to scaling up green hydrogen generation.

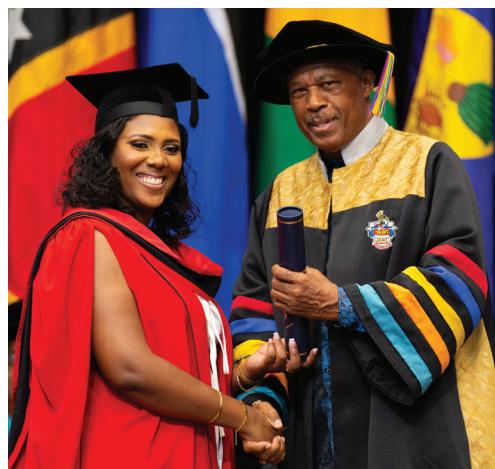
The MOU was signed by Mr Koichi Arimitsu, General Manager of Energy and Environment at Niterra Co Ltd; Dr Graham King, Department of Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering at UWI St Augustine; and Mr Philip Julien, Chairman of Kenesjay Green Limited. The signing ceremony was hosted at The UWI's Faculty of Engineering and attended by senior representatives of all three organisations.

# Ode to the Light Bearers

There is a light that is rising from out of the West, and proud bearers of that light are we,  
so we follow those whose work has brought glory to your name,  
making a better world for you and for me.

*"There is a Light" By Noel Dexter*

BY JOEL HENRY



PHOTOS: J PETERS IMAGES

It's quite a responsibility being a bearer of light for an entire region, having the destiny of some 44 million people, separated by islands decorating the Caribbean Sea, on your shoulders. Watching the faces of graduates, several thousand over three days at UWI St Augustine's 2025 graduation ceremonies, I wondered if it was too much. I wondered if they understood what was expected of them.

"You are not just graduates," Chancellor Dr Dodridge D Miller said to them in his address, "you are the architects of Caribbean possibility."

They have much design work to do. This region needs them more than ever. But what do they need? What do they want?

As valedictorian Joshua Lamy Ramsden said, speaking to and on behalf of the graduates from the Faculty of Humanities and Education and the Faculty of Sport:

"Be deliberate. Be resilient. Be the movement that transforms not just our region, but the world."

It was the message shared over all three days, from

October 23 to 25, by every valedictorian. They were challenged, they overcame, they found community, and they fully intend to work for the betterment of their islands and the lands beyond.

"The truth is," said valedictorian Ayanah Z Mohammed, speaking for the students from the Faculty of Medical Sciences, "the future of medicine is not just happening out there; it is happening in this very room. Each of us carries the potential to push boundaries, to innovate, and to heal in ways even greater than what we see today. The next transformative procedure, the next life-saving discovery, the next paradigm shift in healthcare could very well come from one of us."

This is not bravado. The light bearers of 2025 have proven themselves, on campus and in their lives. Over the course of the ceremonies, I heard many stories of perseverance. I saw graduates with disabilities that made it challenging for them to even cross the stage to receive their degrees. Yet they crossed the stage. I shared a moment of

silence with the attendees at The UWI's Sport and Physical Education Centre for young law student Alexia Trim, who died a week before her graduation.

Truthfully, the graduating class is prepared to become "the light rising in the West" because they passed through fire.

"I grew up in Belle Vue," said Faculties of Engineering and Law valedictorian Jehoshua Williams, "a place often described as a hotspot area, the ghettos, a gunman area...I've heard it all. But those words never told the full story."

"Why is this all important?" he asked.

"It is about redefining stigma and drawing strength from whatever adversity you may face. But strength alone is not enough. It must be carried through perseverance and an unyielding spirit."

What powerful words. Here's to the graduating class of light bearers—may the university spirit continue unyieldingly from past to future generations, illuminating us all.

Be deliberate.  
Be resilient.  
Be the movement  
that transforms  
not just our region,  
but the world.



GRADUATION 2025

# ‘You are part of the generation that must reset the agenda’

The UWI Chancellor Dr Dodridge Miller



**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The following is an excerpt from the address by The UWI Chancellor Dr Dodridge Miller.

Today we gather not merely to mark the end of an academic chapter, but to celebrate the beginning of a new Caribbean story, one that you, the graduates of 2025, are uniquely positioned to assist in crafting.

You did not arrive here by accident. You arrived through sacrifice, through resilience, through nights of study and days of doubt, through balancing (in some cases) work and school, family and ambition, hardship and hope. You arrived through hurricanes, both literal and metaphorical. You arrived through the pandemic's lingering shadows, through economic uncertainty, through the quiet battles that no one saw, but you endured nonetheless.

Class of 2025, you have not only completed your course of study; you have also grown intellectually, emotionally, and socially. You represent the best of our region. And your growth does not stop here. Your journey continues not just academically, but as leaders in your communities, and as guardians of our shared future.

You are graduating into a global environment increasingly shaped by national self-interest, where the idea of a shared responsibility for the prosperity of mankind is failing. Where the preservation of a way of life for all is no longer guaranteed. Where climate change, inequality, and conflict threaten the very fabric of our collective future.

And yet here you are, standing tall, ready. As graduates of The University of the West Indies, you stand on a solid foundation. You have been equipped with knowledge, perspective, and the ability to think critically. In addition, you have inherited the legacy of decades of Caribbean leadership in many important global areas.

This level of leadership and more are required now. In this still-evolving environment, you are not just graduates. You are builders. You are architects. You are the designers of a Caribbean that refuses to be defined by size, by limitation, or by the outdated assumptions of others. You are part of the generation that must reset the agenda.



# Balancing Ambition and Heart: The Valedictorians

BY SERAH ACHAM AND JOEL HENRY



**Mr Joshua Lamy-Ramsden** | BA Theatre Arts Major and Festival Studies Minor  
Valedictorian for the Faculties of Humanities & Education and Sport

During their time at The UWI, these valedictorians discovered that excellence is measured by resilience and purpose.



**Mr Dante S Gains** | BSc International Relations Special and Economics Minor  
Valedictorian for the Faculty of Social Sciences

**H**ow time flies. It was a few short years ago that this collection of people in their caps and gowns first entered the gates of the St Augustine Campus to begin their studies. And now they cross the stage to collect their degrees and certificates.

“I’m suddenly here,” says Aruna Mahadeo, still amazed that the end came so fast.

That’s not the only surprise for her. Aruna, an Economics graduate of the Faculty of Social Sciences, has also been given the honour of being one of the representatives of the faculty as valedictorian.

“I had never imagined this for myself,” she says.

But she shouldn’t be surprised. Aruna, like her fellow valedictorians, excelled in her studies and shows an empathy and concern for society that is incredibly mature. They represent not only their classmates, but also the UWI spirit.

This year’s six valedictorians—Aruna and Dante Gains, both representing the Faculty of Social Sciences; Joshua Lamy-Ramsden for the Faculties of Humanities & Education and Sport; Ayanah Mohamed, the Faculty of Medical Sciences; Josef Paty, the Faculties of Science & Technology and Food & Agriculture; and Jehoshua Williams, the Faculties of Law and Engineering—each embody that balance in their own way. In their valedictorian speeches (and their interviews with us) they speak of resilience and curiosity, of learning from others, and of growing as scholars and people.

“UWI is rigorous. It is relentless. And it is real. You can’t automate perseverance or download discipline; you have to live it,” said Dante in a booming voice to the graduating class during his speech.

And what should the graduates do with that hard-earned learning? He said, “From this very class will rise economists to redesign systems, sociologists to heal communities, psychologists to understand them, political scientists to rebuild nations, and teachers, to light countless minds.”

That’s quite a twining of ambition and compassion.

## To say farewell

The word valedictorian comes from the Latin, *vale dicere*, “to say farewell”. Traditionally, the valedictorian delivered the graduating class’ parting address. It was a role of both celebration and responsibility, earned through excellence and character.

Today, its meaning has deepened. The valedictorians speak for a generation navigating a world transformed by technology and uncertainty. As they leave the university’s familiar spaces and step into the future, they send a clear message—progress means little without heart.

“We are graduating at a time of incredible possibility and complexity,” said Joshua to those in attendance at the Sport and Physical Education Centre for the Saturday morning graduation ceremony. “Technology is reshaping the world faster than ever. Ethics struggle to keep pace.”

The Theatre Arts major, however, was not afraid:

“We, now graduates of Humanities, Education, and Sport are uniquely equipped to meet this moment. The Humanities give us empathy, imagination, and the courage to tell the stories that shape understanding. Education gives us the power to open minds and ignite futures. And Sport teaches us discipline, unity, and the will to rise again after every fall.”

They all shared these sentiments. Dante, who studied in International Relations and Economics, says his programme became a framework for shaping institutions and leading with empathy.

Aruna found growth in embracing responsibility and opportunities outside her comfort zone. The UWI’s World of Work programme opened doors she had not anticipated, giving her the chance to apply her studies in internships and develop confidence.

“I realised that I could handle myself in a social setting in a professional way,” she says, contributing meaningfully, even beyond what she expected of herself.

Joshua found that growth often comes from “trusting the process”.

“The more I trusted and became a sponge in the environment, the more I learnt and grew,” he says.



**Ms Aruna A Mahadeo** | BSc Economics Special  
Valedictorian for the Faculty of Social Sciences

For them, the title *Valedictorian* is more than an academic honour. It reflects perseverance, collective growth, and gratitude for those who helped them soar.



**Mr Jehoshua Josiah Williams** | Bachelor of Laws  
Valedictorian for the Faculties of Engineering and Law



**Mr Josef Anthony Paty** | BSc Geography Major  
and Environmental & Natural Resource  
Management Major  
Valedictorian for the Faculties of Science  
& Technology and Food & Agriculture



**Ms Ayanah Z  
Mohammed**  
Bachelor of Medicine  
& Bachelor of Surgery  
Valedictorian for the  
Faculty of Medical  
Sciences

### ‘Remember your empathy’

Ayanah, who graduated with her Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery, speaks to the importance of compassion. Her journey to become a doctor was shaped by early experiences watching family members navigate illness. She learned the profound impact healthcare professionals can have.

“You are a chess piece in somebody’s story, remember your empathy,” she urges.

Josef’s path in Geography and Environmental Natural Resource Management is a fusion of hands-on action and regional vision. His early volunteer work helping to clean up an oil spill in Colombia set him alight with passion for wildlife conservation. It has guided his academic and professional trajectory.

As a valedictorian, he frames success as personal achievement and the ability to inspire others: “If you can identify something similar in me with yourself, let that inspire you to be the best you could be.”

He has already begun shaping his future, working as a Student Engagement Assistant and pursuing a master’s in Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Development at The UWI.

Jehoshua, who graduated with his Bachelor of Laws, is a believer in holistic development.

“Arm yourselves with skills,” he told the graduands from the Faculties of Law and Engineering that he represented as valedictorian, “people skills, financial literacy and any necessary qualifications to propel you forward in this lifetime.”

A child of Belle Vue, a community he says is “often described as a hotspot area”, Jehoshua used that stigma as fuel, a rocket to success. “We wear it not as a pin of shame, but as a badge of honour. It is proof that even the heaviest labels meant to limit us can be lifted, rewritten and transformed into stories of hope.”

### Stepping boldly—and with grace

If there is a central truth to these young graduates’ insights, it’s that the future belongs to those who navigate change with integrity and purpose. From the ethical integration of technology to the cultivation of creative and interpersonal skills, they see opportunity in the challenges they face. And as a society, we face many challenges indeed.

“Never let yourself become a victim to despair,” Jehoshua reminds us. “You can make yourself in this field through hard work and making a few connections.”

Joshua urges peers to step boldly out of comfort zones, Dante calls on his class to leave a legacy of grace, authenticity, and perseverance.

For Josef and Ayanah, there is another layer of responsibility: to leave a positive impact on their fields. Josef hopes to position the Caribbean as a hub for conservation innovation, blending policy, research, and hands-on work. Ayanah envisions a generation of healthcare professionals who prioritise sensitivity alongside efficiency.

“Humanitarianism has been overshadowed by media coverage of worldwide negativity,” Josef said in his speech on behalf of the Faculties of Science & Technology and Food & Agriculture. “As graduates of The UWI, it is our duty to serve a world that is in dire need of positivity.”

In the stories of these valedictorians, and of many of their classmates, we see a generation embracing technology, creative expression, and societal responsibility. They pass out through the gates that welcomed them in, carrying their degrees, but also something more.

Call it purpose or shared conviction, it’s the animating energy, embedded in the institution of the university, even when it was only an idea in the heads of planners and policymakers. The energy, passed down over generations to develop Caribbean people, their minds and hearts.

“The last few years were not without trials but you have been patient,” Ayanah addressed the graduating class from the Faculty of Medical Sciences. “Studying, sacrificing, and serving. That patience now becomes power. Today, the world has gained new doctors, nurses, dentists, ophthalmologists, pharmacists and veterinarians. You have earned the responsibility to heal, to lead, and not just save, but change lives. Take a look around you. The future of medical sciences is right here and it is dazzling.”

And so, bidding farewell to UWI, they leave a gift for the cohorts to come, wise words and animating energy, their generation’s contribution.

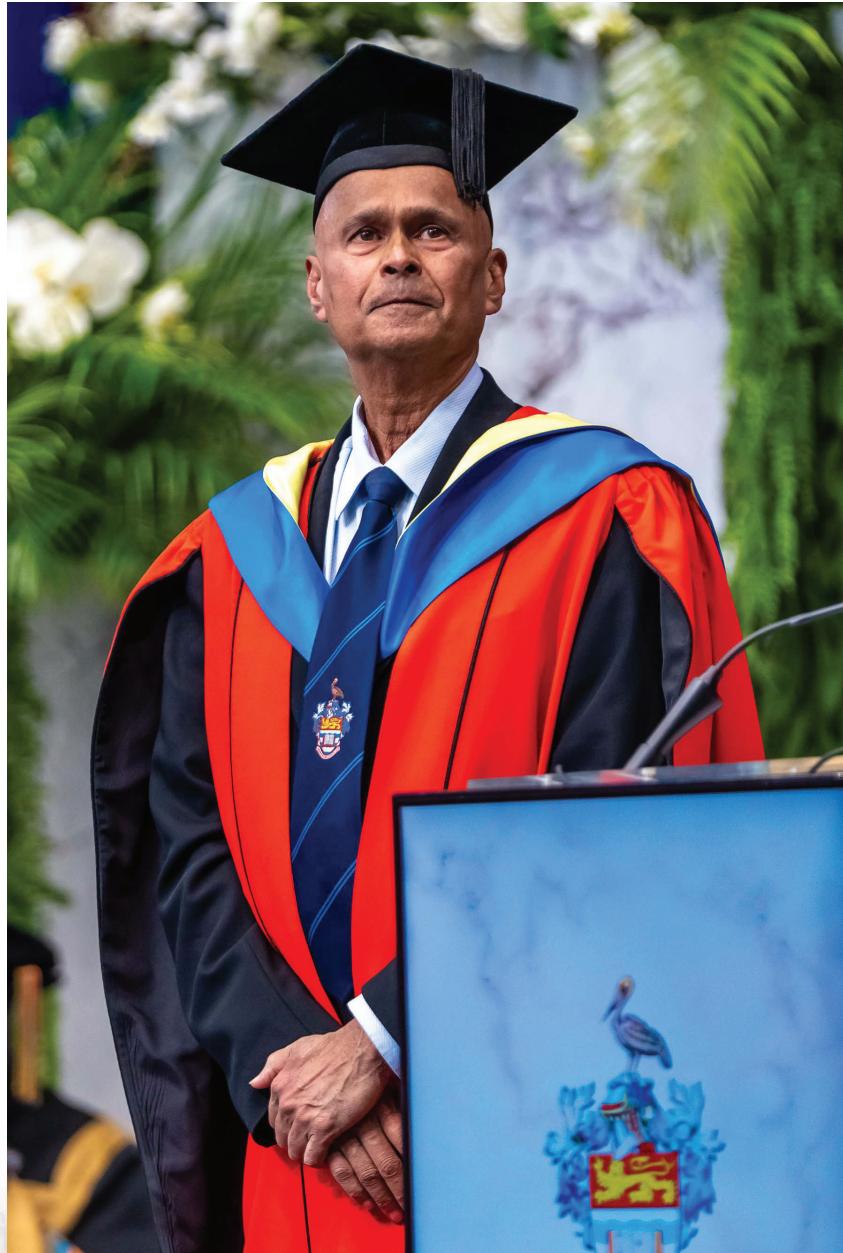
GRADUATION 2025

HONORARY GRADUANDS

# A Champion for Children's Critical Care

## NIRANJAN KISSOON

BY AMY LI BAKSH



Niranjan Kissoon describes himself as an “eternal optimist”. And he has to be. Every day, his work requires him to bear witness to some of the most difficult health circumstances in the world, and to continue fighting to make a difference.

But for Kissoon, an internationally renowned paediatric critical care expert who currently serves as the President of the Global Sepsis Alliance and has now been conferred the Doctor of Science (DSc) from The UWI St Augustine, there is no question of whether this is the path he should take.

“I just do it,” he says with a laugh.

“I came from a pretty poor background—a modest background—from Cunupia,” says Kissoon. A career in medicine took him to Jamaica, and then later to Canada, where he focused on paediatrics, and paediatric emergency and critical care. But he never forgot where he came from.

“In the back of my mind, I had this little feeling... this is a very rich country. Intensive care and emergency care here are very expensive resources, but I was aware that in many parts of the world, there are no facilities or resources available to most patients.”

One of the ripple effects on a lack of healthcare resources is an increase in infections—and sepsis.

“I knew that infections and sepsis were the number one killer in the world of children,” he says. “So, I decided to plant my flag there.”

He wanted to help provide better care to the people who needed it the most. This was the genesis of the Global Sepsis Alliance, born out of an understanding that the issue was greater than one country, or one society.

Since sepsis does not have one singular cause and is a condition where the body begins to shut down in an extreme response to an infection, it is a higher risk in places where resources are scarce—where, for example, patients may need to wait longer to receive care due to understaffing, or where malnutrition is widespread. There are a host of risk factors that come from an overall lack of resources. It’s not simply a health issue, but an overarching issue of equity. And for Kissoon, his passion stems from a personal place.

“The issue of the dehumanising effect of poverty... those things have never left me,” he says.

Now, he works with organisations around the world, as well as mentors the next generation of doctors to approach these issues from a more holistic perspective.

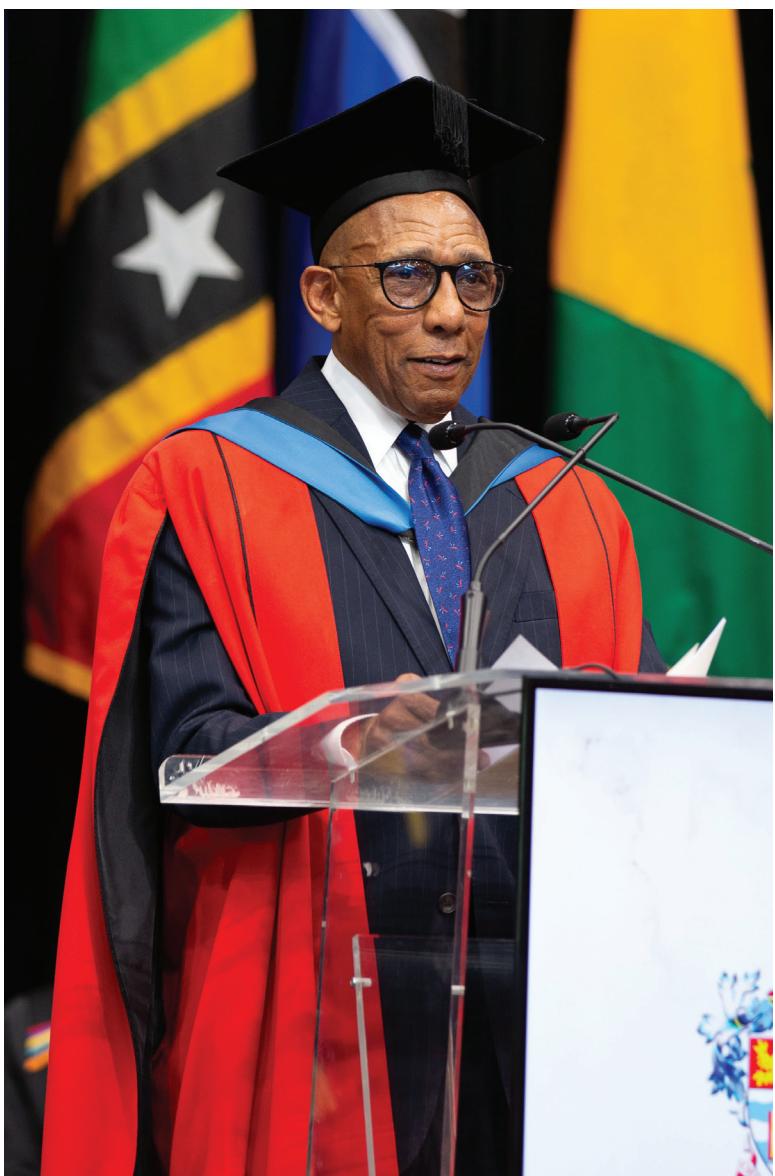
So, what still needs to be done?

“You have to fight the disease in the corridors of authority and power to get the funding to fight it on the bedside,” he says. “Through the Global Sepsis Alliance and the branch, the African Sepsis Alliance and the Caribbean Sepsis Alliance, we have been making great strides in advocacy to really bring it to the fore, that this is an important issue.”

He wants people to understand that anyone can get sepsis, and the factors that make the most widespread difference are knowledge and resources. It’s an issue that connects and affects us all.

“We have to think about the planet globally,” says Kissoon. And as global citizens, we must see it as our responsibility to ensure all children have the right to better healthcare.





## NIGEL ROMANO A Man on the Move

**N**igel Romano has climbed many mountains. He served as Chief Financial Officer for Citibank Trinidad and Tobago. He has climbed Kilimanjaro. He has been Regional Director of Quality and Business Processes for the Asia Pacific region, and Head of Citigroup Business Services for 19 countries. He has scaled Mount Kinabalu, the highest peak in Southeast Asia. He has held leadership roles at ANSA McAL, JMMB, the Caribbean Development Bank, and served on a series of boards across the business world. He has hiked Machu Pichu.

Working and walking, walking and working. But one thing remains the same: throughout his four-decade career, Romano has never stopped moving. From Trinidad and Tobago, to Indonesia, to Hong Kong, to Singapore, to Barbados, and back again.

"You never stayed in one spot too long," I say.

"True!" he replies with a laugh. "I suppose I have a hunger for learning and growth."

His philosophy is to be a "learn-it-all, not know-it-all", as he says during his speech at The UWI St Augustine's 2025 Graduation ceremony where he was conferred with the Doctor of Laws (LLD).

Throughout his impressive career, he has found himself around the world. Now, though he has technically been retired since 2019, Romano is still on the move. He does advisory work as Senior Director of Business Consultancy Services for Moore Trinidad and Tobago. He served as Chairman of the UWI Development and Endowment Fund (UWIDEF) until 2020, and Chairman of National Flour Mills Limited until 2024. He chairs the Caribbean Corporate Governance Institute and the Commercial Committee of the Electrical Industries Group, and serves on the boards of ANSA Merchant Bank Limited, and Genesis Insurance Brokers and Benefits Consultants Limited. It seems that a bustling life is where he feels most at home.

Perhaps the bustle reminds him of growing up in the heart of hilly San Fernando.

"I always walked or rode to school," says Romano. "School was walking distance, 10-15 minutes away."

Living on a hillside overlooking Port-of-Spain now, walking is still a central part of his life. This is where the balance is kept. When he walks, the bustle goes quiet. "I don't have anything to disturb me. A lot of thoughts and ideas come [when I walk]."

Wherever he travelled, he found somewhere to walk. And even better if there were hills. "I love hills. I walk, but I want hills."

With a career of high intensity jobs, this outlet has kept him grounded through the chaos.

"I want to always continue learning and growing," he says. "It has been a very exciting journey, from where I stand."

And the journey must continue.

## The Many Musical Delicacies of Mungal Patasar

**M**ungal Patasar makes a mean baigan choka. Well, not a choka, per se, but a baigan bharta, a north Indian dish that tastes similar to our local choka, but with the addition of tomatoes and "a little bit of masala", as he says.

He generously offers the recipe (and after a taste test, it is excellent). Food might not be the first creative outlet one thinks of when one hears the name Mungal Patasar, but he is a man of many interests. On a typical day, he can be found cooking for his family, or practicing jazz on the piano.

Expanding his piano vocabulary has become his latest musical preoccupation, joining his exploration of clarinet (where it all started as a child), mandolin, guitar, harmonium, dabla... as he lists, his wife, Roshni, interjects in the background of the call to remind him of his stint with violin.

"Oh, yes!" he exclaims. Perhaps it eluded his memory because it didn't quite stick.

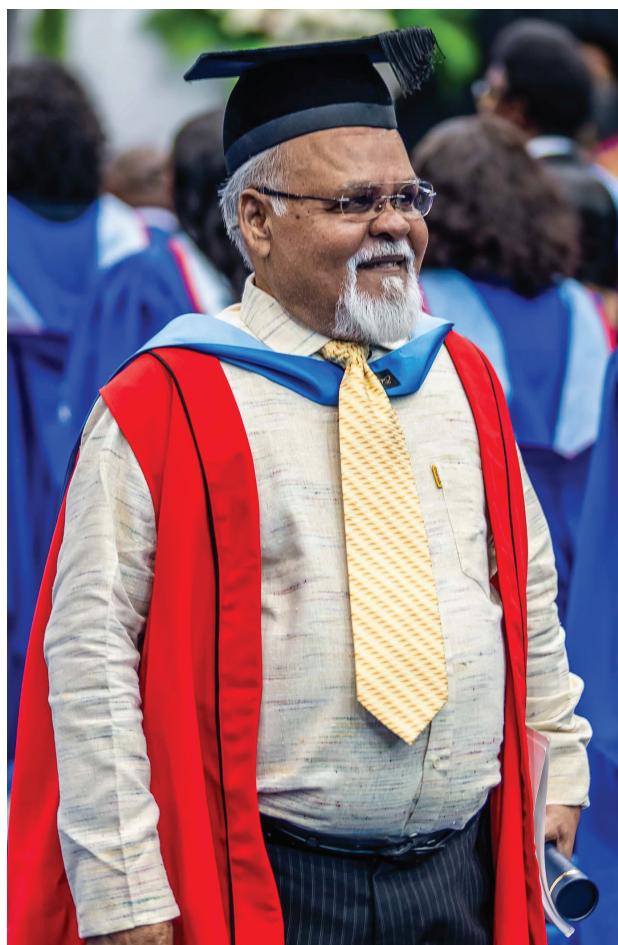
"It didn't speak to you?" I ask.

"Well," he says with a laugh, "The sitar spoke louder."

An exuberant cook, a voracious writer, a connoisseur of many instruments—but the sitar speaks louder.

"I was about 16 years' old when my brother Latchmi brought home a recording of Pandit Ravi Shankar," says Patasar. "I just could not move. I stood with my hair on end, tears streamed down my eyes... I was transfixed." Now, on the cusp of 80, he is still listening.

After that first visceral encounter, it would be ten years before Patasar purchased his very own sitar. "Where the journey started," he says. That journey would take him to India in his 40s, where he earned a Bachelor of Music



from Banaras Hindu University and a Master of Music from Prayag Sangeet Samiti.

But his training in Indian Classical music would not be the only prevailing influence for his evolving sound. It was an encounter with "...a guy teaching jazz music in QRC by the name of Scofield Pilgrim," he says, who first introduced him to 'Calypso Jazz'. This would become the basis of the genre Patasar now considers to be his home space—Indo-Calypso Jazz.

"Pilgrim, Clive 'Zanda' [Alexander], [Lennox] 'Boogis' Sharpe, [Michael] 'Toby' Tobias... they were doing Calypso Jazz workshops and they invited me," he reminisces. "I made a lot of stumbles, because I wasn't trained in that kind of music..." But his Indian classical instincts lent themselves well to jazz improvisation. "[Zanda] said, 'Mungal, you are a genius!'"

This fusion of sound became the foundation of his band Pantar (-pan from steelpan, -tar from sitar). Elaborate musical recipes comprised of sitar, pan, keyboards and dabla, combining into a range of satisfying dishes that tasted a little of jazz, a little of Indian classical, but certainly overpoweringly Caribbean.

Now, to add to his myriad of honours from institutions around the world, he has been conferred with the Doctor of Letters (DLitt) from The University of the West Indies. It is a fitting commemoration of his scholarly work both as a musician and an academic who has published several papers, which he also generously offers to share with me—although his crowning creative achievement might just be a hearty stack of love letters to his wife Roshni, who mischievously suggests I read through those also, as they both dissolve into laughter.



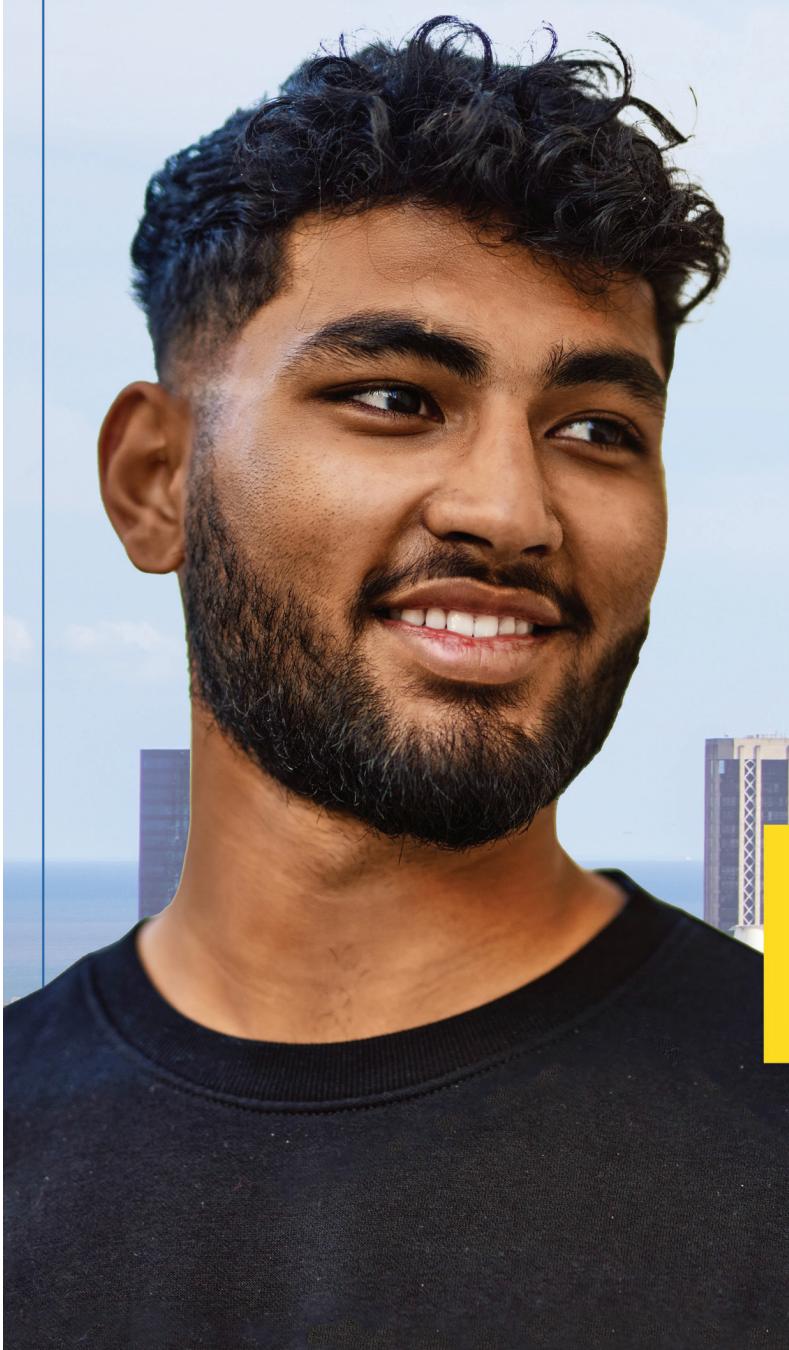
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# Two Masters of the Home

BY VANEISA BAKSH



**Alicia Phillips-Joseph** (right) celebrates with her son **Marcele**.

‘Our family background spans multiple Caribbean islands, including Dominica, Tobago, Trinidad, Barbados and St Vincent and the Grenadines.’

Our children will meet you in school, was what her mother told Alicia Phillips-Joseph. What did she mean by that? Well, Alicia had started her tertiary education with linguistics, then shifted to communications and international relations for her undergraduate degree. When that was completed, she paused her studies to focus on raising her four children.

They’re all adults now. Marcus is 29, Melissa is 26, Marcele is 24, and Matthew is 22. She’d waited until Matthew had finished secondary school before enrolling in a master’s programme in Strategic Leadership and Innovation. It was the long break in her studies that prompted her mother’s words. They were prophetic. She and Marcele both graduated with their master’s degrees in 2025.

Yet Alicia was always committed to tertiary studies. “Growing up in Laventille, I witnessed social challenges that seemed to persist over time. I recognised early on that education was a key to overcoming these obstacles.”

Her parents had not gone past primary school and this motivated her to go further.

## Roots from throughout the Caribbean

“Our family background spans multiple Caribbean islands, including Dominica, Tobago, Trinidad, Barbados and St Vincent and the Grenadines,” she said. This diversity informed her understanding of international relations and trade policy. It was also useful when Marcele spent the final seven months of his programme on an internship in St Vincent.

He had been moving relentlessly through the academic path. From CAPE to undergrad to post-graduate studies, he did not pause. He began his BSc in Biochemistry during the early stages of the pandemic in 2020, and then immediately enrolled in the MSc in Agri Food Safety and Quality Assurance programme. He was determined to have his master’s by the time he was 25. He’s beaten that self-imposed target.

But it wasn’t simply about setting an academic goal. Choosing biochemistry “was influenced by my early interest in the biological systems of living organisms and influence of these on functionalities and operations needed to sustain life.” As COVID-19 unfolded, he saw the importance of biochemistry in public health issues. He also saw the need for good quality food that is “fit for consumption and absent of adverse health effects”.

“Throughout the Agri Food Safety and Quality Assurance programme, I saw the application of biochemistry concepts and skills, such as ELISA and PCR, to the agricultural sector, allowing me to relate and grasp graduate level concepts of which I had not previously been aware,” he said.

Alicia said that when Marcele was awarded a merit for his master’s studies, “we found ourselves studying side by side.”

Both faced challenges.

## A difficult balancing act

For Alicia, balancing family responsibilities with academic demands was the most onerous. She had to learn to delegate household tasks to her family.

For Marcele it was rough to juggle work and study while trying to maintain a social life. He’d been awarded an Intra-Caribbean Academic Mobility Programme scholarship through the European Union/Cariforum which led to the internship at the Eastern Caribbean Group of Companies.

“Adapting to a slower pace of living and without familiar resources, for instance, my own transport, and entertainment took a while to adapt to, but I was able to appreciate being out of my comfort zone and being exposed to new ideas, surroundings and pastimes.”

He said it was an “eye-opener” to find himself doing his master’s at the same time as his mother.

“We both did undergrad at different times. For me, during the pandemic with accessible resources at my fingertips and information one Google click away, and for her during a time where you had to physically go to libraries and borrow physical books, we had to develop our way of bridging the gap. This was initially very difficult for both of us as our learning approaches are vastly different, but worth it in the end.”

He added, “I found it easier to stay at home to study; she found it difficult to stay focused on school work at home and made it her priority to go to the Alma Jordan Library to do schoolwork. We eventually split our school work time to half at home and half at the library. Even teaching a parent how to easily find online journals, papers, articles and connecting papers to build literature truly was an experience that I’ll gladly do again for my mom.”

For Alicia, “Our simultaneous graduation with master’s degrees was a proud moment that fulfilled my mother’s prophecy: my children did indeed meet me in school. This milestone symbolises not only personal achievement, but also the intergenerational value of education and the strength of family support.”



From left: Ms Kreshaun Gordon, Ms Marlene Herrera, Mr Justin Subero, and Dr Charmain Subero-Salanday, family and members of the graduating class of 2025.

# ‘Faith and family sustained us’

BY VANEISA BAKSH

If they were living in the same house, it would definitely have been a rambunctious environment, but perhaps fortunately for these four family members graduating at the St Augustine ceremonies this year, they lived apart.

Marlene Herrera has completed her Master’s in Social Work, her niece, Charmain Subero-Salanday, completed her EdD, and Charmain’s nephew, Justin Subero, his MBA at Arthur Lok Jack and her niece, Kreshaun Gordon, her LLB.

Talking to them about the separate journeys that saw them landing up on the same graduation platforms in 2025, the common traits are clear. They are highly-motivated, energetic and confident, with a never-say-die approach to life.

Marlene had been working as a senior secretary at the Council of Legal Education while she did her programme part-time. At 62, she is now retired but plans to privately practise her social work, with some “volunteering and administrative work to keep busy.”

The most difficult challenges she faced did not come from managing work and study, but a far more profoundly painful source.

## Painful loss

“I lost six sisters, a brother, and two brothers-in-law during the course of my programme,” she said. “At one point, I thought about not continuing, but the motivation from Dr Kendra Pitt encouraged me to take an extension and complete it.”

She is the last surviving sibling, and somewhat of the matriarch of the extended family. Needless to say, the deaths affected everyone.

For Charmain, “Faith and family sustained us. We are

a resilient people. We are a family that has endured great loss, having said goodbye to 18 loved ones, including my mother, who passed away in 2021 from COVID-19.”

Charmain has just turned 59, and “One of my greatest joys was keeping pace with the younger students—a quiet affirmation that age and circumstance need not limit ambition,” she said. This resilience is probably why she found it a plus that her studies were completely virtual. “Pursuing online classes not only expanded my knowledge but also opened doors to meaningful connections—transforming virtual discussions into a network of lasting friendships.”

It was quite different for 27-year-old Justin, who found the transition to virtual learning discombobulating. He had just finished his BSc in Computer Science and Communication Studies when the pandemic intervened and he could not adjust. He retreated, got a job at a bank (where he is now a senior systems analyst). Fortunately, a colleague had done the programme and persuaded him to try again. He was depressed, he said, but starting again made “a drastic difference.”

It was hard to juggle work and study, he said, “sheer determination” was what kept him going through the late nights, the missed liming, and keeping up with assignments. His girlfriend helped him to power through. That, and the “discipline and organisational skills,” he got from his father, Sheldon, and the “charisma and personality,” from his mother, Giselle, helped him thrive.

## Support from several sources

That remarkable confidence is echoed in Kreshaun, who says assuredly, “My long-term goal is to enter politics and eventually serve as Attorney General. I’ve always believed that the sky is my limit, and I aim to reach the

top in whatever I do. For me, law is more than a career, it’s a calling. I see it as a powerful tool to bring about meaningful change and to help build a society that is fair, transparent, and accountable.”

She won’t mind being Chief Justice or Prime Minister either, she said; she’ll figure out which is more appealing as she goes along.

Each of them acknowledges the value of the support family has brought. “My family and I as you can tell are busy bees, but we always make time to support each other,” said Justin.

For Kreshaun, a bleak moment came when her father died during her second year. “Balancing grief, new family responsibilities, and academic pressures was incredibly difficult. There were moments when I felt completely overwhelmed, but his belief in me and my family’s support gave me the strength to keep going.”

For Marlene, support also came from her lecturers and colleagues. She singled out “Miriam Samaru who showed her compassion when my younger sister died, and the present principal Rudranath Maharaj.”

Charmain wistfully recalls the many nights she survived on just three hours’ sleep, juggling work projects, academic deadlines, and missed activities with her family which, “didn’t always go down well,” she said. But she had some words of advice based on her experience as a UWI staffer and student.

“Once accepted to The UWI, you must be prepared to work hard and be challenged—but know this: you are never alone. UWI is a community. Just as my family supported me through the toughest times, my UWI family provided encouragement, guidance, and understanding. That sense of community made all the difference.”

# A Father/Daughter Success Story

BY JOEL HENRY

**“Demanding and absolutely fulfilling”** is how Amara Noel describes her experience pursuing her Master’s in Business Intelligence and Data Analytics at the Arthur Lok Jack Global School of Business (ALJSB).

On Friday, October 24—graduation day—she enjoyed the extra fulfilment of graduating alongside her father, Dr Michael Noel, who completed his Doctorate in Business Administration from ALJSB.

“I’m so proud of him and happy to share it with him,” she says.

Dr Noel agrees: “I would like to repeat something often said. ‘Your children don’t listen to what you say, they listen to what you do.’ This encourages us to lead by example, and in that respect, my role as a father has been successful.”

They advised and encouraged each other throughout their very challenging programmes. “I got to see his gruelling defense and he saw my final presentation for my capstone,” says Ms Noel.



**Dr Michael Noel** with his daughter and fellow graduate **Ms Amara Noel**.

And father and daughter had even more support from the rest of the family.

“My wife often stayed up with me after midnight while I worked, and tolerated the all-nighters,” Dr Noel recounts. “She took the day-to-day cares upon her shoulders to allow me time to research and write. My daughters (he has two more) understood the process and helped when needed. I can truly say that without them this doctoral journey would not have been completed.”

He is also grateful for the support of his supervisor and his classmates in the Doctor of Business Administration programme.

Amara is relieved that she has completed the programme, calling it “one of the most challenging she has ever done”, but also one of the most fun. She also scored her highest grades ever.

“So, it was really fitting,” she says, “to cross the [graduation] stage on the same day.”



## ‘Marriage, motherhood, and education are all my priorities’

BY JOEL HENRY

**“Short answer or the long one?”** Bachelor of Law graduate Sariyah Mohammed responds to the question of how she balanced a new marriage and baby with completing her degree.

She says, “Honestly, my immediate thought when I’m asked this question is that, without my faith, I wouldn’t have managed.”

However, despite the difficulties, she was more than willing to accept them.

“I don’t agree with the practice of picking one focal point. Marriage, motherhood, and my education are all priorities in my life, and I figured, why must I complete one before I can move on to the next. It was difficult and I struggled, but I loved it.”

Yet, there are struggles you willingly take on and others you are forced to accept. Sariyah’s husband, Jibraeel Hosein, was diagnosed with cancer a few months into her pregnancy.

“My immediate reaction wasn’t anger, sadness or even confusion,” she recalls. “It was acceptance.”

“The first words out of my mouth when the doctor shared this news with my husband and I was ‘okay, and what should we do now?’ My husband was in surgery



Graduate **Sariyah Mohammed** with her husband **Jibraeel Hosein** and their new baby. PHOTO: ANEEL KARIM

Friday and discharged later that day. I studied over the weekend and wrote my final exam on Monday.”

That’s quite a feat. Still, Sariyah remains humble and focused:

“It might seem like something glorious, and yes, I’m proud of myself, but some days were great and others were rough. Having support from my partner and my family helped in more ways than I can name, and not giving up on myself was critical.”

Her parents and husband were giving full support at the Faculty of Law Graduation ceremony on October 23. Jibraeel was particularly striking, holding their two-month-old baby during the ceremony, and giving a prayer of thanks afterwards on the campus grounds.

“He stood for over two hours holding my newborn so that I could attend graduation when I originally told him I wouldn’t bother to go,” she says.

Now, a very challenging and meaningful phase of Sariyah’s life is over. She is grateful for the experience.

“In the Quran, there is a line that states ‘with hardship comes ease.’ I think I got a first-hand display of that within this year, and I’m thankful for every second of it.”



# Going Forward Together

And so, after three days of celebration, Graduation 2025 has ended for The UWI St Augustine campus.

This graduating class will now go forward to chart their individual destinies and, hopefully, make a collective contribution to our community of islands.

As Faculty of Science & Technology and Faculty of Food & Agriculture valedictorian Josef Paty said in his address, “Let it be known that we are no longer walking the paths that the world has paved for us, but paving new paths for the world to walk on, and together, graduating class of 2025, we can make it happen.”

*We wish them all happiness and success.*

