



# INSPIRED to RISE



**They get up, and nothing gets them down.** UWI St Augustine students jump in celebration of the beginning of Academic Year 2024-2025 in front of the Faculty of Social Sciences Inspiration Wall. The wall, unveiled in late August, is made up of personal messages and uplifting quotes from past and present students to support their peers as they experience the challenges and thrills of university life. With the official launch of the new academic year on August 25 and the beginning of teaching on September 2, the St Augustine campus is once again bustling with students, faculty, and other members of staff, new and returning. It's a new beginning, and messages of hope, resilience, and positivity shared in bright colours are a great way to start. PHOTO: ANEEL KARIM





UWI  
ST. AUGUSTINE  
CAMPUS

# WELCOME NEW STUDENTS

## GET READY TO SOAR



# UWI PELICANS

ST AUGUSTINE CAMPUS

Like and Follow for more





## FROM THE PRINCIPAL

# EMPOWERING THE NEXT GENERATION: Education as the Foundation for Peace and Social Justice

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** On September 22, **Campus Principal Professor Rose-Marie Antoine** gave the feature address at **The Rotary Club's "Hats and Heels High Tea and Fashion Show"** at the Hyatt Regency Trinidad. **UWI TODAY** is pleased to share an excerpt from her address. The entire speech will be available in our online edition.

## Education – A Collective Social Good

When I heard today's fascinating topic, I thought, "Finally someone gets it." Education is indeed the foundation for peace and social justice. Ultimately, education is a social and collective right. It promotes a social and collective good – social cohesion – peace, justice.

Not many believe that these days, steeped as we are in apathy and self-indulgence. We tend to focus myopically on the short term and individualistic goals of education – getting a job, etc., but its true goals are much broader.

But then Rotary has always been a progressive organisation. It understands these intersections and sometimes invisible limitations in our societies. For example, your work on period poverty, recognising the link between female bodily functions and equal opportunity/advancement (being able to go to school). I was honoured when, 3 years ago, Rotary approached me to assist with that programme.

Just as education empowers, and promotes social justice, so too, social justice and peace promote genuine education and opportunity. So, this is a complex and hugely important subject. And of course, if you chose such a serious topic, one assumes that you want a serious discussion.

## Inequity: the Root of all Evil

We cannot interrogate this topic without considering the issue of inequity which I have always believed is the root of all evil. I have spent much of my work-life advocating for equity and justice. Inequality is also a constant challenge that we must continually confront, even more so that our societies were born out of brutal inequality. To state the obvious, without social justice, there can be no peace in our societies.

That is the important truth that we must grasp. Look at Denmark – happiest place in the world. It is because they have actively addressed inequity.

Inequality breeds injustice and injustice catalyses conflict, the opposite of peace. We as human beings cannot thrive or survive if others in our societies are disenfranchised or marginalised.

There is no blame game here. We must create the social structures that prioritise these goals of social equity, and education remains the fundamental tool to do this.

Interestingly, we are not even achieving those short term goals of education. Fewer are now able to use education to climb out of poverty.<sup>1</sup> A large percentage are failing – achieving below 50%. The odds against success are greater than ever.

## Decline of Education as a Priority

It is no secret that we are witnessing the decline of education as a priority in our communities, our governments and even industrial sectors. Some of that is due to what I call the Bill Gates phenomenon. Both he and Zuckerberg (Facebook) dropped out of university, although they did make it to Harvard. These are rare successes. We must fight against this growing cynicism that education is not valuable, whether it is the ordinary person on the street or the policy makers.

The results – a lack of funding and the undervaluing of education, tertiary in particular – continue to be major challenges.



But it is a more pervasive problem. Education has become less attractive, especially to our male youth, and possibly some ethnic groups, whether as a path to gaining livelihoods, or as an end in itself.

Of course, some of that disillusionment toward education comes from embedded social practices which encourage nepotism instead of merit, achievement and hard work.

It is therefore not enough to simply provide education, as we are fond of boasting (although, we are not even doing that well). We now have the task of persuading young people, especially males, that an education is something worth having. We cannot do that by carrying on as usual.

## The Gender Dimension - Education Pushback, and Increasing Crime and Gang Culture

Recent research highlights clear gender dimensions in the pushback against education. Education is no longer a male domain, and we know today that girls are outperforming boys in every academic field and are the majorities in universities. It is good that women, long denied opportunities, are progressing, but there is a dark side.

While male marginalisation is debunked, David Plummer and others argue that "with education becoming 'common ground', boys are left with fewer opportunities to establish their gendered identity through education". So, since academic achievement and the classroom are no longer meeting those needs as easily, have less value for boys in establishing their masculine identity, education

is less attractive to them. In fact, boys who excel in academia risk being considered "suspect", nerdy or even gay by their peers. So, masculine taboos have entered the classroom. Education is seen as feminised and not something a 'real man' would do.<sup>2</sup>

These same gender dimensions help explain the meteoric rise in gang violence and murder. What emerges are links between this gendered identity dilemma and social conflict. The "desire to prove male identity is being driven towards risk-taking, hyper-masculine, sometimes antisocial acts including bullying, harassment, crime, and violence."<sup>3</sup>

That *machismo* – the search for an empowering identity, to project oneself as successful and masculine – helps to explain the staggering level of violence in our society. Unless we can address these, peace will continue to be illusory.

The research also shows that for boys, the peer group is most powerful, more than family, school, and media, and assumes a culture and authority of its own, particularly where there is a power vacuum, like a lack of supervision. The peer group is the genesis of the gang culture and self-perpetuates. Importantly, these peer-group values start with us, including our mothers, who instill these rigid hyper-male/hard masculine norms.

"The combination of masculine obligation and taboo narrows boys' potential and cuts them off from large areas of social life", including education. Males are depriving themselves of the social benefits of education that can lead to their empowerment. It is a paradox; they are marginalising themselves.

Statistics from the prisons confirm this. Reports say that 50.3% of inmates did not complete school.<sup>4</sup> Incidentally, I noticed this phenomenon several years ago while doing a UNICEF project. Many of the 'juvenile delinquents' had dropped out of school and had learning difficulties, such as dyslexia. Yet, nothing has been done to design education programmes to harness these children. They are left to self-destruct. Note that Einstein had dyslexia.

We are now beginning to understand the phenomenon and can devise solutions. We must, therefore, create routes for males' advancement. No one demographic should be over-represented if we want a peaceful and egalitarian society.<sup>5</sup>

**For the entirety of Professor Antoine's address, please visit the UWI TODAY website at <https://sta.uwi.edu/uwitoday/>**

*Rose-Marie Antoine*

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

### Editorial Team

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

**Director of Marketing and Communications**  
**Wynell Gregorio**

**Ag. Editor**  
**Joel Henry**  
Email: [joel.henry@sta.uwi.edu](mailto:joel.henry@sta.uwi.edu)

**Contact Us**  
**The UWI Marketing and Communications Office**  
Tel: (868) 662-2002,  
exts. 82013 / 83997  
Email: [uwitoday@sta.uwi.edu](mailto:uwitoday@sta.uwi.edu)

<sup>1</sup> A recent report states that 937 students were enrolled for the post-SEA revision programme. This should raise alarm bells since, based on a quick review of this year's results, the number scoring below the 50 per cent mark was somewhere between 6,000 and 7,000. So, the ministry was not even remotely close to its target number for remediation.

<sup>2</sup> David Plummer, 'Is learning becoming taboo for Caribbean boys?' UNESCO/ UWI, St Augustine, Trinidad.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Randy Seepersad, *Regional Comparative Report: Survey of Individuals Deprived of Liberty: Caribbean (2016-2019): The Bahamas, Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago*, Center for Latin American Studies on Insecurity and Violence, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Do we seriously want a world where a huge percentage of men are dropouts, or underachievers and all of the good jobs and professions are filled only by women?



## ■ UWI IN SOCIETY

In the Caribbean, the issue of food security and sovereignty looms, especially as we have seen the effects of a crisis like a global pandemic on the region's capacity to import food. In 2023, the United Nations' World Food Programme and CARICOM found that 3.7 million people in the English-speaking Caribbean face food insecurity.

To ensure that we have access to healthy, safe, and sustainable sources of the local foods, we have to look at how we can support and nurture the agricultural sector. Researchers at The UWI St Augustine's Faculty of Food and Agriculture have been working on providing a variety of services to support the farming community – but since the onset of COVID-19, these efforts have become more important than ever.

Senior Laboratory Technician in the Department of Food Production Augustus Thomas, who has been instrumental to these efforts, noted that there is a wide range of issues being faced by our nation's farmers, and the department has established a range of services, from testing the quality of the soil, to the nutritional value of the food being fed to livestock, to the health of plants being cultivated.

### 'We have experts in soil, animals, crops, and food'

"Farmers are having challenges in properly addressing issues," said Thomas. "We have been trying to make it a well-rounded service. In the department, we have experts in soils, in animals, in crops, in food."

While the department began many of their current projects in 2019, the pandemic put much of their work on hold, until they could begin analysing what the new agricultural landscape would require in 2021. Those first virtual meetings were instrumental to what the project would become today. But, to be really effective, they needed boots on the ground.

"In the AES [Agro-Environmental Services], we like to visit the farmers, because if we're on-site, it helps us to identify the challenges and develop management strategies," says Thomas.

A part of the drive to help us be more resilient to these types of crises is considering our food security from the very beginning of the agricultural cycle.

"One thing we have to do is have our own seeds," says Thomas. "We talk about being food secure, but one of the challenges is having to rely on outside supplies for seeds. Until we can produce our own seeds, we won't be entirely secure."

One of the projects the department is working on is developing an extensive seed bank to help mitigate this problem, so that we have our own stores of locally grown seeds to ensure that our food production is not hampered should there be another global crisis that affects our ability to import goods.

The pandemic is not the only global issue that has upended the agricultural industry. Climate change has also affected the region, with more frequently occurring natural disasters, and more extreme dryness and flooding weather events having an impact on crop yields. As part of the effort to become more environmentally sustainable and help mitigate the effects of climate change on the region, the Faculty of Food and Agriculture have been trying to encourage farmers to adopt more sustainable methods of solving the issues they face.

### Biophyt, a biological pesticide non-toxic to humans and the environment

One of the changes to the farming culture that is widespread currently is replacing the use of chemical pesticides with more environmentally sustainable alternatives. The department has developed its own biological agent to treat crops in lieu of pesticides, Biophyt.

"The active ingredient in [Biophyt] is non-toxic to humans and the environment," says Thomas.

He notes that the product contains an organism isolated from the soil rhizosphere that works as a preventative measure against plant pathogens, and helps to solubilise nutrients, enriching the soil the plants are grown in.

"It's much better for our environment, for our water sources, and for the farmers themselves," says Thomas.

Of course, cultural change can be slow, especially when it involves an industry changing its habits in a way that might introduce financial risk. Farmers may be reticent to adopt more sustainable methods because their livelihoods depend on doing what works. However, farmers who have taken on the challenge of transitioning across to more environmentally friendly practices with the support of the department have seen a positive impact on their crop yields.

For those who have tried Biophyt, their feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. For these methods to work, however, there must

# UWI brings agro-environmental services to local farmers

BY AMY LI BAKSH



A member of the FFA performs soil analysis to diagnose pest and disease symptoms during the Mobile Agro Environmental Services (AES) exercise.



Mr Augustus Thomas (right) presents UWIMade Biophyte 1.0 to a farmer in the Orange Grove area.

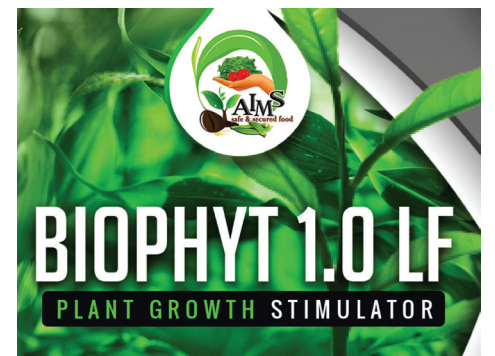
be a proactive rather than a reactive response to issues.

"This is not a synthetic product," says Thomas. "It responds slower."

While pesticides might have more of an immediate effect for pathogen or pest management, they also leach into soil and water systems, having a toxic effect on the environment and the health of the farmers who grow the food and the people who eat it.

To really reach the people in the agricultural community who need the most support, it is vital that the department engages in outreach and education as part of their ongoing work. In July of this year, the AES began taking their services mobile, with a free initiative in the Orange Grove area that saw the team visiting farm sites and offering their diagnostic services on location.

For Thomas, these initiatives are part of the mission of the department to "contribute to society", which has been a personal goal of his during his tenure there.



**The department has developed its own biological agent to treat crops in lieu of pesticides, Biophyt. The active ingredient in [Biophyt] is non-toxic to humans and the environment. The product contains an organism isolated from the soil rhizosphere that works as a preventative measure against plant pathogens, and helps to solubilise nutrients, enriching the soil the plants are grown in.**



UNIVERSITY NEWS

# ‘One of our greatest leaders and impactful citizens’

UWI Vice Chancellor comments on the passing of Sir Shridath Ramphal

“In every sense, he was one of our greatest leaders and impactful citizens.”

This was how UWI Vice-Chancellor Professor Sir Hilary Beckles described Sir Shridath “Sonny” Ramphal, who passed away on August 30. Sir Hilary, in a statement on behalf of the university, said, “Sonny contributed much to the development of Caribbean civilization and institutions. I am sorry for his passing, but I am proud of his contributions.”

Born in Guyana in 1928, Sir Shridath was a consummate Caribbean man who, throughout his life, served in numerous regional roles at the highest level, including as Chancellor of The UWI between 1989 and 2003. His portfolios included Commonwealth Secretary General, Foreign Affairs Minister of Guyana, Assistant Attorney General of the British West Indies Federation, and Chairman of the West Indian Commission.

“It was Sonny’s mission to promote both democracy and regionalism,” the statement from the Vice-Chancellor said. “In his role as a legal draftsman, he worked on the constitutions of the West Indies Federation and Guyanese Independence.”

He was instrumental in securing the Treaty of Chaguaramas, which preserves and protects the regional character of The UWI. He made history as the first Secretary General of the Commonwealth from a “third world” country. As Secretary General, he played an important diplomatic role in ending apartheid and freeing Nelson Mandela.

“We will honour his memory by upholding the values and principles he stood for,” said Vice-Chancellor Beckles. “May the soul of Sonny rest in peace.”



## BRASS IN HEAVEN

On September 5, Roy Francis Cape, the legendary master of the saxophone and leader of the Roy Cape All Stars, passed away at age 82. Known as “Docta Horn”, he was a band musician for more than half a century, performing on countless recordings and before numerous audiences alongside many of Trinidad and Tobago’s greatest calypso and soca artistes.

Mr Cape had a special relationship with The UWI. In 2011, he was awarded an honorary doctorate (Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*) by the university for his contribution to Caribbean music and culture. In 2016, UWI St Augustine held a special concert in his honour – “Pappy: A Tribute to Roy Cape”, where some of the region’s top performers celebrated his life’s work and raised funds for his medical expenses.

“Roy Cape’s passing is a tremendous loss, not only for the music community but for The UWI family,” said St Augustine Campus Principal Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine. “He will always be part of our legacy. His extraordinary contributions to Caribbean music and impact on the Caribbean soundscape will continue to inspire generations.”

Brought up in adverse conditions, Mr Cape was sent to the St Dominic’s Children’s Home at a young age, where he found solace in music, discovering the clarinet and saxophone. He would go on to perform for audiences around the world as a celebrated exponent of culture. In 2004, he received the Hummingbird Medal, Gold, in recognition of his work.

“From Tents to Fetes, including UWI Carnival fetes, his saxophone brought sweet soca music to the ears of many, accompanying icons like David Rudder, Black Stalin, and Blaxx,” said former UWI St Augustine Campus Principal Professor Clement Sankat.

He added, “The UWI recognised his immense talent with an honorary doctorate, celebrating his warmth, humility, and generosity. Though he is gone, his music and legacy will live on.”



UWI  
ST. AUGUSTINE  
CAMPUS

RANKED AMONG THE BEST IN THE WORLD

**THE WORLD UNIVERSITY RANKINGS**

- ▶ WORLD UNIVERSITY RANKINGS
- ▶ GOLDEN AGE UNIVERSITY RANKINGS
- ▶ LATIN AMERICA RANKINGS
- ▶ IMPACT RANKINGS

See what it's like to **#BeUWI**



**100+**  
UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMMES

**200+**  
POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMMES

REASONABLE PAYMENT PLANS

SCHOLARSHIPS & BURSARIES

SUPPORT SERVICES

**#1 Ranked Caribbean University**

Third consecutive year in the hemispheric rankings.  
Impacting academia and policy processes in developing countries.





## ■ OUR GRADUATES

**UWI graduates are everywhere** – politics, business, the arts, and as public intellectuals. In the coming months, **UWI TODAY** will profile some of our high achieving alumni who have made or are making a positive impact on society.

# ‘UWI gave me the confidence I needed before entering the workforce’

*TT Chamber President Kiran Maharaj*

BY JOEL HENRY



## Kiran Maharaj surprised me.

She is the current President of the T&T Chamber of Industry and Commerce, and past president of both the T&T Publishers’ and Broadcasters’ Association and the Greater Tunapuna Chamber of Industry and Commerce. She is also the Managing Director of Caribbean Lifestyle Communications, a company made up of several radio stations (including Heartbeat Radio 104.1 FM, the world’s first radio station for women), and a film/video production and distribution company.

So I expected our interview to be laser-like in its focus on business. Far from it.

“I wanted to be a poet,” she tells me of her earliest ambitions.

And though her father (film magnate Anthony Maharaj) dissuaded her from following this passion because of its limited economic viability, it is clear in our conversation, and in the path of her career, that she approaches life and business with somewhat of a poet’s sensibilities.

During her tenure as chamber president (she was appointed in April 2023) she has shown herself to be a focused and effective representative for the local business community. But beyond that, and in our interview, Maharaj expresses, with great eloquence, views on Caribbean identity, collective solutions for national and regional challenges, and a passion for life-long learning.

Among the centres of learning she attended is UWI St Augustine, where she completed her undergraduate degree.

“I don’t even want to say ‘wonderful’ because it sounds

like I am underrating my experience,” she says of her time at the St Augustine campus. “It really gave me the confidence I needed as a young person before entering the workforce.”

UWI’s relationship with leaders in the business community are perhaps more important than they have ever been as the university progresses its “Revenue Revolution”, the second phase of a strategic plan focused on income generation and improved self-sustainability. Partnerships with both the private sector and government are crucial for its success, as well as campus-grown commercial projects.

So what can the university do to better serve the business community? Ms Maharaj has thoughts, particularly in the areas of preparing graduates for their professional lives and research for commercial purposes.

## ‘The role of women influenced me’

“The ways of the world I learned from my father, and humility and heart I learned from my mother,” Maharaj tells me of her formative years.

She grew up in Chaguanas, the eldest of three girls to their parents. And though the family unit was just five, they were also very close to their extended family.

“I think the role of women in my family influenced me,” she says. “On my dad’s side, my grandmother was a single mother of four and raised her kids mainly on her own, from very humble beginnings. On my mom’s side my grandparents also came from very humble beginnings.

“Among my aunts and even with my grandmother, I saw how they were able to balance their work and family

lives. That gave me a very good grounding.”

Her mother worked with her father in his business, but she was “the ideal mummy”, she says.

“When you think of what a mummy should be, I was very fortunate.”

And though her father might not have been in favour of her career aspirations as a poet, he did have a love for the creative arts that he was able to successfully integrate into his entrepreneurial vision. The Maharaj family are film distributors and producers. Anthony Maharaj has also written screenplays and directed numerous films.

“Daddy is a true entrepreneur,” she says. “I remember he mortgaged his house and took the money and went out there (internationally) with a script. You have to have guts to do that. And he made it. His first feature film for the international market turned into 16 feature films.”

That urge to adventurism and capacity for work is evident throughout Maharaj’s own life, all the way back to her UWI days. She studied literature with a minor in political science. At the same time, she was earning her certificate in marketing from the School of Accounting (SAM) and Management.

Apart from her studies, she worked on the UWI Student Guild paper as a member of their Publication Committee and did extracurricular activity with her classmates in SAM’s marketing programme. When she wasn’t at school, she edited the *Trinidad Express*’s cultural magazine.

“I like to keep busy,” she laughs. “I love learning. Even now, if I see something and I’m interested in it, I will do the course.”

UWI’s relationship with leaders in the business community are perhaps more important than they have ever been as the university progresses its “Revenue Revolution”, the second phase of a strategic plan focused on income generation and improved self-sustainability.



Ms Maharaj leading a trade mission to Jamaica.



The two main problems affecting the business community are problems for all of T&T—the urgent need to improve the ease of doing business, and crime. “Ease of doing business is multi-pronged,” she says. “But there are simple things that we should be able to do online.



Conducting a learning session on marketing.

Despite her schedule, she did still find time to enjoy her student days. In fact, when she speaks of her time at the St Augustine campus, this is what she emphasises.

“Although I had so much going on, I had a great time at UWI. I think that was important, to be able to enjoy yourself while you are going to school—whether it was through the extra-curricular activities, meeting your secondary school friends in other faculties, and meeting students from other islands,” she recalls.

She also speaks about the opportunities for development UWI gave her such as “using the student services to get a job, using the campus pool, going to the cricket matches”, and the importance of taking advantage of them.

Among the most important relationships she formed on campus was one with a petroleum engineering student. “He was my best friend,” she says. He would eventually be the father of her son.

“I have a fantastic son,” she says. “He is brilliant. He is the ideal gentleman.”

Laughing, she adds, “maybe I should thank UWI for that as well.”

Her professional life has been just as full. Her first official “job” was as a trainee reporter at the *Trinidad Newsday* under the leadership of revered journalist Therese Mills. She loved the profession, but she had the blood of an entrepreneur as well. She graduated to reporter, then producer and programme developer for radio before her family eventually acquired the radio stations.

“I always wanted to do journalism. I was really influenced by hearing the stories that I felt were not told sufficiently and that the world did not hear about,” she explains, referring to the stories of the Global South.

So she set out to tell those stories - as a journalist and managing director of a media house. This includes her time as a freelance journalist for CNN World Report covering the region, and the opportunity to take part in a leadership programme of the Washington-based National Association of Broadcasters (a rare accomplishment for someone not born in the US).

And as president of the T&T Chamber she represents local business, “telling their story” through advocacy, but also the interests of our society through the entities with great responsibility for its economic well-being. It is important to recognise that being a business person and representing the business community are two different roles, the second one much more about the collective interest.

“I never aspired to be in any of the roles I ascended to,” she says of her positions as a leader of chambers and associations, and a member of boards. But she did accept them, and served dutifully.

“For me,” she explains, “my legacy is not going to be in the house I have or the size of my bank account. My legacy is going to be in what I gave back to my society.”

In fact, to Maharaj, the two main problems affecting

And as president of the T&T Chamber she represents local business, “telling their story” through advocacy, but also the interests of our society through the entities with great responsibility for its economic well-being. It is important to recognise that being a business person and representing the business community are two different roles, the second one much more about the collective interest.



Addressing the audience at a T&amp;T Chamber event.

the business community are problems for all of T&T - the urgent need to improve the ease of doing business, and crime.

“Ease of doing business is multi-pronged,” she says. “But there are simple things that we should be able to do online. And although we are in the process of digitisation and digital transformation, to me and to many business people, we are not getting there fast enough.”

Crime, she says, is “more of a puzzle” with many pieces and requiring the involvement of many groups throughout the society to solve:

“Crime is not just about the stealing and the murders. Crime is about corruption. It is about fraud. They all interplay and interlock with each other. I don’t see the stakeholders coming together regularly. I don’t see a council of civil society organisations, business organisations, and government officials.”

And what of the university? What can The UWI do to respond to the needs of the private sector? The T&T Chamber president has several suggestions. The first is to be more proactive in recognising the high-demand jobs and structuring programmes to prepare graduates for them.

“I made the point that our government did a wonderful job in giving free education,” she says, “but we are overrun by doctors, lawyers, and engineers, and we are severely lacking in many other disciplines.”

Another area is preparing graduates for the world of work. Maharaj would like to see more students take part in internships and other programmes to make their transition from campus to professional life smoother (it should be noted that UWI St Augustine’s Division of Student Services and Development does great work in this area through departments like Careers, Co-Curricular and Community Engagement and programmes such as World of Work).

She would also like to see more students and graduates engaged in business-driven data and research.

Interestingly, the areas she points out in higher education, like crime, all need closer partnerships to improve, especially between the university, the private sector, and government. It makes sense, the pathway of her career is simultaneously guided, girded, and measured by the success of people working together.

She says, “This road that I have travelled, and many other people have travelled, has not been easy. It has had its failures. You fall many times. What you have to have is a sense of purpose, self-worth, and confidence.”

And to students who, like her, will graduate and be required to make their way as professional, entrepreneur, or maybe even poet, she adds, “expect the falls, expect the failures, but strive for success knowing that you are being true to yourself, and true to others, and acting in the highest good.”

Joel Henry is a writer and editor.



■ OUR CAMPUS

# Make friends, Study Hard, Strive for Excellence

St Augustine students and staff share their goals and perspectives for the new academic year

BY SCYLLINA SAMUEL

**On September 2, 2004**, classes began for the new academic year at UWI St Augustine. The campus, quiet during summer break, is now alive with activity. Returning students are eager to continue their studies. Newcomers feel excited to start their journey. Students fill the halls, lecture rooms, and cafeteria. They all have dreams and plans for the year ahead. Everyone you meet on campus – student, lecturer, or staff – has their own story.

For many students, the new academic year is about more than classes, coursework, and exams. They will make friends and have experiences that will stay with them long after graduation. Some want the highest GPA they can achieve. Others, especially international students, seek knowledge of new cultures. Some students want to make a difference, advocating for minorities and others in need.

The staff of UWI St Augustine, many of whom have been part of the campus community for years, are focussed on serving students. They want to strengthen relationships with the student body. They want students to know they are approachable and ready to support them.

**UWI TODAY is pleased to share the perspectives of some members of the campus community on their hopes and plans for Academic Year 2024-2025.**

*Scyllina Samuel is a writer and 3rd year Literature and Communications student at UWI St Augustine.*



STUDENT PHOTOS: ANEEL KARIM

**“I want to finish. And finish strong. I want to really enjoy and appreciate the moments I’m in right now,” says Danielle Cato.**

**Danielle**, 21, is a third-year student doing the International Relations major with a minor in Linguistics. She is wrapping up her internship at the Ministry of Digital Transformation, where she worked in the Engagement and Behavioural Communications Department. This year, she hopes to pass all her courses and find a good topic for her final-year linguistics project. But beyond academics, she also aims to form lasting friendships. She has a strategy: start conversations with people you might otherwise overlook.

For Danielle, building connections is vital. She says, “Building meaningful relationships and lifelong friendships speaks to who you are. It means you can maintain them. You can call your friends when you need them, and they can call you when they need you.”

You’ll find Danielle at many campus activities, savouring her university experience.

**“I want to go back to having a high GPA... basically, lock in, focus,” says Nicholas Leiba.**

Nicholas achieves grade point averages above 3.6, but his goal for the 2024-2025 academic year is to hit a 4.0. His strategy? Reducing stress. Nicholas is a 22-year-old, third-year Banking and Finance student. He is passionate about photography, philosophy, and fitness. This academic year, he plans to go on more hikes with friends and with The UWI’s HikerSpirit Tours. His love for photography takes him on adventures across Trinidad and Tobago. Many of Nicholas’s goals this year are personal. He’s currently reading *A Contemporary Introduction to Ethics* by Harry J Gensler. Once finished, he plans to read *The Psychology of Money* by Morgan Housel.



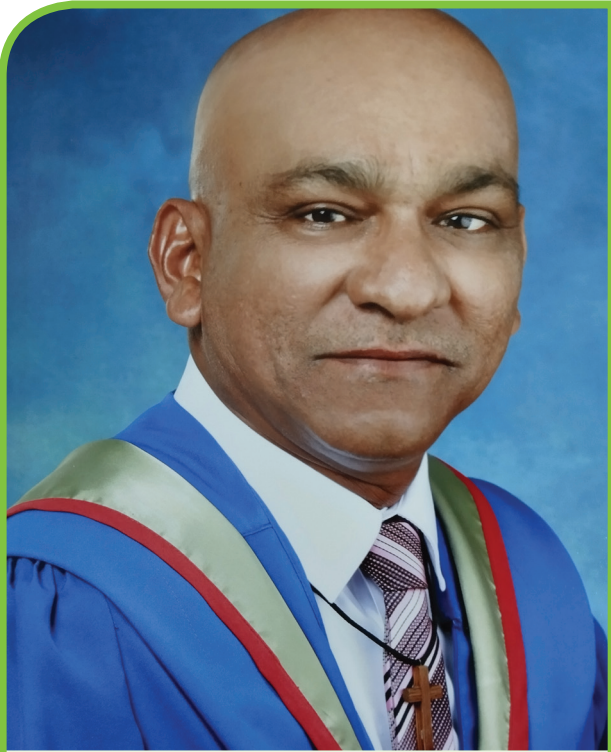
**“I’d love to get good grades without losing my sanity or sleep, learn something new that changes my perspective, have really good friends, restart dance, and become proficient in sign language,” says Zuri Boucaud.**

**Zuri** is a 19-year-old first-year Computer Science student. She is eager to explore everything university life has to offer. She strives for a GPA of 3.6 or higher and wants to make friends, join the dance club, and learn tennis. Zuri stresses her desire to be someone others feel safe with.

Zuri is deaf and has cochlear implants. She’s worried about the lack of resources for the deaf community in Trinidad and Tobago. The country, she said, has only two audiologists, so she plans to take sign language classes at UWI’s Centre for Language Learning (CLL). She will also pursue a minor in Speech-Language Pathology. Her long-term goal is to make medical resources more accessible to the deaf community.







**“I want our shuttle service to be the best in the Caribbean and beyond. We’re striving for excellence,” says Mr Dave Samsundar.** Mr Samsundar is the Transport Coordinator at UWI’s Estate Police. He has one goal: to serve students with empathy and professionalism. He believes The UWI is nurturing future Caribbean leaders, so he works hard to support staff and students. As Transport Coordinator, his activities also include improving the facilities for his staff, such as a better break area for shuttle drivers. He admits that there are some challenges, such as the traffic and staff shortages that cause delays, but he is optimistic about overcoming them with his team.

**“You want your student to thrive, and to achieve that you have to create a supportive, compassionate environment for students and staff,” says Ms Aduke Williams.**

Aduke is a Student Services Assistant at the Division of Student Services and Development (DSSD). This year, she aims to strengthen connections across the campus by creating meaningful bridges between staff and students. She aspires to develop a “Campus Compassion Crew”, a programme geared towards supporting the campus population through challenging or unfortunate incidents.

Aduke has warm memories of the “Love Walk”, an event to show love and unity and bring the campus closer together. She hopes to revive that spirit. She also recalls Entrepreneurship Day which gave staff the opportunity to show their talents, and would like to see more staff-centred events, as she believes that a motivated staff boosts students’ experiences. This year, she also looks forward to celebrating her good friend, Tricia, at her graduation.



**“I hope to see more of Trinidad, so I’m looking forward to any opportunity to explore,” says Donovan Hepburn.** Donovan is 25 years old and a third-year Biology student from the Bahamas. He aims to excel in his studies while soaking up all the experiences Trinidad has to offer. Although he’s a Biology major, he has a passion for the arts. This semester, Donovan is taking an elective: Creative Writing: Poetry. He’s also been learning the harp since his first year, hoping to improve his skills. Last year, Donovan went to many campus cultural events, including the Department of Creative and Festival Arts’ Old Yard for Carnival, and intercultural events at Sir Arthur Lewis Hall. This year, he plans to continue engaging in campus life.

**Zuri is deaf and has cochlear implants. She’s worried about the lack of resources for the deaf community in Trinidad and Tobago.**



**“Building relationships is a must,” says Sergeant Natalie Millis-Sue.** Sergeant Millis-Sue is the head of the Command Centre at the Learning Resource Centre. She manages campus security surveillance. Her top priority is safety during the increased campus activities. She recounts several policies and steps taken by Campus Security to protect everyone on campus, like enforcing the use of vehicle permits, student IDs, and the “no thoroughfare” policy. Sgt Millis-Sue wants to raise awareness about the services offered by UWI’s Estate Police. One of these is the Campus Security Escort Service, which provides accompaniment to staff and students around the campus estate, especially after hours. She believes that strong relationships are key to a safe campus. She aims to build a rapport with the students to help them become more comfortable with reporting incidents to Campus Security.



## ■ OUR CAMPUS

For many, these words evoke nostalgia, whether from childhood races with family and friends, school sports days, or even major competitions. But earlier this year, 350 pairs of sneakers came out in the early hours of the morning and circled the compound of The UWI St Augustine campus for a different reason – charity.

Hitting full registration capacity within two weeks of its announcement, it was clear to the Department of Chemistry that their 5K Fun Run had gained the attention of the local running enthusiasts. Moreover, it was proof that there was a community devoted to helping the department raise funds for welfare initiatives for students and staff. Proceeds from the run would assist with medical emergencies, home repairs, financial aid, and other hardships. The fun run was also an excellent vehicle to promote fitness and health among students, staff, and other participants from across T&T.

Chemistry Laboratory Technician and Event Coordinator Ms Peaches Daniel reflected on the event, remarking that it had grown greatly from its start last year.

Any feelings of exhaustion, sore muscles, and achy legs immediately disappeared when participants crossed the finish line and spotted the unique spread awaiting them. At the end of those five kilometers were culinary rewards – doubles, chow, yoghurt, granola, biscuits and a variety of drinks. The runners enjoyed the feast while sporting their customised medals.

“People left with their bellies full,” Ms Daniel laughed, adding that the post-race events ensured that “anyone could win something”, whether it was a hamper or a voucher.

The department hopes that the event will also “strengthen the connection between the department and students that had weakened during the COVID pandemic”,



# Racing for Community

*On your marks...Get set...Ready...*

BY SHAIENNE ST HILAIRE



PHOTO: COURTESY THE UWI ST AUGUSTINE DEPARTMENT OF CHEMISTRY

and empower the community to prioritise their mental and physical health. Ms Daniel was touched by the “warmth and family vibe” displayed by her colleagues and students, and their role in making this event a success.

When asked what was in store for the future Chemistry 5K’s, she declared that it would grow “bigger and better every year”, using what was learned previously to continuously improve.

*Shaienne St Hilaire is an avid reader, storyteller, and budding communications professional. She is a 2023 graduate and valedictorian of UWI St Augustine’s Faculty of Humanities and Education.*

In today’s globalised world, proficiency in languages like Chinese and Japanese can open numerous doors to unimaginable opportunities. These languages are not only gateways to rich cultural traditions, but also valuable assets in the international job market. As the influence of China and Japan continues to grow globally, individuals who can communicate in these languages will have a significant advantage in fields such as business, technology, diplomacy, and more.

The Centre for Language Learning (CLL) recently launched “Introduction to Asian Culture I” a workshop designed for young learners to give students the opportunity to learn foreign languages that are not widely studied in T&T.

“Every day felt like a new journey into the world of Chinese culture and language,” says Josiah, age 17, one of the first cohort of 10 students. “What stood out to me was the emphasis on practical vocabulary that may be used in everyday life.”

This programme included 10 students between the ages of 12 and 17 and consisted of basic language skills in both Chinese and Japanese, focusing on conversational phrases and common expressions; cultural insights, including traditional festivals and daily life in China and Japan; and hands-on activities, such as paper cutting, calligraphy, origami, and cooking demonstrations. Students also enjoyed the exposure to Chinese cultural topics that carry hundreds of years of history.

Talya, age 12, says of her experience with the Japanese portion of the programme that, “Learning about Tanabata [a Japanese festival] in class was a truly eye-opening experience for me. I really enjoyed learning the history of the festival and sharing my thoughts on it with friends and family.”

She adds, “Writing my own wishes and decorating a bamboo branch deepened my curiosity about Japanese

# Opening Doors to Asia

*CLL hosts new workshop for future global citizens*

BY JANINE LUTCHMAN



Happy graduates of the Introduction to Asian Culture workshop with their certificates. PHOTO: COURTESY THE CENTRE FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING

culture, inspiring me to keep learning more.”

“Introduction to Asian Culture I” was developed and led by the CLL tutors Mrs Shiho Arakawa and Ms Janine Lutchman. Mrs Arakawa, a native Japanese speaker with several years of experience teaching Japanese language and culture. Ms Lutchman is an L2 Mandarin Chinese speaker, current Mandarin Chinese tutor at the CLL.

## ■ For more information

on available workshops, visit the CLL website <https://sta.uwi.edu/fhe/cll/workshops/> or send an email to [CLL.FHE@sta.uwi.edu](mailto:CLL.FHE@sta.uwi.edu)

*Ms Janine Lutchman is a Mandarin tutor at the Centre for Language Learning.*



## ■ MATRICULATION 2024

Every year they seem to get younger, the fresh-faced students in their white shirts, the newest members of St Augustine's community of the campus. More likely it's us, the veteran members of that community, who have witnessed this ceremony for years, that have gotten older. But the ceremony itself, Matriculation, the formal process of university entry for new students, never gets old.

"Today, I feel optimistic and hopeful as I look at you," says Campus Principal Professor Rose-Marie Antoine in her welcome address to the new students.

Most of us feel the same way. Despite its hardships, a career in higher education has the ultimate benefit of constant renewal, of a new beginning every year with new young people on their path (and some older ones on an updated path), and the sense of doing work that uplifts others.

This year's matriculation ceremony is even more special because it's bigger. Over 1000 new students are in attendance, filling the great hall of the campus's Sport and Physical Education Centre (SPEC). But there's much more to this accomplishment than crowd size.

For 2024, UWI St Augustine saw an increase in students at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, quite a feat in this era of chaotic transformation in higher education. Over 3,000 first year students, representing an estimated 30 countries have come to the campus for Academic Year 2024-2025.

"Your choice to pursue tertiary education despite the trend of decreasing enrolment worldwide means you have taken a significant step toward achieving your potential," Principal Antoine commended them.

And it wasn't easy to get here. They may be young, but these students have shown the maturity and work ethic required to overcome the academic hurdles placed before them and meet The UWI's standards for entry. Among them is top matriculant Ms Keshma Rampersad, who represented the incoming class of 2024 and signed the register on their behalf.

"Keshma is an extraordinary student with a passion for technology," a statement from the campus reads. She is a "recipient of The President's Medal Gold for Secondary Education 2022. Keshma excelled at Naparima Girls' High School, where she achieved 12 Grade Ones at both the CSEC and CAPE levels".

The theme of this year's matriculation ceremony is "Pelicans: Get Ready to Soar", a play on The UWI's avian



Ms Keshma Rampersad, a first year computer science student, and the top matriculant for Academic Year 2024, signs the Matriculant Register as Campus Registrar Dr Dawn-Marie De Four-Gill and Senior Administrative Assistant (Student Affairs) Mr Garth Jones look on. PHOTOS: LIFE VIDEO PRODUCTIONS.

# LEARNING *to* FLY

BY JOEL HENRY

mascot and our mammalian, human desire to rise, to take on life and succeed, and find our place in the heights of accomplishment. Many UWI pelicans have done it before.

"Today, you're not just signing a symbolic register," says Campus Registrar Dr Dawn-Marie De Four-Gill, "you're signalling your readiness to challenge yourself, to grow, and to contribute to a legacy."

Watching these fresh-faced attendees in their white, I can't help but wonder if their place in The UWI's legacy is on their mind. Not yet, most likely. They seem overwhelmed by the moment – a new space, a new purpose, the beginnings of a new phase in their studies and lives. One day, they will. They'll be veteran pelicans too. May they find a home in the sky.

This year, UWI St Augustine saw an increase in students at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, quite a feat in this era of chaotic transformation in higher education. Over 3,000 first year students, representing an estimated 30 countries have come to the campus for Academic Year 2024-2025.





## ■ OUR PEOPLE



Dr Ravi Maharaj

# The Story Behind the Book

Dr Ravi Maharaj, Head of Clinical Surgical Sciences, writes a textbook of surgery for and by Caribbean people

BY SHEREEN ALI

Had he followed his original life plan, Dr Ravi Maharaj might have become an engineer, but after accompanying his sister to a doctor's appointment, he was inspired.

He was inspired by the aura and competence that was exuded by the doctor they had visited, Surgeon Professor Vijay Naraynsingh. It was that moment of inspiration that led a young Ravi to promptly apply to UWI St Augustine's Faculty of Medical Sciences. We can say that the rest is history, but Dr Ravi Maharaj is still making history with his recently published book *Textbook of Surgery for Medical Students*.

Dr Maharaj describes this book as "a textbook of surgery for us and by us". As the Head of Department of Clinical Surgical Sciences, the university examiner for the final MBBS examination in surgery, and a Senior Lecturer in Surgery, Dr Maharaj recognised a gap in the resources that were available for his students. In his years of studying in Trinidad and Tobago, England and India, he had never come across a surgery textbook that was written in the West Indies.

So, in 2023, with encouragement and support from his wife, he conceptualised the format of the book and began engaging with co-authors. After only about a year and half, in August 2024, his vision had fully materialised.

Born out of a passion for teaching, Dr Maharaj has brought together contributions from 107 local, regional

and international experts in a publication that not only meets international standards, but that, more importantly, caters to the diverse local population. What makes this publication even more meaningful is the honour that Dr Maharaj had of co-authoring the first chapter of his first textbook with his mentor, Professor Naraynsingh.

He cites the President of the International Hepatopancreatobiliary Association, the Director of the Breast Cancer Centre at the University of Toronto, the President of the British Plastic Surgery Association, and the Regional Chief of Colorectal Surgery in New York as just some of the professionals who contributed chapters to the textbook. To cover diseases from the region, contributors from the various UWI campuses were called upon, and to ensure that the local diaspora was also represented, authors from India and Nigeria were also engaged.

Dr Maharaj acknowledges that it is not humanly possible for a doctor to know about every single disease, but highlights that his textbook identifies the common diseases affecting patients in the Caribbean, so that local doctors can be better trained in treating patients. The textbook was structured with the student in mind, and lays out the information in a manner that allows for easy assimilation of the vast amount of content.

The Department of Clinical Surgical Sciences now offers 11 postgraduate programmes, and it is his hope that

his fellow academics will follow suit and publish textbooks to cover all specialities.

"It is important for us to document our work for the benefit of future generations," he says.

Dr Maharaj shows genuine love for what he does: "The intention of the textbook was never for commerce. This is not a money-making venture. I have always been very lucky to have had great teachers in my career, great surgeons such as David Josa, Deneash Ariyanayagam, Dilip Dan, Vijay Naraynsingh and Parul Shukla [who] have all influenced me and given of themselves. This is about giving back...giving back to this noble profession. It is letting the younger generation know that not everything is about money."

In addition to the support from his family, his peers and his fellow practitioners, Dr Maharaj also acknowledges The UWI Research and Publication Fund, through which he was able to secure a grant to assist with the hardcopies of his textbook, which he will be distributing to his students at no cost. An electronic version of is also available on Amazon Kindle and Digital Canopi for international students. Dr Maharaj will also distribute electronic copies via his office to those who request it.

■ For more information contact (868) 663-4319 or [ravi.maharaj@sta.uwi.edu](mailto:ravi.maharaj@sta.uwi.edu)

Born out of a passion for teaching, Dr Maharaj has brought together contributions from 107 local, regional and international experts in a publication that not only meets international standards, but that, more importantly, caters to the diverse local population.



## ■ OUR PEOPLE

# Lancelot del Caribe

BY DR ANNE-MARIE POUCHET

**Honorary Professor Dr Lancelot Cowie** was a distinguished son of Caribbean soil. Born in Tobago on 3rd October 1947, he began his trajectory with The UWI at the Mona Campus, where he earned his Bachelor's degree with Honours in Spanish (Special) in 1969, and a PhD in 1976 in Spanish/Latin American Studies, having studied in Jamaica and at the Universidad Autónoma de México and El Colegio de México. After joining UWI St Augustine in 1981, he served as a lecturer and senior lecturer in Spanish for nearly 30 years in the Departments of Language and Linguistics, Liberal Arts, and Modern Languages and Linguistics.

Dr Cowie taught all levels of Spanish language, several literature courses on Colombian, Mexican and Argentine literature and film, as well as the history of the Spanish language. He developed several courses at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, coordinated the Spanish programme, coordinated and established the Portuguese language programme, and developed the BA in Latin American Studies with colleagues from History, Latin American Politics, and Economics.

He supervised numerous postgraduate MA, MPhil and PhD students, sometimes jointly with colleagues from Latin America, Europe and the US. He created and coordinated exchange programmes with universities and business schools from various Latin American countries including Universidad Simón Bolívar in Venezuela, the INCAE Business School in Costa Rica, and Universidad Javeriana and Universidad Nacional de Colombia, both in Colombia.

The Centre for Language Learning was his vision, and he assumed responsibility for getting the plans drawn up and obtaining the financing. He was the founder and Director of the Centre for Latin America and the Caribbean (CENLAC) at the St Augustine Campus from 2003 until 2016. As Honorary Professor, he returned to the CENLAC office, housed at the Institute of International Relations, where he reinstituted the monthly *Foro latinoamericano*, an intellectual space for Hispanic diplomats, scholars, students, and the wider public.

He was President of the Sociedad Latinoamericana de Estudios sobre América Latina y el Caribe from 2002 to 2004, and hosted their conference in 2003 at UWI St Augustine. In 2013, he co-founded the Asociación de Latinoamericanistas with several UWI colleagues, including Dr Nina Bruni, Ken Crichlow, Prof Gary García, and Dr Anne-Marie Pouchet, as well as past students and external stakeholders.

Among his publications are numerous scholarly articles, book chapters, anthologies and books on Latin American and Caribbean literature, politics and society. He was a keynote speaker and presenter at numerous international conferences on social, cultural, political, literary and other creative topics in many countries including Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, England, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Poland, Russia, and the US.

All of this is just the tip of Dr Cowie's professional iceberg. He was a Visiting Fellow at Oxford University, and a Visiting Professor at the University of Alcalá de Henares, Spain, El Colegio de México, the UNAM and the University of Warsaw, Poland.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** On June 24, Dr Lancelot Cowie, Honorary Professor and renowned educator and exponent of the Spanish language, and Latin American art and culture, passed away. His contribution to Caribbean society and to The UWI is beyond measure. UWI TODAY is pleased to share this remembrance to Dr Cowie.



Dr Lancelot Cowie (second from left) presiding over the unveiling ceremony of the busts of Simón Bolívar and José de San Martín at The Alma Jordan Library 35 years ago. At left is Professor Max Richards, former UWI St Augustine Campus Principal and President of Trinidad and Tobago.

**Dr Lancelot Cowie was larger than life and much larger than death. Faced with his end, he was a true soldier, acknowledging those who came to see him even until his last moments. He urged us on even while he was slipping away. He was a strong, visionary, intelligent, selfless man who always brought out the best in himself and others.**

## An outstanding record of public and professional service

Dr Cowie's record of public and professional service is outstanding. He was an invited member of the Languages Steering Group which developed special language programmes at City University, London, and a Consultant and Coordinator at the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean's Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee. He served as a Ministry of National Security Representative on the Police Promotion Advisory Board, and Research Officer for the Bruce Committee for Restructuring of Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. He was on the Board of Trustees and Chairman of the Academic Affairs of COSTAATT and a Member of the Government Language Planning Sub-Committee-Bilingual Initiative. He was a member of several editorial boards, a judge for several book prizes and awards, and a reviewer of many scholarly books and articles.

He served as the International Observer from the Caribbean for the Mexican Federal Electoral Process in July 2006, and the interpreter for Queen Sofia of Spain during her visit to the UWI St Augustine campus in 2009. He was named Honorary Professor by the Universidad del Caribe in Santo Domingo, and awarded a Paul Harris Fellow by the Rotary Foundation for outstanding community service. In 2009, he was commissioned a Kentucky Colonel by Governor Beshear of the Commonwealth of Kentucky in recognition of his outstanding contributions in the field of Latin American Studies.

He served as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in Havana, Cuba from 2016 to 2021 with distinction, and then returned to his beloved home of Tobago. There, he received many job offers from universities in Europe, Brazil and Mexico. He returned to his second home, The UWI, in 2023, where he served until his untimely passing on 24 June 2024.

As a colleague, Dr Cowie was a joy to work with. He was always collaborative and supportive and ready to advise students on postgraduate study and career options in Latin America.

His professional legacy is a robust academic career which continues to bear fruit, and a strengthening of ties and dialogues between the Caribbean, Latin America and the whole Hispanic world. He was also a kind and generous mentor and colleague.

Dr Lancelot Cowie was larger than life and much larger than death. Faced with his end, he was a true soldier, acknowledging those who came to see him even until his last moments. He urged us on even while he was slipping away. He was a strong, visionary, intelligent, selfless man who always brought out the best in himself and others. Rest in peace, Dr Cowie. He will be sorely missed.

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** Mexican philosopher Leopoldo Zea referred to Dr Lancelot Cowie as "Lancelot del Caribe"- Lancelot of the Caribbean. Mexican Ambassador, Víctor Hugo Morales Meléndez alluded to Zea's remark at the Memorial Service held in Dr Cowie's honour on July 22 at the Centre for Language learning at UWI St Augustine.



## ■ CULTURE

# A Night of Folk, Fables, Dance and Steel



UWI Arts Steel performs at "Dancing on Steel". Conducting is Mr Jessel Murray, Head of DCFA, and playing pan at left, front row is Dr Jeannine Remy, Senior Lecturer and prolific composer and arranger for the steelpan.

BY PAUL HADDEN

**In Queen's Hall on September 15, 2024,** The UWI Arts Steel and The UWI Arts Dance hosted Dancing on Steel: a musical production where dance, drama and pan intertwined to give the audience a taste of our folk heritage. The live performance was recorded and later viewed by an international audience for the Percussive Arts Society International Convention (PASIC 2024).

The music for Dancing on Steel, for which Department of Creative and Festival Arts (DCFA) Head Mr Jessel Murray was the conductor, is the brainchild of Dr Jeannine Remy, a longstanding Senior Lecturer of Music at The UWI and a prolific composer and arranger for the steelpan.

The performance also included choreography by Ms Joanna Charles, an icon of dance in T&T who is a graduate of both The UWI Drama and Dance programmes, as well as a Dance instructor at the DCFA.

UWI's invitation to participate in the annual PASIC conference is no small feat, and speaks to the excellence of the UWI Arts Steel ensemble.

"This is our second invitation to perform for PASIC, which is really just incredible," says Dr Remy. "This year, many groups applied and were denied; we were accepted and invited to perform, so this is something that we are really proud of."

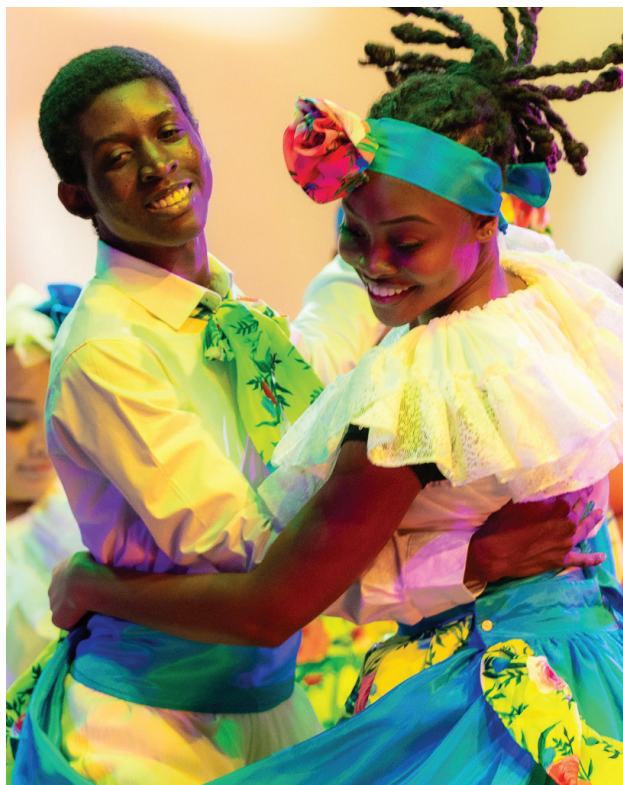
The concert featured six original pan compositions by Dr Remy, all of which drew influence from the West African derivative of our local folk dancing tradition. The music and dance encapsulate the essence of six of Trinidad's most iconic Afro-French Creole dances: Bélé, Tobago Jig, Kalinda (stick fighting), Limbo, Bongo, and Calypso.

"All of the music and dances speak to us as Trinbagonians and explore all the different influences that we've had and who we have become," says Ms Charles.



The concert featured six original pan compositions by Dr Remy, all of which drew influence from the West African derivative of our local folk dancing tradition.





# Love of Pan, Dedication to its Rise



## *UWI Arts Steel celebrates two decades*

BY PAUL HADDEN

**It's been a big year for pan.** Here in T&T, one of the highlights has been the celebration of the first anniversary of World Steelpan Day on August 8, replete with dazzling performances from the nation's top steelbands in the heart of Port of Spain. 2024 also saw Trinidad move one step closer to having the steelpan officially recognised as the country's national instrument with the passing of the National Music Instrument Bill in the Lower House of Parliament.

To top it all off, The UWI also brought to a close its year-long celebration of the 20th anniversary of UWI Arts Steel, the campus's own steel orchestra which is currently co-conducted by Mr Jessel Murray and Mr Khion De Las, who is himself an alumnus of the group.

The steel orchestra, known for their virtuosity, musicality, and commitment to the craft, was founded in 2002 by a group of undergraduate students hoping to take part in the "small ensemble" category of the World Steelpan Festival. The following year, the reigns were handed over to Mr Murray and the late Mr Nervin Saunders – affectionately called "Teach" by those who knew him. The group was officially adopted into The UWI's Department of Creative and Festival Arts (DCFA) department.

Since then, the department's steel orchestra has enjoyed a successful career. Its latest achievement is the screening of a recording of "Dancing on Steel" at the prestigious Percussive Arts Society International Conference (PASIC).

The live performance of *Dancing on Steel*, which consisted of six original pan pieces and local folk dance performances composed by the DCFA's Dr Jeannine Remy, and accompanied by local folk dances choreographed by Ms Joanna Charles, took place at Queen's Hall on September 15, marking the latest milestone in the group's two decades of existence.

### **UWI graduates at the forefront of steelpan worldwide**

"We've been around for 20 years, and if you are asking what the high points have been, well, they've certainly been a lot of them!" says Mr Murray. "However, I will say that *Dancing on Steel* is one of the biggest things that we've done in recent years and something of which we are very proud."

Dancing on Steel is only one of UWI Arts Steel's many achievements over the last two decades. Most years they put on at least two concerts. The group boasts of being chosen by local pan legend Ray Holman to record six of his original works for a CD entitled *Changing Time* in 2006, and also prides itself on its several international performances in conjunction with The UWI Arts Chorale in Barbados, Belize, Mexico, and the United States.

Through all this, however, Mr Murray notes that "the legacy of which we are most proud, is the sheer volume of graduates who are now at the forefront of achievement in the steelpan world and beyond."

Both Mr De Las and Mr Murray note that one of the main elements that set UWI Arts Steel apart is the group's professionalism, their desire to bring out the absolute best from their players, and their mission to master the intricacies of the instrument. Their aim, according to Mr Murray, is to attain the highest levels of proficiency. Developing a love for the instrument may be a good start, but it is far from enough to reach the level of virtuosity of which UWI Arts Steel is known.

He shares this message of dedication with his players.

"It's great that you are in love with the instrument," he says, "but now the hard work begins. Playing pan well is almost like a love affair. As soon as you get past your first blushes is when you need to begin the real work of nurturing your relationship for the rest of your life."

Mr De Las stresses another one of UWI Arts Steel's defining characteristics – musicality.

"For us," he says, "It's not just about hitting the pan and playing loudly or softly. We do our best to emulate the same colours that you would get from a traditional orchestra with bassoons and violins and violas. We also train upcoming conductors and focus on showing them how to shape the music and the sounds of the pan; how to bring out the colours of the instrument to differentiate the timbre and style of playing from that of a traditional steelband."

UWI Arts Steel has accomplished a lot in its short lifetime, and as the steel orchestra moves into their 21st year, lovers of the national instrument and music in general look forward to many more years of creativity, concerts, and musical excellence.

"As a choreographer, I like to work within the narrative compositional structure, where dance is used to create storyline, so I used Dr Remy's compositions and arranged them in such a way that the dances work with the music to tell a story, the story of us."

In the manner of a fairy tale, the story of *Dancing on Steel* follows a young museum keeper who is suddenly thrown into the dreamlike world of a troupe of folk dancer statues which come to life and take him on a musical journey of love, marriage, death, mourning, and celebration. Each movement of the pan suite works in tandem with the dances to tell the story of *Dancing on Steel*.

"You really have to see this folk music come alive in story form," says Dr Remy, "I just don't think that anything quite like this has been done before. We've gotten standing ovations both here in Trinidad and in Texas."

Dr Remy herself performed with the ensemble. "Dancing on steel is a lot of fun to play, and each movement is challenging," she says, "The performers experience so much joy while practicing. That's why I'm playing. I'm not just going to sit back and let them have all the fun. I'm going to play!"

*Dancing on Steel* was commissioned by Professor Michael Mizma and the San Jacinto Central Steel Band at San Jacinto College in Texas, and has already been performed both in Texas and here in Trinidad at the Naparima Bowl. Aside from serving as a virtual showcase concert for PASIC, the performance of *Dancing on Steel* marks the end of a year of celebrations to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the UWI Arts Steel ensemble.

In a world where the cultural forms of larger nations tend to dominate the creative space, this performance demonstrates the power of our own traditions.

"Our folk dances help us to understand who we are and where we come from. Just like any other country, we too – through our diverse heritage – have developed our own unique folk style," says Ms Charles.

She stresses that performances like *Dancing on Steel* can help us come to appreciate that our own local folk dances can stand alongside the other cultural and artistic traditions of the world, and once promoted, can help to strengthen our cultural confidence.

"This is who we are and this is where we've come from," she says. "Dance and music bring a level of national pride which helps us to respect our differences and, to greater extent, our country," she adds.

Mr Murray echoes this sentiment: "As we move forward into the 21st century, I think that it's really important for us to continue to build our own classical idiom here in Trinidad and Tobago. It's essential for us to embrace and develop what we have."

It is an aspiration that *Dancing on Steel* certainly manages to fulfill.



*Paul Hadden is an educator and freelance writer with a passion for the art of storytelling.*



# The UWI Calendar of Events | October–November 2024

## Demography, Space and Time: Planning for Caribbean Development October 4

ONLINE



It is estimated that there are more than 44 million people in the Caribbean. How can the study of demographics help us solve our region's problems and develop a path to better lives for its peoples? This online event, hosted by the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies (SALISES), will be presented by Dr Godfrey St Bernard, scholar in the field of Social Demography.

To register, visit <https://bit.ly/caribbeandevlopment>  
For more information, email [Cathy-Ann.Modeste@sta.uwi.edu](mailto:Cathy-Ann.Modeste@sta.uwi.edu)  
or visit the SALISES website at <https://sta.uwi.edu/salises/>

## 2024 UWI St Augustine Graduation Ceremonies October 24 to 26 St Augustine Campus

Join the campus community in celebration of UWI St Augustine's graduating class of 2024. This October, students, family, friends and well-wishers will come together for the signature event of the campus, a part of The UWI's region-wide recognition of its graduates.

For more information on the ceremonies, updates, and where they can be viewed on TV and online, visit [www.sta.uwi.edu/graduation](http://www.sta.uwi.edu/graduation)



Save the Dates

2024 UWI St. Augustine Campus

**GRADUATION  
CEREMONIES**

THUR  
**24**  
OCTOBER

FRI  
**25**  
OCTOBER

SAT  
**26**  
OCTOBER



## The UWI SPEC International Half-Marathon and 5K November 10 | St Augustine

Put on your running, jogging, and fast-walking shoes, and come out to this beloved athletic event. Every year, participants at all levels take part in the half-marathon and 5K races, running for glory, to test the limits of their endurance, or just to have an entertaining outing with friends, colleagues, and other runners. This year, UWI SPEC is partnering with The Dyslexia Association of T&T to support their initiatives by raising funds and increasing awareness.

For more information on the races and to register, visit <https://sta.uwi.edu/spec/marathon>



## Principal's Research Awards 2024 November 14 St Augustine Campus

Breakthroughs in the the arts, sciences, engineering, food and agriculture, sports and others will be celebrated yet again this year at the Principal's Research Awards. Researchers whose work has the potential to better communities, support economic development, protect the vulnerable, and help us better understand the mysteries of existence will be judged. This year, a special Hurricane and Earthquake Alleviation Research (HEAR) award, open to all researchers at the St Augustine Campus, will be given.

For more information, visit the official Principal's Research Awards site at <https://sta.uwi.edu/researchawards/>