



WORK WITH PURPOSE

Cross-Caribbean team makes groundbreaking aquatic discovery in Haiti

BY AMY LIBAKSH

Like many Caribbean children, James Josaphat grew up with a love for fishing, spending much of his free time near water with his friends in Haiti. He didn't know at the time that he would be involved in the discovery of a new species of fish many years later, right in his homeland.

"Since my childhood, I have been passionate about fish," says James as we communicate on WhatsApp, allowing him to more easily translate from his native Haitian French. It is the easiest method of contact, as access to internet in Haiti is difficult and electricity often available only at night.

Against the backdrop of Haiti's incredible, much undiscovered biodiversity and widespread social unrest, James began his journey into the world of fish at undergraduate level with courses in fisheries, coastal resources and aquacultures. "I obtained a scholarship for a master's degree in a programme (MSc in Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Development in the Caribbean) funded by the European Union, ECCAM (Education for Climate Change and Adaptation and Migration) to go to Trinidad at The University of the West Indies." From there, he would go on to work with Dr Amy Deacon, who supervised his studies in Trinidad.

"He approached me because he had a special interest in fish and freshwater ecology, which is one of my specialist areas," says Dr Deacon.

Originally, his plan had been to conduct his research in Haiti, but the logistics of moving back and forth didn't work and they decided instead to design a project based in Trinidad that would give him the skills in freshwater fish and sampling to take back to Haiti.

"From the very beginning, James was set on the idea that he wanted to apply those skills in Haiti. People have been studying the rivers in Trinidad for more than 100 years— we know quite a lot about the fish there, whereas Haiti, because of its situation, has had very little research."

To put that into perspective, Trinidad has a total area of just over 5,000km², while Haiti clocks in at almost 28,000km². Yet there are thousands of articles on Trinidad's freshwater biodiversity available online, while only a handful can be found on Haiti.

With the economic and social challenges Haiti has faced, conservation efforts have been difficult to put in place. Once James had completed his programme in Trinidad, he was determined to bring this knowledge back to Haiti and to do the crucial research of his local biodiversity before it is too late.

"That's something that's quite special about James and this situation," says Dr Deacon. "For a lot of people in countries like Haiti, it's very tempting to take opportunities to go abroad, but then you are taking your skills away from where they are needed the most. But from the beginning, James has said *no*. I want to make a difference in my country." **CONTINUED ON PAGE 4**



Rodet Rodriguez-Silva (left) with Haitian citizen and UWI St Augustine researcher James Josaphat (right), and members of the community at Lake Miragoâne in Haiti catching the newly discovered species of fish, *Limia mandibularis*. Through this discovery, James and his fellow scientists have made a major contribution to the advancement of freshwater biodiversity in his homeland, which has been limited due to the nation's political and economic challenges, and is crucial for conservation efforts. PHOTO: PATRICIA TORRES-PINEDA



A photo of a female *Limia mandibularis*, the jawed limia, discovered in Haiti. PHOTO: © RODET RODRIGUEZ-SILVA

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FROM THE ACTING EDITOR

Looking forward to 2020/2021

As the restrictions placed on society are loosened, thanks to Trinidad and Tobago's outstanding management of the COVID-19 pandemic, the campus community looks forward to the upcoming 2020/2021 academic year. While we are not free from the risks associated with the Coronavirus (as discussed in our page 7 article on a recent health webinar), we are able to better focus on the new school year and campus life.

In this issue of UWI TODAY, we take a special look at student life, focusing on student achievement, student international experience, internships and non-traditional careers. We wanted to share some of what life is like for those who have made the decision to pursue higher education on this campus. The focus is beyond academics. Of course this aspect of the student experience is crucial, but studying at UWI can be so much more.

Our page 1 story is on James Josaphat, a researcher from the Department of Life Sciences in the Faculty of Science and Technology, who with his colleagues have discovered a new species of fish in his homeland, Haiti. Not only is his research fresh, but it is also an expression of commitment to his home, which has not benefited from much scholarship of this kind.

In our centrespread, we continue with our focus on food security, a critical issue of our time that is being championed by the Faculty of Food and Agriculture (FFA). In the spread as well, a truly collaborative team from both within the campus and externally launched a seed kit initiative for people with disabilities. These seeds can be used to grow food and is a great way to encourage small and home food gardening. It is also a way of offering people with disabilities a path to greater self-sufficiency and a means to supplement their food stores.

This June issue also takes a very timely look at education during and after a pandemic, as well as the "Whole Child" concept. An initiative of the School of Education within the Faculty of Humanities and Education, the series brings together some of our leading academics and scholars in the field of education to discuss an array of topics related to the theme. As our society is in the process of mapping out a post-COVID-19 roadmap, the insights from this series should definitely be considered in developing strategies for the educational system.

In May, we focused on UWI St Augustine's contribution to the national response to COVID-19. This month we continue to look at how the campus community is supporting Trinidad and Tobago during this time. Our Centre for Language Learning (CLL) held a two-week course of study for Cuban nurses that were brought to T&T to supplement our medical



A student shuttle ready for the new passengers and new academic year. PHOTO: SHEREEN ALI

While we are not free from the risks associated with the Coronavirus, we are able to better focus on the new school year and campus life.

professionals during the pandemic. CLL teachers administered a short programme on English for medical purposes to the nurses. They also taught them a bit about Trini culture.

On our back page we give a round-up of The UWI response to COVID-19 throughout the region. It is important to remember, even as we make the slow return to some form of normalcy, the great challenge of this global pandemic and how so many of our faculty, staff, students and alumni stepped forward. There is a tendency these days to slip into cynicism, which is understandable given the many challenges Caribbean society faces. However, it is undeniable that as a university community, we made and continue to make a very real and positive impact on the region during this time. Let's maintain that momentum.

JOEL HENRY
AG. EDITOR

EDITORIAL TEAM

CAMPUS PRINCIPAL
Professor Brian Copeland

**DIRECTOR OF MARKETING
AND COMMUNICATIONS**
Wynell Gregorio

AG. EDITOR
Joel Henry
Email: joel.henry@sta.uwi.edu

CONTACT US
**The UWI Marketing and
Communications Office**
Tel: (868) 662-2002, exts. 82013 / 83997
or Email: uwitoday@sta.uwi.edu

DISCOVERY

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The phenomenon of “brain-drain” is well-known to the Caribbean, as many of our brightest have an easier time finding opportunities abroad. Programmes such as the Caribaea Initiative, whose mission includes training and supporting the next generation of conservation scientists within the Caribbean, allow passionate young minds like James to do the much-needed local work with support, funding and other opportunities.

In 2018, James met fellow fish-enthusiast (the scientific study of fish is called Ichthyology) and Cuban PhD student at the University of Oklahoma Rodet Rodriguez-Silva at the Latin America and Caribbean Congress for Conservation Biology, which was held in Trinidad and hosted by the Department of Life Sciences at the St Augustine Campus. They made plans for the historical expedition that would lead to the discovery of a new species.

“Back in Haiti, after the master’s was complete, my first field work experience with fish was with Rodet. I learned a lot from him in the capture methods and identification of fish, especially in Lake Miragoâne,” says James.

This lake, in the south west of Haiti, is where they made their incredible discovery— a fish they called *Limia mandibularis*, a cousin of the Trinidadian guppy. “It was very exciting for me because I am very young in the field and I was able to be a part of a team that discovered a new species in my country in my first major research project since completing my master’s.”

The fish, whose discovery was recently published in the journal *Zootaxa*, is an endemic species— which means it is only found in Haiti. Its name, “jawed limia,” comes from its well-developed lower jaw (mandible). According to Professor Ingo Schlupp, a poeciliid expert from the University of Oklahoma, “This is the most unusual mouth I have ever seen in a livebearing [retains the eggs inside the body and gives birth to live offspring] fish.” In other words, this fish is sporting a wicked underbite.

But *Limia mandibularis* is not the only exciting creature to be found in Haiti’s natural world. Haiti appears to be a hot spot of endemism for this group, with a total of nine species of *Limia* discovered to live only there. So James and the cross-Caribbean team have a lot of exciting work ahead.

Starting with a Haitian and a Cuban meeting in Trinidad, and going on to include scientific collaboration between Haiti and the Dominican Republic with the addition of Patricia Torres-Pineda, this is truly an inter-Caribbean endeavour.

What’s next for James and the team?

“More research on freshwater fish in Haiti!” he says enthusiastically. He is now working on his PhD at l’Université des Antilles in Guadeloupe, and plans to continue his research in Haiti with the support of Dr Deacon and others.

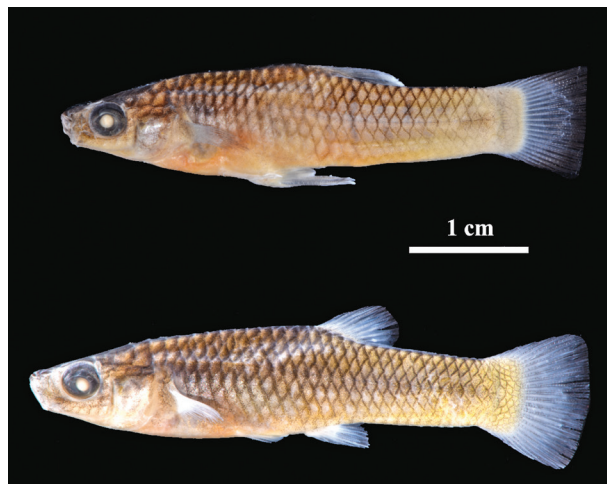
“I’ll continue to be involved, even though I’m in Trinidad, because I’ll be on his advisory committee,” she says. “I’ll be remotely supervising, with a couple of other academics from other universities. I’ve got high hopes for him in the future. He’s exactly the graduate we want from the master’s because he’s taking what we’ve taught him and doing great work with it.”

From the well-studied rivers of Trinidad to the massively understudied waterways in Haiti, James has had a wide variety of experiences working in the field. In Haiti, access to the field can be difficult, and a local guide is mandatory on all expeditions for security reasons. Without biological laboratories or a museum of natural history, there is no designated space to monitor collected data or the storage of specimens. There is a great deal of work to be done, but that means there are great opportunities to venture into the relatively unknown, and perhaps discover new life.

Meeting *Limia mandibularis*, the jawed limia



James Josaphat (right in khaki hat) with Rodet Rodriguez-Silva (left in black cap) and members of the expedition team, with a catch. PHOTO: PATRICIA TORRES-PINEDA



Male (top) and female *Limia mandibularis*. PHOTO: RODET RODRIGUEZ SILVA



***Limia mandibularis* is not the only exciting creature to be found in Haiti’s natural world. Haiti appears to be a hot spot of endemism for this group.**

Although Haiti has suffered major environmental problems like pollution, deforestation and the spread of invasive species, it remains one of the Caribbean hotspots for new discovery possibilities. Now more than ever, it is vital that its biodiversity be studied and protected— but many of its issues are intertwined with its socio-economic situation and now compounded by a massive outbreak of COVID-19 with over a thousand cases, and several thousand suspected cases.

It is a country with an awe-inspiring history of struggle and passion, and people like James are determined to change the perception of his home.

“Many persons in the Caribbean who have never visited Haiti have very bad perceptions of the country. While Haiti is poor financially, it is rich in a lot of natural resources, and as its biodiversity is pristine, it is a great place for research in the Caribbean. I hope that in the future many more research projects will be conducted in Haiti, as my country has a lot to offer,” says James.

And he intends to make good on his promise to pull back the curtain on the incredible natural world of Haiti.

Centre for Language Learning trains COVID-19 response nurses from Cuba



The Centre for Language Learning (CLL) at UWI St Augustine successfully conducted a specialised 40-hour English language training course for 11 Cuban healthcare professionals contracted by the Ministry of Health of Trinidad and Tobago. The course was delivered online from May 7 to 16, coinciding with the nurses' 14-day quarantine period. The training sought to improve their ability to communicate with speakers of Trinidadian English in a medical context.

"The nurses are professionals in their field but needed to strengthen their usage of English language," says Dr Amina Ibrahim-Ali, Coordinator of English as a Second Language (ESL) at the CLL.

Dr Ibrahim-Ali and ESL tutor Ms Natalie Bhawanie were responsible for the course development and teaching of the nurses. Over the two-week programme, the students were oriented to T&T culture through the use of locally produced materials for English for medical purposes, which is a subset of English for specific purposes (ESP) learning.

"We were teaching them medical English," says Ms Bhawanie. "Our focus was on extending their knowledge of vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar. We incorporated that with listening and speaking activities."

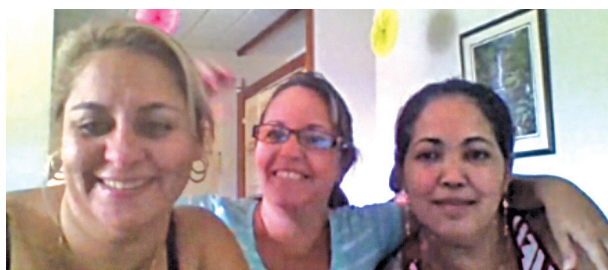
The objectives of the course included:

1. Extending their knowledge of medical terms and structures in English through the use of course materials in varying and combined formats.
2. Encouraging learners to interact in the simulated contexts with some proficiency.
3. Providing a safe space to develop their competence and confidence at an individual pace.

Dr Ibrahim-Ali said they placed importance on boosting the nurses' confidence and making them feel accepted:

"We had to make the course culturally relevant. I would use Toco, David Rudder in our classes. I introduced them to 'Trini to d' Bone' and one of them got up and danced. I asked them 'where is Maracas Bay?', 'what is shark and bake?' You have to orient them to the country to make them feel comfortable. You have to make them feel welcome."

CLL has considerable experience in teaching foreign medical professionals. In 2009, they trained over 120 Cuban doctors and nurses in English. In 2010, they trained another 70 to 80 Cuban nurses.



CLL has considerable experience in teaching foreign medical professionals. In 2009, they trained over 120 Cuban doctors and nurses in English. In 2010, they trained another 70 to 80 Cuban nurses. Ibrahim-Ali and her colleagues at CLL have published research papers based off of these teaching exercises.

At the conclusion of the course, the nurses were asked to evaluate the training and all reported that it had helped them develop their competence, knowledge and confidence in English. The near complete satisfaction expressed by the group served as an excellent reward for the effort and time invested by the CLL team.

"They were so gracious and grateful," said Ibrahim-Ali about the nurses. "We enjoyed the experience immensely. It's always lovely to give people currency that they can take up and use. That's how we view the English language."

When asked how it felt to have contributed to the national effort against COVID-19, Ms Bhawanie laughed:

"I didn't think of it like that. Teaching is like second nature to me. I come from a family of teachers. I am glad to be able to help yes, but at the same time it's always fulfilling for me to be able to teach."

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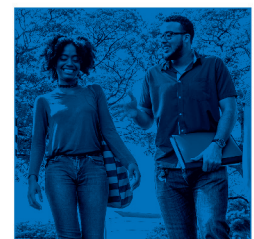
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■ EDUCATION

As schools get set to reopen SOE webinar takes on Whole Child approach

BY GILLIAN MOORE

In mid-March, the closure of schools and universities was one of the first measures adopted in T&T's fight against COVID-19. Since then, teachers, parents and students have had to grapple with new realities, including adopting unplanned remote teaching.

Now, with the nation's learning institutions set to reopen on September 1, educators and students face a new set of uncertainties. In order to present a way to negotiate these issues, UWI's School of Education (SoE) hosted a webinar entitled "Educating the Whole Child in Pandemic School Closure and Reopening", on May 26.

The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development defines the Whole Child approach to education as a set of "policies, practices, and relationships that ensure each child, in each school, in each community, is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged".

Senior Lecturer and Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Education Dr Heather Cateau, opened the seminar, saying COVID-19 has been "a massive shock" to our education systems and has shown that this sector "reflects the best and worst in our societies". She commended stakeholders for coping with the adjustments but said it was now time to shift focus and ask fundamental questions regarding "the very relevance of what we teach and how we teach".

She said school resumption "must be a transformative period" for education, and handed the reins to senior SoE Science (Physics) Education lecturer Dr Rawatee Maharaj-Sharma, who chaired the webinar.

Dr Maharaj-Sharma introduced the panels and speakers:

- **The Whole Child Approach** – Ms Jennifer Doyle and Professor Jerome De Lisle
- **The Whole Child in Pandemic School Closure: Beyond Online Learning** – Dr Korinne Louison and Dr Vimala Kamalodeen
- **The Learner with Special Needs in Closure and Reopening** – Dr Elna Carrington-Blaidies, Dr Paulson Skerit and Dr Phaedra Pierre
- **The Whole Child in School Reopening: Ensuring and Maintaining Healthy Learners** – Dr Susan Herbert, Dr Sabeerah Abdul-Majied and Dr Bernice Dyer-Regis
- **System and School Policies that Foster the Whole Child in Reopening** – Professor Jerome De Lisle, Dr Rinnelle Lee-Piggott and Dr Freddy James

Kicking off the first panel, Prof. De Lisle, Director of the School of Education, said the Whole Child strategy had been chosen as a "coherent and evidence based" methodology which "can help us in Trinidad and Tobago to move forward to a new era".

Director of Bishop Anstey High School East and Trinity College East, Ms Jennifer Doyle described the Whole Child system as "an integrated approach," noting the contrast with the traditional, academically focused approach to education. She stressed that Whole Child initiatives seek "not to diminish academic emphasis" but to assure "high-quality, holistic education" and "pay more attention to the all-round development of students".

De Lisle said "Learning is not just academic, it's social, it's emotional", adding that "positive and stable relationships... are critical to learning." The SoE director noted that "school climate is essential for students' learning".



ILLUSTRATION: SPARKLE SMITH



Dr Heather Cateau, Senior Lecturer and Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Education



Professor Jerome De Lisle, Director of the School of Education

"If a school climate is negative, if people are unsafe, then people cannot learn," he said.

During panel two, psychoeducational assessment expert and SoE lecturer Dr Korinne Louison explained that in fostering the development of the whole child it was important to note that intelligence quotient predicts only 50 per cent of academic success. Environment, personality, and learned life skills such as critical thinking, resilience and self-regulation are equal predictors of achievement, she stated.

Dr Vimala Kamalodeen, an educator for nearly 30 years and SoE Math and IT lecturer, highlighted the issues faced by teachers and students during the abrupt shift to "shutdown" remote learning. She mentioned "ad-hoc" lesson regimes with a lack of coordination, guidelines or planning; and parents thrust into new roles as educators.

She also noted that the lack of resources and amenities (Wi-Fi, electricity, devices) experienced by many students at home had revealed "the gap between haves and have-nots" in society.

Drs Elna Carrington-Blaidies, Paulson Skerit and Phaedra Pierre discussed students with special needs, saying we should be concerned for special learners, who were often very vulnerable. Skerit pointed to a need for strong relationships between parents and educators, and opportunities to utilise high-quality educational resources online where available.

Carrington-Blaidies said it was often a challenge to find instructional devices compatible with online platforms, citing the

difficulty for deaf and hard-of-hearing learners to use popular screen programmes.

Pierre noted, however, remote learning has been advantageous for children, such as some with autism or Asperger's syndrome, who are challenged by the classroom environment and social interaction.

She said inadequate resources meant collaboration between all educational agencies was necessary to address the magnified inequities made evident by the pandemic.

Dr Herbert examined school reopening strategies around the world and recommended that standard health protocols like sanitisation, distancing and hand-washing be observed.

Dr Dyer-Regis said educators should "capitalise on parents' engagement" in the wake of COVID-19, and that family and community networks were key.

Rather than risk causing more anxiety with an immediate focus on examinations, Dr Sabeerah Abdul-Majied said schools should use "trauma-informed pedagogy", with social and emotional learning as a priority. "It cannot be business as usual."

Professor De Lisle, Dr Lee-Piggott and Dr James looked at Whole Child policies to inform school reopening.

James called for "education systems that promote equity and provide high-quality education to all children, regardless of their background or where they live, giving everyone what they need to succeed."

"Equity closes the gaps," he said.

Dr Lee-Piggott called for support resources and robust data and management systems, especially for those at risk.

She said there was a need to reintegrate students who have lapsed, utilising student support services, health services and even community police: "the reality is that some will not return to school because of the effects of the pandemic."

"Because students will return having had varying depths of learning experiences," Lee-Piggott said, "practitioners need to be prepared for diagnosing, remediating and blending modes of instruction."

De Lisle said we have to consider future policies as we reopen. "Policy is not always predictive. We have to continue to collect data to alter our pathway."

■ HEALTH

Proceed with Caution

*UWI experts warn of the risk of dropping our guard
and causing a second COVID-19 wave*

BY DIXIE-ANN BELLE

As many countries across the world begin to tentatively reopen in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, UWI experts are advocating caution to ensure the process goes smoothly so as to combat the danger of a second wave.

This was emphasised at a May 3 virtual symposium - “The Impact of COVID-19 on Health Systems” - hosted by the Faculty of Medical Sciences (FMS) and the Caribbean Centre for Health Systems Research and Development (CCHSRD). Eleven presenters, representing a cross section of faculties, spoke on a variety of topics.

Dr Stanley Giddings, Lecturer of Adult Medicine at FMS, held up the 1918 Spanish Flu as an important historical lesson on what mistakes to avoid. “Reoccurrence can occur if non-pharmacological interventions are relaxed too soon.” He gave examples of American states which had deadly second waves in a pandemic that infected a third of the world’s population.

Giddings pointed out, “The second wave was highly fatal and accounted for most of the mortality.”

As she looked at physical distancing and socialisation, Dr Sandra Reid, Senior Lecturer, Psychiatry at FMS, highlighted possible risks which might arise because of the social culture of Trinidad and Tobago.

“We run the risk of our celebratory attitude leading us to ‘hyper-socialise’, to make up for missed parties and limes, which have the potential to undo all that has already been accomplished.”

Other speakers suggested issues that should be in the forefront of the minds of world leaders in managing the pandemic and its aftermath.

While analysing projections for the spread of the virus in the Caribbean, Dr Godfrey St Bernard, Senior Fellow at UWI’s Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies, reviewed the trajectories in various countries and raised the need to access data from municipal areas within larger countries. St Bernard observed that, in addition to contact tracing to identify transmission pyramids, speculation on best case scenarios based on the examples of nations like New Zealand and South Korea was necessary.

Dr Sateesh Sakhamuri, Lecturer, Adult Medicine at FMS, considered the challenges for the health care system. He looked at data related to other coronaviruses and observed that a third

of SARS and MERS patients have exhibited [lung] changes, even after three to six weeks of recovery; about a third reported diminished lung diffusion capacity up to six months later. Sakhamuri remarked on incidences of PTSD in former SARS patients. Possible long-term lung complications of COVID-19 recovered patients, he said, may include risk of developing pulmonary fibrosis, COPD, and asthma.

Better Balance Between People and Nature

Christopher Oura, Professor of Veterinary Virology at FMS, explained why wildlife is a public health issue. He highlighted the growing occurrences of the movement of diseases from animals to humans and pointed out that deforestation, unsanitary butchering of wildlife, and intensive agriculture bring humans in close proximity to animals and promote disease spread.

While COVID-19 has been traced to bats, Oura urged, “Don’t blame the bats!” Rather, “we need to follow the sustainable development goals and see clearly that sustaining human health and well-being cannot be achieved without saving lives on the land and lives on the oceans.”

On the issue of food security, Dr Lystra Fletcher-Paul, Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) Sub-Regional Coordinator for the Caribbean and a Biometrics lecturer at UWI’s Faculty of Food and Agriculture, cited possible future concerns. These include poverty and malnutrition, increased food prices and production costs, and the importation of low quality food. She suggested short and long term solutions like home gardening and cash transfers for the vulnerable as well as strengthening institutions, increased private sector involvement, and making agriculture compulsory in schools. Fletcher-Paul considers these measures vital because they “provide an opportunity to improve our food sovereignty, be in charge of our destiny, and of the food we eat.”

Dr Marlene Attzs, development economist and advisor to the Campus Principal, expounded on the secondary societal impacts of the virus. Direct economic impacts like GDP, consumption patterns, and expenditure were not the only issues. “It is really important to unearth those secondary or indirect impacts...so that we can get an understanding of the

effect of the pandemic and appropriate policy responses can be crafted.”

Presenters framed the current status of the virus within the context of Trinidad and Tobago, the Caribbean, and the world. Professors Christine Carrington, Professor of Molecular Genetics and Virology, FMS and Terence Seemungal, Dean of FMS and symposium co-host, delineated current knowledge about the virus.

Professor Carrington summed up the survival rate of SARS-CoV-2 and noted the main route of transmission was via respiratory droplets and contaminated surfaces. Depending on the type of surface, temperature, humidity, ventilation and more, the virus can persist for periods ranging from hours to days. However it is easily made inactive by common disinfection methods. She observed that the role of airborne transmission is still unclear but “is not thought to be a major route under normal circumstances”.

Prof Seemungal spoke on vaccine research, outlining research areas - like using inactive or weakened viruses, employing material present in the virus, utilising a viral vector, and creating protein based vaccines. “We need to know how and when to use the drugs and which drugs are going to be the most efficacious,” he said. “The future is hopeful, but for now we must focus on our immediate preventive methods.”

Prof Donald Simeon, Director of the Caribbean Centre for Health Systems Research and Development and symposium co-host, brought the forum to a close with a look at the response of local health systems. Assessing Trinidad and Tobago’s implementation of activities recommended by the World Health Organisation, he observed, “Of the 65 that were indicated in the WHO handbook, we have evidence that 45 of them have been implemented in Trinidad and Tobago”. He concluded that the local health system has been responsive to challenges.

Symposium presenters emphasised UWI’s role as a key player in the Caribbean’s pandemic strategy for life post-COVID-19. Professor Seemungal expressed the view that “in the years to come, we will be able to take pride in how we responded to this challenge, and future generations will say that we rose to the challenge and contributed significantly to the COVID-19 suppression and eradication efforts worldwide.”

FOOD SECURITY

PHOTOS: TERRY SAMPSON



Grow Local?

*Years of slow progress in revitalising local agriculture
– will COVID-19 trigger change?*

BY GILLIAN MOORE



**COVID-19 is our chance
“to change our tastes for foreign
foods, for the sake of food security
and for national health reasons”**

Professor Wayne Ganpat



Among the myriad repercussions of the COVID-19 crisis is the effect it will have on our food – the quality of what we eat, where we get it, and how much of it we produce ourselves.

Experts, including specialists at UWI's Faculty of Food and Agriculture (FFA), have long argued that agriculture should be at the heart of sustainability planning for this country. The effects of the pandemic, ranging from widespread loss of income to broken food supply chains, amplify these concerns.

The goal of the United Nations' Committee on World Food Security is a world where “all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their food preferences and dietary needs for an active and healthy life.”

On May 5, an FFA webinar (aired also via UWItv) looked at the impacts of COVID-19 on the agriculture sector and echoed some of the very issues from UWI's 2018 National Symposium on Food and Nutrition Security. Participants had identified the major challenges to Trinidad and Tobago's agriculture sectors as poor food safety standards, lack of institutional coordination across sectors, insufficient human and capital investment, low levels of competitiveness and innovation, and poor agricultural practices. Two years later, professors and professionals shared their recommendations for the new, post-coronavirus world.

FFA Deputy Dean of Outreach Dr Gaius Eudoxie chair of “COVID-19: A Wake Up Call for Regional Food and Nutrition Security”, noted that the pandemic had thrown many plans into disarray. On the other hand, it also provided an “opportunity to create new and more resilient economies in the region”.

Dean of the FFA Professor Wayne Ganpat, a 30-year veteran in the field of agricultural economics and extension, pointed out that Trinidad and Tobago's imported food had risen from 60 to 80 per cent of the country's nutritional intake over the last two decades.

In a previous 2018 interview, he had reminisced on World War II war gardens. “In the 1940s, you couldn't get anything, no ships were coming into the Gulf. There was no foreign exchange to buy anything because all money went into the war machine.” Ganpat said the colonial government gave people parcels of land, so they were “growing and eating basic but more nutritious home-grown food in the absence of luxury imports”.

The present-day government has likewise come around to a position of support for individual and community gardening, offering 50,000 households across the country free seed packets: bodi, corn, melongene, seim, pigeon peas, and ochro. Trinidad and Tobago, Ganpat says, has a sufficient cadre of experienced farmers, well-trained agriculture graduates, idle lands, and appropriate technologies to get this done.

He added, “We need leadership that takes advantage of a crisis to emerge better and stronger as a region.”

FOOD TO KILL OURSELVES

The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations works to fight hunger and improve nutrition and food security. Dr Lystra Fletcher-Paul is FAO Sub-Regional Coordinator for the Caribbean and a Biometrics lecturer at the FFA. In the webinar, she gave a grim report of regional dietary habits, but also gave reasons for optimism.

Some 90 per cent of the food we import from the USA is highly processed, high in sugar and fat. “We are importing food to kill ourselves,” she stated.

In the Caribbean, Fletcher-Paul explained, agricultural decline started with the era of “trade liberalisation, where sugar and bananas were no longer king”. Regionally, less than 5 per cent of GDP is generated by agriculture, and only Suriname and Guyana (with over 10 per cent) can feed themselves. Haiti alone qualifies for food aid.

She was encouraged that part of the immediate impact of COVID-19 was “increased domestic production of food, with people rushing to plant backyard gardens”.

In spite of problems faced in the region – including shortages of seeds, fertiliser, and labour; an aging farming population (also vulnerable to the coronavirus);





increased poverty; and depleted food stocks – the FAO representative saw a silver lining: “the opportunity for intraregional trade and cross-border investment”.

“No more lip service” paid to agriculture, she declared. The sector must be acknowledged as key, with the “private sector as part of the solution”. She pointed to the example of Guyana, where agriculture is compulsory at schools and stressed that indigenous societies, sustainable for millennia, also had much to teach the rest of society.

Dr Fletcher-Paul, with over 30 years in the sector, knows her recommendations are not new, and asserts that: “we can no longer continue to do things the same old way”. Behavioural change is the way forward.

BETTER DATA, UPGRADE PROCESSING

Dr Sharon Hutchinson, Head of the Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension at the FFA, stressed the importance of processing our “very perishable” agricultural products, and “finding ways of extending [their] shelf life”. Research and good data are essential to the building of food security plans and policies, especially if we are to protect our “most vulnerable”.

The region’s populace is facing loss of livelihoods, less income (especially in the informal sector), and less remittances from abroad. As such, there is less frequent grocery shopping and purchasing of fresh, nutritious foods. “People are focusing on basics like wheat and rice,” said Hutchinson. “A lot of imported food is calorie-rich, high-fat, high-sugar. And the poor are accessing this cheap food.”

She urged targeted grants, and meal delivery programmes for children in need, for which more and richer data was needed “to make informed decisions”.

Hutchinson also encouraged food upgrading processing:

“Getting food in a form consumers want.... Think about ready to eat, frozen, boneless, etc. Livestock rearing has to go beyond production, to products consumers want.”

FINANCIAL PROTECTION

Also taking part in was Gina Phillips, Programme Director of the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility (CCRIF), which assists regional governments by quickly providing short-term funding in the wake of disasters.

CCRIF offers parametric insurance products that make payments based on the intensity of a catastrophic event like a tropical storm, earthquake or hurricane; the country’s exposure; and the amount of loss calculated at a pre-agreed model.

Phillips said CCRIF had made 41 pay-outs since its formation in 2007, totalling US\$152 million, paid to 13 member governments.

UN-ECLAC predicted that “COVID-19 would result in the worst economic contraction in the history of Latin America and the Caribbean”, she told participants, and “governments should build a financial protection strategy that combines a number of instruments that address different layers or types of risk”, including the fallout from the pandemic.

STRONGER AS A REGION

Dr Keisha Roberts, Director of Healthy Options Consulting Limited, warned against compromised health due to less stringent food safety rules abroad, food fraud, challenges to public health, a potential increase in malnutrition, and the prioritisation of buying food over cleaning or sanitising products.

She urged the development of distribution networks between agriculture and food banks, the categorisation of sanitisers as basic items for aid distribution, and sustained education on hygiene.

Dean Ganpat agrees: COVID-19 is our chance “to change our tastes for foreign foods, for the sake of food security and for national health reasons”.

“Food sovereignty must be the driving force. It will keep farmers and farm families employed while producing safer and healthier food for the population.”

He closed his webinar remarks with an affirmation: “Together we can take charge of what we put into our bodies to sustain us into the future. Together we can do it.”

Gillian Moore is a writer, editor and singer-songwriter.



Seed kits for persons with disabilities

BY DR WENDY-ANN ISAAC

The COVID-19 global pandemic demands an evolution of the models for food production, food safety, and health and wellness in Trinidad and Tobago. Such an evolution urgently requires a combining of technical know-how in food production with local knowledge and circumstances; it needs the inclusion of people from all walks of life. Persons with disabilities (PWDs) with their distinct strengths must be included.

In early May 2020, a multidisciplinary team responsible for the deployment of two campus-led projects took on the charge to make seed kits available to PWDs. By May 26, the initiative had kicked off with a handover to the Autistic Society of Trinidad and Tobago at the St Augustine Campus.

The project combines seed bank research funded by The UWI/Trinidad and Tobago Research and Development Impact (RDI) Fund, Sustainable Seeds of Survival (UWI-SOS), with a UNDP Global Environmental Finance Small Grants Programme (GEF SGP) initiative for PWDs, together with support from the NGO Flying Tree Environmental Management.

In this initial phase, Dr Sharda Mahabir, National Coordinator for GEF SGP Trinidad and Tobago, secured seeds from several agricultural input suppliers to create a seed kit for distribution to 265 vulnerable households throughout the country. UWI-SOS agreed to use its RDI seed project and provide seed kits consisting of 16 varieties of seeds, mostly grown at the University Field Station, to reach a further 70 groups. Flying Tree provided the PWD NGOs with pots created from recycled plastic bottles. The seeds are not for sale or resale.

The St Augustine Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship and the Student Life and Development Department will use the experience gained in this first phase to scale up to other groups such as Persons Associated with Visual Impairment, the National Centre for Persons with Disabilities, and the Consortium of Disability Organisations, as well as several UWI students with disabilities and medical conditions.

This project will form the basis of a wider effort to be proposed by the Faculty of Food and Agriculture as an immediate to medium term response to food security.

The Seed Kits Project addresses 5 Food Security Pillars

1. Continuous availability of seeds through banking and bulking activities;
2. Access to seed material through distribution and/or commercial production of seeds to farmers and local home producers;
3. Utilisation of waste materials generated from commodities after seed extraction;
4. Stability through research and training generated;
5. Contribution to development of a seed policy for Trinidad and Tobago.



Dr Wendy-Ann Isaac is Deputy Dean of Graduate Studies, Research and Innovation and Senior Lecturer in Weed Science/Agronomy at the Faculty of Food and Agriculture. Her current project “Sustainable Seeds of Survival” is supported by The UWI/Trinidad and Tobago RDI Fund.

■ CYBERSECURITY

“Control the device, don’t let the device control you.”

So says Daren Dhoray, Webmaster at UWI St Augustine. For Dhoray, technology is a tool to make our lives easier, make information more accessible, and keep us and our families safe. For years, teaching people how to stay safe online has been one of his projects and passions. He believes cyber safety and security must be taken more seriously, not only at an organisational level, but also at a personal one.

Digital anthropologist at CyberSafe Trinidad and Tobago (CyberSafeTT) for the last 10 years of its operation, Dhoray has a wealth of IT knowledge when it comes to safety and security; knowledge he has been sharing with some of the most vulnerable in our society – children. For the last ten years, Daren and his CyberSafeTT team have spoken to over 12,000 students, teachers and parents at the primary and secondary school levels, as well as NGOs, on what to do while online. Their discussions run the gamut of cyber etiquette, internet addiction, creating a strong password, and how to get help if you have been a victim of cyberbullying. His messages are consistently well received.

Dhoray’s brainchild, CyberSafeTT came about when he realised the many gaps that would have had to be closed in order to protect children who access these devices. As technology advances, so too should the way we keep ourselves safe while using it.

A line that always runs through his head is, “the devices are listening”, a topic he covered in a 2017 blog post on the CybersafeTT website. Worrisome thoughts when you are not sure what your devices are doing with the data you share should be enough to give anyone pause. How many of us have spoken about an item privately to a friend on a messaging app only to see ads for the item pop up on their social media accounts? Have you thought about all the information that you store on your private devices and what you have put in place to keep it safe? Do you know about antivirus and anti malware software? When was the last time that you did a backup of those important documents you have on your laptop? Do you know which apps can remotely access your webcam?

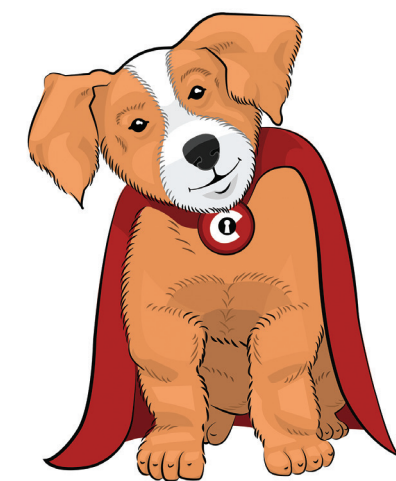
If you have never considered any of this, then Dhoray is quietly shaking his head at you. Technology is not the problem. Failing to adapt is. CybersafeTT wants to teach you how to utilise technology to your benefit. Over the many years that he has served in the IT field, Dhoray has seen where many have created a false sense of security with their devices, thinking they do not need to protect their, private information.

During this time when many parents are overseeing online learning, there are several ways that children can be kept safe. Referencing an unfortunate incident in Tobago where unsavoury content was shared in a Zoom class, Dhoray speaks about how important it is to not allow children to conduct their online schooling in closed spaces. Where possible, it should be done in an open space where parents can have a presence. Living rooms, dining rooms, or even the kitchen table are all great options.

He also urges guardians to place parental controls on the internet router to control content and accessibility to the internet. CybersafeTT recommends parental control routers, such as KoalaSafe, that allow parents to easily manage screen time and the types of apps used.

“A meaningful conversation needs to be had with any child before they are allowed to utilise tech,” says Dhoray. “Providing them with the knowledge of how they can use tech properly and keeping an open line of communication to the dangers of improper use of technology (cyberbullying, internet addiction, etc) can help them navigate the internet safely.”

For the adults who are now tasked with having online meeting after online meeting, and may be utilising their personal computers, Dhoray has some tips for working



The CyberSafeTT mascot, Scotty.

successfully and safely from home. First, the device itself must be protected - never leave it plugged into the wall socket when not in use. This leaves devices vulnerable to energy fluctuations. The purchase of an uninterruptible power source (UPS) device can solve this problem. He also recommends that we should always back up our data using a 3, 2, 1 process: (3) create primary and backups, (2) store on different storage media, and (1) keep a copy of your data offsite (such as cloud storage) and always remember to install antivirus and anti malware software.

Being safe online, whether we are simply scrolling through

Guardian of the CYBER FRONTLINE

BY OMEGA FRANCIS



Daren Dhoray, Webmaster at UWI St Augustine and digital anthropologist at CyberSafeTT.

PHOTOS: COURTESY CYBERSAFETT



Daren speaking to young women at the San Fernando East Secondary School on International Women's Day.

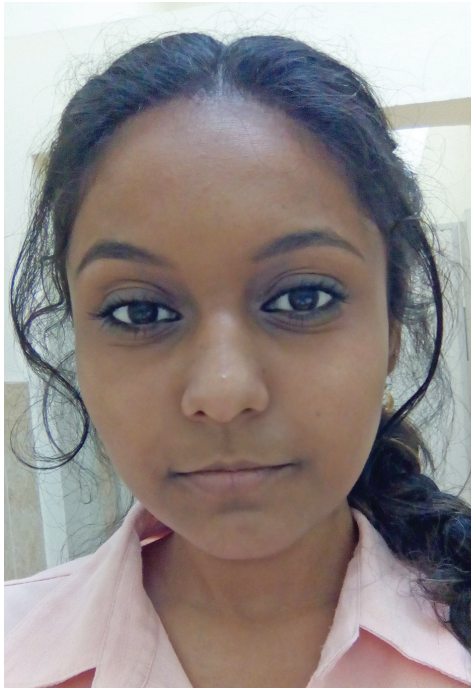
social media, doing important research, or video chatting, is necessary in this time as many operations are inevitably being moved to this space. Do not become complacent and develop a false sense of security with your devices and apps. You control the device. Don't let it control you.

If you are interested in finding out more about CyberSafeTT and their initiative, contact Mr Daren Dhoray at daren@cybersafett.com or call (868) 680-6480

■ OUR STUDENTS

Engineering interns learn, grow

BY DIXIE - ANN BELLE



Sharlene Mohammed,
Chemical and Process Engineering



Liam Smith,
Civil with Environmental Engineering



Renisha Hercules,
Chemical and Process Engineering



Ambika Jadoonanan,
Electrical and Computer Engineering

“I was able to truly make an impact that made me feel as though I had made another family in my life’s journey,” declares Ambika. “Each and every one played a crucial role in moulding me into a better person and engineer. I know that they are cheering me on and when I graduate in 2021, part of this accomplishment will be dedicated to them.”

The next time you witness the extraordinary creations of local engineering - massive construction, bustling plants, complex planning and operations – there is a good chance that an engineering student of The UWI had a role to play in its development.

Equipped with the knowledge they absorb, many students spend their vacation time working in local companies. Last year several of these students got a close-up look at the world of their future engineering careers. Their duties covered a wide range of tasks which gave them insight into the work lives of engineers.

During his time at Shell Trinidad and Tobago Limited, Civil with Environmental Engineering student Liam Smith gave input and feedback to members of project teams, accompanied colleagues on site visits, and much more. In her weeks at Yara Trinidad Limited, Chemical and Process Engineering student Sharlene Mohammed helped revamp a seawater chlorination system for sea cooling water and worked with draftsmen to update the plant piping and instrumentation diagrams.

Crucially, while their work covered a wide range, the interns’ tasks often related to their fields of study and aligned with their career plans. Among the many tasks he completed during his five weeks at China Railway Construction Caribbean Company Limited, Kyle Simmons felt he particularly gained from participating in quality assurance tests and documentation preparation.

“A lot of the theory I learnt in the classroom was applied on the field,” he says. “Some of my Year 1 knowledge was needed when I had to reproduce drawings of a retaining wall in AutoCad.”

Kyle is in his final year of a degree in Civil with Environmental Engineering. His fellow intern, Chemical and Processing Engineering student Renisha Hercules, worked in the Operations Support Department of Shell and found herself completing tasks right in line with her studies.

The interns’ work was not without challenges. Ambika Jadoonanan, who is pursuing Electrical and Computer Engineering, spent her internship at Proman: “Each work place has persons with various backgrounds and mindsets which have been a product of their individual experiences... you need to learn to observe a situation and act accordingly to ensure the needs of the plant are met and you work cohesively with each other.”

Liam expounds on work relations between interns and regular staff. “I was encouraged to let my voice be heard and to carry out my work at the level of a permanent employee.”

The interns enthusiastically endorse the internship programme because of the opportunities for personal growth. “I learnt how to interact with people working in different engineering disciplines, in different fields, with different personalities and in different aspects of life,” says Sharlene. “I learnt that in a real life scenario, we must consider the many different aspects of an issue in order to reach a definite conclusion.”

Both Liam and Renisha appreciated being part of a group who developed a presentation on “Millennials in the Workplace”, where they discussed bridging the age gap in the workforce. Renisha felt the presentation gave her valuable insight into what she envisions for her future career. There was a time when people “just looked for a job because you needed

a job” but now millennials expect more. “You want to work in an organisation that has the same belief system as you and treasures the same things as you”.

The interns’ advice to other students considering whether or not to try an internship can be summed up with an emphatic “yes”.

“I encourage more such programmes, starting at the year one level,” says Kyle. “Meeting new people and networking are important. An internship programme allows students to network with experienced people within and outside their respective fields.”

Despite the uncertainty created by the global pandemic, Renisha feels optimistic for the options future interns can explore. “Hopefully, in a few months, companies will reopen their doors to students/recent graduates. I urge my fellow students to remain strong and have a positive but realistic outlook on the situation.”

The companies all seem to have embraced their interns, not only helping them explore potential careers but encouraging them and assisting them in forming networks. “I was able to truly make an impact that made me feel as though I had made another family in my life’s journey,” declares Ambika. “Each and every one played a crucial role in moulding me into a better person and engineer. I know that they are cheering me on and when I graduate in 2021, part of this accomplishment will be dedicated to them.”

Based on these interns’ reports, the future of this country’s engineering professionals has not only been shaped by the classroom but by real world experience in several innovative companies. The forthcoming projects of these future UWI graduates will no doubt be intriguing.

■ OUR STUDENTS

For students, dealing with the disruption to school – and life – caused by COVID-19 has been difficult; imagine how difficult for those studying abroad.

When the world woke up to the threat of the pandemic, 21-year-old Joselle Ali was taking part in **The UWI Student Exchange programme**, spending a semester at Queen's University in Ontario, Canada. A Management Studies and International Relations student at UWI St Augustine, Joselle had made enthusiastic plans to take part in the exchange programme offered by the International Office. Yet, because of the coronavirus, her semester away turned out very differently. Different, however, does not mean bad, as she told **UWI TODAY** in an online interview.

Is this your first time abroad, and how has your experience been thus far?

I first travelled abroad last year; but this experience has been vastly different due to the absence of friends as a source of comfort and safety net. Regardless, it has been nothing short of amazing. This is my first time away from family and it's a test of my abilities to be self-sufficient and independent. I had some fear but this was overshadowed by excitement which transformed it into one of the best experiences I have ever had.

When the COVID-19 became a pandemic, what were your initial thoughts?

My initial feelings were shock and panic, followed by a swift urgency to salvage as many experiences possible from the remainder of my exchange. A whirlwind of thoughts ensued such as, "what will happen to classes?", "is my family okay?", "will my visa expire before I can leave?" Throughout the myriad of thoughts and feelings, the most prominent was "I am not ready to go home".

I was determined to remain as long as possible even in the face of a pandemic because this exchange is something I have wanted and spent most of my degree planning. The signup process wrought much frustration that lasted over the course of one year. Allowances had to be made for my being able to exchange in my final semester. As a result, this opportunity became much richer and more coveted. It was not something I was willing to relinquish so easily.

How have you been able to cope emotionally and psychologically with the changes?

There was anger for a short while but part of my coping process was trying to look at the bigger picture – that I was not the only one affected. All the other students on exchange were in similar positions, or even worse off. In pausing and reevaluating, I realised that I was lucky. For instance, some students who went on exchange in Europe only got three weeks before having to return home. Truthfully, most of my coping had to do with my support system. My friends and I made a joint decision to remain and weather the storm together [instead] of returning home. Within the span of one week more than 75 per cent of the students returned home. My housemates moved out and classes shut down. It was a lot to process. However, knowing I had friends by my side was the most stabilising outcome I could envision.

What has been the hardest part about this whole transition?

The hardest part has been the adjustment away from socialising because, for me, this was a big part of the exchange. I was excited to go to class, explore the building and chat with other students. I joined a salsa club and had gotten accustomed to receiving impromptu invitations to clubbing, house dinners, and other events. I loved the exhilaration and freedom of being able to drop everything and simply go. There were no restrictions, time limits or safety concerns to be worried about and it was one of the best feelings I have ever had. The fact that it was all ripped away so suddenly was difficult.

On another campus

BY JOEL HENRY



Joselle (second left) with three classmates at Queen's University in Ontario.

This experience has no impact whatsoever on my willingness and desire to travel. In my opinion, studying abroad is one of the best programmes a university could offer.



A magnificent spread prepared by Joselle and her friends. "Another favourite is cooking," Joselle says. "We would have [different] country nights and made it international to the best of our abilities."

How is Queen's University assisting you?

Queen's has been a huge help throughout this ordeal. When the news broke, our exchange co-ordinators immediately reached out to provide comfort and a support system during the transition. Virtual counselling sessions were also made available for students. Lecturers pushed back deadlines after a week of class suspension, in addition to being more lenient overall once circumstances were explained. Special consideration was given to those who had to immediately return home. However, the most gracious change made was giving all students the option to change grades to a pass or fail upon receiving transcripts, if the grades were not reflective of a student's normal functioning capabilities. Students no longer had to worry excessively about academics due to the situation.

How have you been able to socialise with other students given the limitations of social distancing?

The city where the school is situated, thankfully, did not have very stringent restrictions compared to others in the province. Socialising was restricted but still occurred in the stipulated numbers. Additionally, living in a student community with virtually all students gone, Kingston very quickly became a ghost town. There was still minimal activity and my friends and I socialised only with each other, every day, since lockdown. We held dinners, movie nights, workout sessions, game nights and even celebrated Easter together. Otherwise, communication occurred through voice and video calls.

What have you been doing to pass the time while at home/on hall?

When there aren't assignments, I have been doing what any student does once the semester is over: catching up on movies and shows. I have also been trying to reignite my love of reading. Prior to university, this was a norm. Another favourite is cooking! A big part of most days is the anticipation of which new foods we would try. We would have [different] country nights and made it international to the best of our abilities. Lastly, I just appreciated the silence and the freedom. It helped me understand how fortunate I was. Some may think that living alone is lonely but, to someone who has never had a place to myself, it was a new experience and I was grateful. I had the space to slow down, process, and think.

Will this experience deter you from travelling? If it doesn't, how will you encourage other students to study abroad?

This experience has no impact whatsoever on my willingness and desire to travel. In my opinion, studying abroad is one of the best programmes a university could offer. If I were to convince other students to do the same, I would promote the opportunities for personal growth. You are exposed to so many persons with different cultures, backgrounds, perspectives, and opinions. The exchange places you in a real-time, interactive scenario where you can evaluate and develop your views away from your comfort zone. It is an enlightening and enriching learning opportunity.

You cannot predict what will happen or where you end up; and that's the beauty of it. For example, I had plans to stay within Canada, focus on my studies and allow some exploration after exams. Instead, I made new connections and ended up booking a weeklong trip to Mexico a few days before the flight, after only one month and a half of being there. It turned out to be the best trip ever! I learnt that exchange students possess a different agenda from domestic and even international students. In our minds, it is an adventure that is multicultural and open but with an expiration date. This knowledge helps forge strong friendships and support systems quickly and the craziest ideas become your norm.

What are your top three tips for future students who want to go on exchange and are afraid to because of COVID-19?

Don't see the virus as an obstacle but as a new and challenging context that is surmountable. The experience is worth the risk; it makes it that much more valuable. If I had known that the virus was coming, I would still have gone on this exchange.

Work on turning pessimism into optimism and adversity into opportunity. Do this and the virus, or any phenomenon, will have less control over your time and thoughts.



From music, to business studies and back again

BY JODY ROBINSON

"My father was a deejay, and I remember playing around with one of his mics at about age six or seven. In that moment I became obsessed with music!"

Nathan Bullen, graduate of UWI St Augustine, who performs under the moniker NVTHY (pronounced "NATHY"), entered his first calypso competition in standard one at Diego Martin Boys RC School. Though he placed last in the competition, NVTHY was determined to succeed and entered the following year and won. He won every year since then, for his entire time at primary school.

As a teenager, NVTHY became fascinated with Bob Marley and roots reggae. This influence only manifested after a life changing encounter with Kylene Dowden, a then coworker and eventually, a supporter and good friend. One day she asked him, why not make conscious music and be the change of which he always speaks. He found it timely, as it was always his intention to change his messaging. Days later, a new afrobeats and reggae artiste emerged with music about his life experiences, love, peace and spirituality.

In 2013, NVTHY embarked on a new path, enrolling in The UWI to study Accounting. During that first year he considered dropping out to pursue music. NVTHY's mother however, encouraged him to finish his degree. He decided to exercise some patience and diligence and continue. However, he switched to Business Management. A decision that would have a profound impact on his future.

At UWI he would meet Professor Surendra Arjoon, Professor of Business and Professional Ethics in the Department of Management Studies. Professor Arjoon became his mentor and lecturer of "the best course he had ever taken" (Prof Arjoon and his work was profiled in the August 2019 issue of UWI TODAY). He was one of several key people such as the first recording engineer, future music collaborators and colleagues who became big supporters throughout NVTHY's career.

He praised his degree for equipping him with the skills needed to become established as a music entrepreneur. "I harnessed the positives from my experience [at UWI] and integrated it into all aspects of my life."

The 26-year old was featured at last year's staging of Carifesta XIV hosted at the Queen's Park Savannah. Audiences enjoyed an exhilarating performance of original reggae and Afrobeats songs including hit single and crowd favorite "Obeah". One of his most notable experiences was the release of his first official music video for the song, "Baiyuhayuwah".

NVTHY has so far released a 7-track EP, "Diary Lost in Tropic Waters", a 5-track EP, "NVTHY I" and other singles and collaborations such as hit song, "Brown Skin Girl" featuring Rayquan868.

He advises upcoming artistes and students to "trust the process, stay away from negative influences and be in spaces where your goals align with the people around you. Put God first, and try to enroll into a school that offers what you want to do; somewhere that will help you!"



Celebrating Easter.

Jody Robinson is a final year student from Jamaica completing a master's degree in Social Work. She serves as the Deputy Vice President (Outreach and Development) for the Guild of Students 2020/2021.

■ OUR STUDENTS

Online and On Hall - Supporting Students During the Lockdown

BY ADUKE WILLIAMS



The COVID-19 crisis has created challenging and uncertain times for higher education institutions everywhere, forcing daily operations to rapidly shift to remote work and virtual classes. For student services professionals at the DSSD, this shift comes with the understanding that an institution's response to this crisis will directly impact the student experience, student retention and student success, and quite possibly the survival of the institution post COVID-19.

"Student services professionals and campus administrators must adopt creative ways of sustaining student engagement and maintaining support to students at this time, and particularly those at risk," says Dr Deirdre Charles, Director of DSSD. "For at risk students the unlikelihood of continuing studies and even returning to campus is greater."

In the past weeks of the stay-at-home order, the management and staff of the DSSD have worked assiduously at adapting to the circumstances brought on by the pandemic to maintain quality programming and effective support services for the students. At the forefront of the agenda is ensuring that every student can access the suite of services during the crisis – financial aid, disability support, student engagement, counselling, and others. The DSSD team has made the transition to virtual operations for the welfare of students.

As a vital university function, it is necessary for student services to be strategically positioned and aligned because of the critical role they play in fostering mental, spiritual, social and physical care for students. In this current environment, students are required to adjust quickly to a plethora of changes and challenges. These include access to resources, mental/emotional preparedness, financial constraints, familial obligations, and employment obligations. Our students are experiencing depression, anxiety, anger, sadness and even emotionlessness. There are also feelings of isolation, defeat, disconnection, hopelessness and helplessness. With this in mind, the response has to be one of compassion, and requires flexibility and emotional intelligence.

From the onset, the DSSD established frequent and ongoing communication with students to ascertain their needs and provide support accordingly. This was the single most important student engagement strategy used as a direct response to the crisis in the initial phase. A focused approach was adopted that involved identifying the various subgroups within the student population and assessing their respective needs. This approach continues to guide the process for connecting with regional and international students, students living on and off halls of residence, students with learning and physical disabilities, students in need of financial aid, and marginalised students.

"We have maintained contact with our students and we encourage them to stay connected with us," Dr Charles says. "We understand that a student's connection to the institution has great implications for retention. Therefore, student engagement, student success and the overall student experience has to be a campus wide responsibility."

According to Dr Charles, "at this juncture it is crucial that our online model resembles our usual offerings to attract, engage and connect with our students. Also, our students need to know that their campus support systems are still actively seeking their best interest and success."

Now is the time to remind students of the vibrancy of UWI St Augustine, and demonstrate that it is focused on student-centredness. The campus community is one of immeasurable strength and solidarity, and now more than ever students need to see this. The current environment has emphasised the meaning of the watchwords of the UWI "Triple A Strategy". If we are to extend our reach and range and be more accessible, align better globally and become more agile, then technology has to be better woven in our daily operations. Moving forward, the DSSD intends to sustain its use of online platforms for quality student programming and support services. We urge other departments to do the same and continue to engage and connect with students.

DSSD's activities include:

- **Student Engagement** - Frequent check-ins with regional students (both those residing on and off halls), and at risk students, with the aim of keeping in touch and providing important updates from the campus, as well as useful tips and resources to cope during such uncertain times. Additionally, our Student Life and Development department continues to maintain its *Student Support Group* initiative through the use of WhatsApp group chat.
- **Residential Life** - Students residing in halls were encouraged to adhere to physical distancing guidelines, and sanitisation and hygienic measures were put in place to ensure their safety. Application processes for hall accommodations (new and returning students) and the resident assistant programme have been shifted online. The recruitment and training process for resident assistants are being conducted virtually.
- **Career Management and Student Development** - Additional online career services have been implemented, including resume critique, one-on-one career sessions, mock interviews, career planning sessions, and company presentations and recruitment. The majority of co-curricular courses are being delivered online.
- **Counselling and Psychological Services** - Psychotherapeutic services are being facilitated by Zoom and Doxy, and the *Safe Space* programme has also been moved online.
- **Financial Assistance** - The application process for scholarships and bursaries is online. Webinars have been conducted for how to apply. Assessments of at risk students, and processing financial grants are also being done virtually. The disbursement of funds for recipients of *Adopt-A-Student* and OBUS scholarships is now being done via direct bank deposits and wire transfers (for regional students).
- **Academic Support** - The recruitment process for peer tutoring is being conducted virtually. Sessions on exams strategies, study skills and review of papers have been conducted by telephone and emails.

Aduke Williams is a Student Services Assistant in the Office of the Director at the Division of Student Services and Development.

HEALTH

“A donation from just one person could save up to three lives” – these words are stated on The UWI Blood Donor Foundation’s (UWIBDF) website and have been repeated in blood donor campaigns globally. Yet there is a lack of voluntary blood donors in Trinidad and Tobago. How could that be?

Blood is vital to life and a constant supply is necessary for patients such as pregnant women, those undergoing cancer treatment, persons with inherited blood disorders, and so many others. According to UWIBDF Chair Dr Kenneth Charles, Senior Lecturer in Haematology in the Department of Para-Clinical Sciences at UWI’s Faculty of Medical Sciences (FMS), the number of blood units collected annually has plateaued and further decreased since stay-at-home measures were implemented in Trinidad and Tobago.

UWIBDF and the Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of Health are collaborating to encourage people to voluntarily give and continue doing so during COVID-19. Last month, UWIBDF hosted its 16th Voluntary Blood Drive. UWIToday sat down (virtually) with Dr Charles to discuss the foundation’s role in increasing voluntary blood donation awareness, misconceptions surrounding donating, and why ensuring regular, safe access to blood donations should be our first priority.

Since its inception in 2011, UWIBDF has promoted voluntary blood donor awareness. Could you tell us about that and how this goal has evolved over the years?

The first aim is to promote awareness of voluntary non-remunerated blood donation in the university and the community. This has not changed.

Voluntary non-remunerated donors (VNRD) donate blood voluntarily, without pressure from the healthcare system, patients or relatives for nothing that could be considered payment in cash or kind. Currently, blood is collected from family replacement donors at hospital-based donation centres where close friends and family donate blood to be claimed for a named beneficiary. If not enough people donate, the beneficiary will not receive the quantity of blood they need. Voluntary non-remunerated blood donation is a safer alternative that ensures blood is collected and available to treat anyone in need (for example, persons needing monthly transfusions or emergency transfusions due to road accidents).

How else is voluntary non-remunerated blood donation promoted?

In FMS, students learn about it through lectures, practicums and research projects. Research findings are shared regionally and internationally. UWIBDF also conducts school visits and invites secondary school students to the World Blood Donor Day Symposium.

Since March 2015, UWIBDF in collaboration with the North Central Regional Health Authority has been hosting a blood drive which takes place three times a year. We consistently collect over 100 units of blood at each drive and add them to the national blood supply. Last month, we held our 16th Voluntary Blood Drive at the blood bank and using a mobile unit to accommodate more donors and maintain the social distance guidelines. We collected 67 units, which is a great effort.

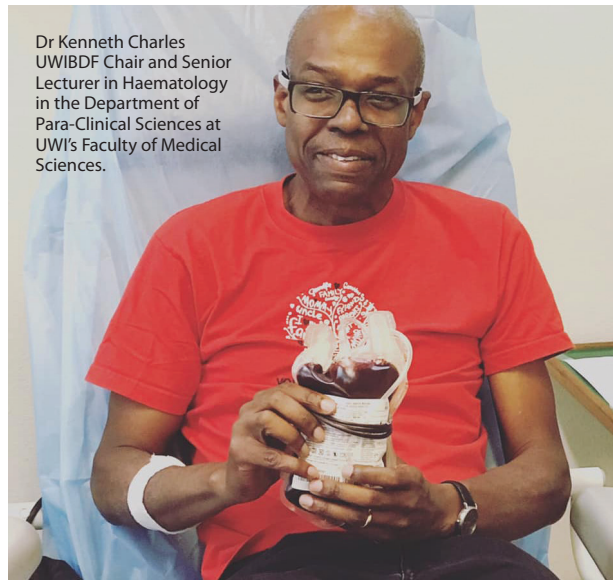
Based on the students you’ve met who are VNRDs, what would you say are their reasons for donating?

National pride, altruism, a desire to help others, and taking up the challenge of fixing the blood shortage problem in this country. Overall, UWIBDF has VNRDs from the student body and the public who are motivated by these reasons.

FIRST, BLOOD

Giving Blood is an Essential Service

BY JEANNETTE GAWAI



Dr Kenneth Charles
UWIBDF Chair and Senior
Lecturer in Haematology
in the Department of
Para-Clinical Sciences at
UWI’s Faculty of Medical
Sciences.

- A convenient, accessible location, personal interaction and feedback encourages people to repeatedly donate.
- Women are more willing to donate blood as VNRDs than replacement donors.
- And lastly, it is possible to increase the number of VNRDs rapidly. We’ve seen it happen.

I would like to see the blood donation system changed to one that is 100 per cent reliant on VNRDs using public education and changes in the legal and regulatory pathways to facilitate voluntary non-remunerated blood donation. That means continued investment in our young people as the agents of this change. We would increase the amount of blood collected annually and make the supply safer and equally available. It could happen if the UWIBDF model is applied nationally.

How can people get involved?

If you are a healthy person of suitable weight, and age, you can register to become a donor on the UWIBDF website. You can also encourage others to donate voluntarily through the Ministry of Health Blood Bank Services. It is a great time of national need, please do your part.

For more about The UWI Blood Donor Foundation, please visit <http://uwiblood.com/> or their Facebook Page <https://www.facebook.com/UWIBlood>.

5 Top Misconceptions surrounding Blood Donation

Misconception 1

We already have a voluntary non-remunerated system.

Fact: More than 80 per cent of donated blood comes from replacement donors and most of the rest from persons who could reclaim their donations (they can donate blood for no specific person but then claim their blood for a named beneficiary at a later date).

Misconception 2

Once blood is tested in the lab it is safe.

Fact: There is a window period before tests for infections become positive. Safety relies on truthfulness at the blood donation interview. This is why VNRDs are safest.

Misconception 3

Persons could get infections from donating blood.

Fact: There is no risk of acquiring an infection from donating blood since sterile equipment is used and not reused. Sterile techniques as defined by international (Pan American Health Organisation) standards are used for collecting blood from donors.

Misconception 4

You can get COVID-19 from donating blood.

Fact: COVID-19 is not spread through blood donation or transfusion.

Misconception 5

Donated blood is stored for a long time.

Fact: Once collected, blood is separated into red cells which last about a month, platelets which last five days and plasma which is frozen for a year. Red cells are the most commonly used component so a steady flow of donations is required.

On a separate note, Dr Waveney Charles, pioneer in the field of Haematology recently passed away. What do you think people can learn from her example?

Dr Waveney Charles was the first trained haematologist to practise in this country and single-handedly laid the foundation for haematology and blood banking services. Her work in developing a space for young persons with inherited blood disorders and their families will be a lasting legacy. She doggedly developed a national blood transfusion service which did not exist before 1986, within the constraints of the regulatory systems. Dr Waveney Charles personally trained most of the laboratory technologists who became the core of blood banking operations in the country. We can all learn about the power of listening to the needs of others from her, and how to identify solutions and implement them selflessly.

How would you like to see the current blood donation system in Trinidad and Tobago change?

Our experience with UWIBDF in the last five years has taught us several things about how people come around to donating:

- Sharing blood transfusion information removes fear and anxiety about donating blood.





Together in the Caribbean's fight against COVID-19

More than ever before, we are called to rally around each other. As an activist University, we at The UWI continue to engage in the search for sustainable solutions for the Caribbean to confront the COVID-19 challenge. Universities are built and resourced to serve their communities and nations, so times like these draw precisely on our academy's purpose. Through science, medicine, engineering and volunteerism, our staff and students are contributing their resources and expertise towards the fight, demonstrating that **UWI cares**.

As we continue to do our part, we are energised by the solidarity of regional unity because it is only together we will get through this.

#UWIAgainstCOVID19 #TOGETHERCARIBBEAN #UWICARES

FRONTLINE CLINICAL CARE

Members of our Faculties of Medical Sciences across the region are providing critical care for COVID-19 patients at hospitals and primary care settings and centres.

MEDICAL STUDENTS VOLUNTEER

Hundreds of medical students from across all our campuses are volunteering to provide supplementary support to doctors and nurses.

UWI Mona students are supporting communication activities for the Ministry of Health and Wellness through the Campus Call Centre and the National Emergency Operations Centre.

100+ students in the District Health Visiting programme at UWI St Augustine are doing contact tracing for the Ministry of Health, Trinidad and Tobago.

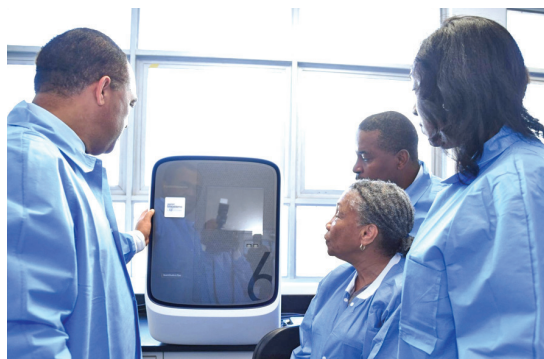
Nursing Programme staff are working the COVID hotlines, and overseeing operations of field hospitals.

Cave Hill's Department of Social Work staff are lending social care assistance to the elderly, along with UWI Five Islands providing COVID-19 relief to single mothers and the elderly.

TESTING

The National Influenza Centre at The UWI Mona's Department of Microbiology is testing for COVID-19.

Similarly, to help increase testing capacity in Trinidad and Tobago, The UWI St Augustine has handed over the School of Veterinary Medicine's Molecular Biology Laboratory along with additional PCR machines from its Faculty of Science and Technology's Department of Life Sciences to the Ministry of Health for real-time polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing for COVID-19.

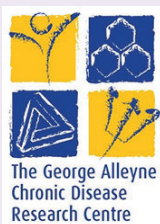


FIELD HOSPITALS

The UWI Cave Hill, in partnership with the Barbados Defence Force and Ministry of Health and Wellness, is hosting a Respiratory Short Stay Unit, a field hospital on the premises of its E.R. Waldron Clinical Skills building at Jemmots Lane. In Trinidad and Tobago, The UWI St Augustine's Couva and Debe facilities are both in use for COVID-19 patients and quarantined returning nationals.

DRUG TREATMENT

The Faculty of Medical Sciences at the St Augustine Campus has reviewed the use of drugs for the management of COVID-19 to guide Trinidad and Tobago's Ministry of Health.



DAILY SURVEILLANCE AND MODELLING

by The George Alleyne Chronic Disease Research Centre at The UWI Cave Hill are facilitating evidence-based decision-making in the Caribbean via www.uwi.edu/covid19/surveillance.

The website functions as an 'observatory' for confirmed COVID-19 cases, deaths and outbreak growth rates for 14 CARICOM countries and 6 UK Overseas Territories, as well as regional heat map models.



COVID-19 TASK FORCE

Informing the Caribbean's Response

Early in February, a UWI COVID-19 Task Force was established to leverage the University's knowledge and expertise to support the Caribbean's response to the virus pandemic. The Task Force is chaired by The UWI's Professor Clive Landis, Pro Vice-Chancellor for Undergraduate Studies and former Director of the George Alleyne Chronic Disease Research Centre, who has considerable experience in the field of Caribbean public health.

VISIT WWW.UWI.EDU/COVID19
TO FIND USEFUL RESOURCES AND LEARN MORE

GLOBAL SOLIDARITY CLINICAL TRIAL

The UWI is part of the World Health Organisation's 'Solidarity Trial' to investigate the efficacy of potential treatment drugs.

SCIENCE FOR POLICY DECISIONS

Researchers and experts from our specialised units and centres are producing models and policy briefs to inform national and regional governments and decision makers.

STUDIES

- COVID's psychological impact on workers
- Intervention strategies to curb spread
- Public health modelling to predict infection and mortality rates of the virus
- Behavioural change needed to halt the spread of viral illness



ENGINEERING SOLUTIONS

The Faculties of Engineering at UWI St Augustine and Mona in collaboration with students, alumni and industry partners are driving national efforts to manufacture ventilators, face shields and other medical equipment for the COVID-19 response.



HAND SANITISER

Thousands of litres of hand sanitiser is produced daily by The UWI Mona Campus' Doctor of Pharmacy programme in collaboration with National Health Fund and its partners - J. Wray and Nephew Ltd., Organic Growth Holdings and Carimed Ltd.

The UWI Cave Hill Campus is also producing hand sanitiser for essential workers.



EQUIPPING REGIONAL EDUCATORS TO TEACH ONLINE

The UWI Open Campus has trained more than 2000 teachers/educators across the region in the use of educational technology for the rapid response delivery of online education:

- Close to 600 teachers, community college lecturers and curriculum officers from ministries of education in Barbados and OECS, in association with the Eastern Caribbean Joint Board of Teacher Education.
- Over 1000 personnel from sister campuses and 752 tutors from Open Campus Country Sites in 16 countries.

POST COVID-19 RECOVERY

The Post COVID-19 Road Map to Recovery team comprises UWI Chancellor and other UWI experts and alumni for Trinidad and Tobago.

Similarly, in Barbados, Cave Hill staff are serving on a Jobs and Investment Council to help the government mobilise and catalyse opportunities during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Pro Vice-Chancellor and Campus Principal, Prof. The Most Hon. Eudine Barriteau chairs the Services and the Creative Economy Committee.

The UWI Global Tourism Resilience Centre in Jamaica is leading the recovery of the region's tourism industry beginning with simulations to understand the economic and social impact.

From psycho-social and clinical experts to economists and more, a wide range of disciplines and specialists are focused on the Caribbean's rebound from the impact of COVID-19.