

The Virgin Islands Consortium

UVI to Award Nearly 300 Degrees At 2016 Commencement Ceremonies

Education / **Published On May 06, 2016 12:27 PM /**

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The University of the Virgin Islands will award nearly 300 degrees at the 52nd annual Commencement Ceremonies on May 12 and 13, on the St. Thomas Campus and the Albert A. Sheen Campus on St. Croix, respectively, a press release U.V.I. recently issued has revealed.

More than 200 degrees will be awarded at 1:30 p.m. on Thursday, May 12, in the Sports and Fitness Center on the St. Thomas Campus. Nearly 100 degrees will be awarded at 1:30 p.m. on Friday, May 13, on the grounds of the Albert A. Sheen Campus.

The class speaker on the St. Thomas Campus will be Patrice Harris. The class speaker on the Albert A. Sheen Campus will be Akeem O. McIntosh. Vice Chancellor of The University of the West Indies, Sir Hilary Beckles – distinguished scholar, international historian, transformation leader and Caribbean intellectual – will be UVI's 2016 commencement keynote speaker, and will receive an honorary doctorate. Ruth Moolenaar, of St. Thomas, and Richard A. Schrader, Sr. of St. Croix, will also receive honorary doctorates.

Admission to the St. Thomas ceremony is by ticket only. Parking on the St. Thomas Campus will be available in the parking lot of the Reichhold Center for the Arts. Shuttle service will be provided from the Reichhold Center to the Sports and Fitness Center, beginning at 11 a.m. Parking will not be available at the Sports and Fitness Center. Both ceremonies will be broadcast live on DaVybe Radio Station 107.9 FM and will stream live online on from this direct link. WUVI 1090 AM/97.3 FM, UVI's student run radio station, will carry a live stream of both commencement ceremonies on <http://wuvi.am>. The St. Croix commencement ceremony will also be broadcast on 1090 AM/97.3 FM.

Interesting Graduate Stories, St. Croix

Lisa Lucien was a freshman at the University of Tampa when she discovered that she was pregnant. "It was definitely a surprise," she said. But instead of relinquishing her goal of obtaining a college degree, she transferred to UVI, moved back to St. Croix and got not one, but two jobs. With support from her mother and family, Lucien hardly missed a beat. At 23, she will graduate with the first class of Hospitality and Tourism majors that has gone through the full program at UVI.

"I am totally overwhelmed," she said over the phone while driving to campus from her full-time job as a customs broker. "I was lucky that most of my classes were at night so I could work during the day and on weekends. But it was still really hard. There were a lot of tears and many sleepless nights."

Lucien said that her daughter was her main source of motivation. "Every day when I would come home from work or school she would ask me: 'Did you go to school today, Mommy? Did you go to work?' I would always say yes, and then she would say: 'I'm proud of you Mommy.' That's what kept me going. I want to give my daughter a great start in life."

Another challenge for Lucien was deciding on a major, but after she discovered her passion in Hospitality and Tourism, she never looked back. "I love to plan events, work with people, and move around while I'm working," she said.

Lucien served as the president of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, vice president of the UVI class of 2016, and the treasurer of the Hospitality and Tourism Club. Soon she will begin to look for a job in her field, but in the meantime she is looking forward to catching her breath while she savors her accomplishment and spends a bit more time with her daughter.

When Denis Lynch started his college education at UVI's Albert A. Sheen Campus in 2006, he did not think that he would be a member of the Class of 2016. But the scenic route suited him; at age 27 he will soon graduate with an Associates in Arts Degree in

Process Technology, a Bachelor of Arts degree in Business Administration, and plans to attend graduate school.

Lynch graduated from St. Joseph Catholic High School on St. Croix at the age of 16. His original plan had been to study engineering, but he soon realized that opportunities for engineers on St. Croix were scarce, and he knew that he did not want to leave home. Not sure where his education was headed, he scaled back on his coursework and went to work for the Transportation Security Administration (TSA.) The financial independence was attractive. So in 2010 he took an even more lucrative job with Hovensa. Despite his enjoyment of a comfortable lifestyle, his mother – a graduate student herself – urged him to return to school. So when Hovensa closed in 2012, he made the difficult decision to turn down other job offers and resume his studies full-time.

“It feels good to no longer have my mom’s resounding voice in my head, telling me that I should finish my degree,” said Lynch, whose 10-year journey awakened in him an appreciation for the intellectual stimulation that chasing money had not provided. “I have a good job now at the VI Water and Power Authority’s propane plant, but I’m planning to get my Master’s Degree in Business. My dad and I are big horse racing enthusiasts; I’m thinking about trying to develop that into a profitable business.”

Lynch ultimately hopes to follow in his mother’s footsteps with a Ph.D. as well, and to find ways of giving back to his community by working with children. “I didn’t always realize how lucky I was to have two parents who really care about me,” he said. “Not everybody has that, and kids are the future.”

Interesting Graduate Stories on St. Thomas

Patrice Harris will be the student speaker at this year’s commencement ceremony on the St. Thomas Campus, but she is not nervous. As a communications major whose dream job is to be a television news anchor, public speaking comes almost as naturally to her as walking, and she does it with the confidence of an elite athlete who knows she’s at the top of her game.

Originally from St. Kitts, Harris was one of the first students from St. Kitts and Nevis to receive a scholarship from UVI. She was excited to explore the world beyond the island of her birth, but the transition proved difficult. Intense homesickness brought on a bout of digestive complications that landed her in the hospital and took her out of commission for more than a month. Determined not to fall behind, she completed that semester with a 3.7 grade point average and went on to attend the Thurgood Marshall Leadership Institute. That, too, was difficult; Harris grappled with being a small fish in a big pond for the first time in her life. But instead of feeling defeated, she threw herself into the work at hand and was subsequently chosen to be a student ambassador.

UVI made it possible for Harris to attend the Washington Center during the summer where she had an internship as a congressional news correspondent. There she was in her element, especially while covering the opening of the Cuban Embassy in Washington D.C. But at the height of what she described as her “grand moment” she received word that her father had had a stroke. “I really loved my dad,” she said. “I wanted to go home, but he encouraged me to continue. I finished the program and got an A in the class.”

Toward the end of her final semester at UVI, while still in the throes of coursework and making tough decisions about her future, Harris received the call she had long dreaded: Her father had passed away. "So this has become a very bittersweet moment for me, and I'm not always sure how to handle it," she said. "I still have all this work to do. It's very difficult."

Nevertheless, Harris continues to look forward to speaking at this year's commencement, and feels proud of being named the 2016 Best Student Employee of the Year for her work at UVI's Radio Station, and Best Communications Student. She was offered a job at the Hershey Corporation in Sales and Marketing, but has instead decided to pursue a career in communications and journalism. She is currently working with TMCF representatives toward securing an internship in her chosen field.

Yohance Henley wanted to be a baseball player, so when his mother suggested to him, over and over and over, that he attend college instead, he felt irritated. He became rebellious. He had already gone to school for 12 years, he said, and since he had not received a baseball scholarship, he was done. But his mother gave him an ultimatum: if he didn't continue his education at UVI, he would no longer be welcome to live in her house. The summer after he graduated from Ivanna Eudora Kean High School, Henley's mother enrolled him in UVI's Summer Bridge Program, which focuses on a student's transition from high school to college during a five-week residential and academic program. She explained that it was simply unacceptable for him to do nothing with his life.

"I couldn't believe it," he said. "She was trying to send me to school in the middle of the summer. But I went just to get her off my case, and that program changed my life. The faculty was so supportive. By the end of the summer, I was excited to start my first semester as a freshman at UVI."

Henley became a resident hall assistant in one of the challenging areas on campus, which unearthed his gift for leadership. He has since gone on to become the 2016 Student Government Association president, a trained folktale storyteller, Virgin Islands Legislature Youth Advisory Council vice chairman, an esteemed role model and mentor for legions of his fellow students, a part of Brothers with a Cause, and one of the primary voices of the student body. Henley is excited to remain in the Virgin Islands after he graduates, where he plans to get a job and coach baseball while he explores a few different career avenues. His interests currently include politics, education and motivational writing/speaking.