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UVI Students and Faculty Join U.S. Territories at National STEM Diversity Conference

Students and Mentors from the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam and Puerto Rico at SACNAS, the Largest Multidisciplinary and Multicultural STEM Diversity Event in the Country

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Students, faculty, and staff from the University of the Virgin Islands recently participated in the National Diversity in STEM (NDiSTEM) Conference, held October 31 through November 2 in Phoenix, Arizona.

The event, hosted by the Society for Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics & Native Americans in Science (SACNAS), is recognized as the largest multicultural and multidisciplinary STEM diversity conference in the U.S., focusing on advancing underrepresented groups within scientific fields.

According to a release from UVI, the local delegation included a mix of 20 attendees, comprising seven undergraduate students, four graduate students, four faculty and staff members—including a representative from the Virgin Islands Coastal Zone Management Agency (CZM) and the Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR)—and five workforce fellows from UVI. For many of these participants, this was their first opportunity to attend a large-scale STEM conference dedicated to diversity.

St. Croix native and UVI graduate Amanda Boissiere, who is currently a National Science Foundation (NSF) Securing STEM Island Pathway Workforce Fellow, described the conference as a memorable and inspirational experience. “I loved the cultural element of SACNAS—it was a STEM conference that truly embraced diversity and welcomed individuals from all walks of life,” she shared. “Networking with and learning from scientists across the nation was incredibly inspiring, and it motivated me to take the next step in my academic journey by applying to graduate programs.”

According to the release, the delegation’s participation was supported by the Navigating Home project, an NSF-funded initiative uniting the U.S. territories of Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico. The Navigating Home project is dedicated to advancing representation of historically marginalized and underrepresented groups within the geosciences across these territories. Altogether, 71 representatives from the alliance attended the NDiSTEM conference this year, reflecting a commitment to fostering diverse scientific communities.

Elisabeth Leerdam, SEAS Islands Alliance coordinator for UVI’s Center for Marine and Environmental Studies, highlighted the importance of the gathering for islander representation in STEM. “Our commitment to diversity brought together a vibrant group of islanders, allowing them to connect across oceans at this conference,” she said. “In addition to connecting with Alliance members, the conference created opportunities for professional development, cultural celebrations, and peer connections. It was an honor to represent UVI and our U.S. territories.”

The SACNAS conference provided a unique platform for UVI attendees and others from the alliance to engage with peers, explore opportunities for advanced studies, and participate in workshops designed to enhance professional and academic growth within STEM disciplines.

For more information about the Navigating Home Project and related workforce fellowship opportunities, visit navigatinghomeproject.com.