

The Virgin Islands Consortium

UVI Board Approves Creation of School of Agriculture

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Staff Consortium **June 22, 2020**



In the regular session of its quarterly meeting on June 20, via teleconference, the University of the Virgin Islands Board of Trustees unanimously approved the creation of a School of Agriculture, the institution of higher learning has made known.

This new school will combine UVI's Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service with a new academic teaching unit that is expected to further expand and strengthen the University's Land-Grant mission locally, regionally and globally.

The new academic teaching unit will offer a variety of innovative programs that prepare students for jobs, professional employment, and leadership roles in the agriculture industry. To increase accessibility and maximize enrollment of both traditional and non-

traditional students, the programs and courses of agriculture will be delivered utilizing a variety of modes, including face-to-face, online, and blended formats.

The academic unit will be charged with the responsibilities of developing and maintaining approved and accredited certificate, associate, bachelor, and graduate programs in agriculture and agriculture-related disciplines.

Careers are available for the graduates in such fields as Financial and Policy Analyst, Loan/Credit Office, Extension Agent and Specialist, Teacher Educator, Environmental Health Inspector, Industrial Safety Inspector, Farmer/Grower, Commodities Inspector and Merchandiser, among others.

The board also re-elected Henry Smock to serve as chairman and Oran Roebuck as vice chairman.

“Congratulations to Chairman Smock and Vice Chairwoman Roebuck,” said Trustee Yvonne Thraen. “You have a very big agenda for the next academic year. Congratulations and the best of luck to you.”

Also, at Saturday’s meeting, the board unanimously approved a new School of Graduate Studies and two new degree programs – a Bachelor of Arts and a Bachelor of Science degree in Interdisciplinary Studies.

Currently, the university has nine masters degree programs and one Ph.D., with several certificate programs at this level. These programs are situated in various schools and colleges at this institution; however, they have no formal home. The creation of the School of Graduate Studies will ensure that graduate education is not overshadowed by undergraduate education.

Through the Interdisciplinary Studies degree program, students will be able to design their own program and pursue multiple interests. Considered ideally a four-year degree, students enrolled are expected to seek advising early to obtain guidance on designing their program of study. Students in the program will also be encouraged to think innovatively about their studies and explore study-abroad options or seek out certificates they might be interested in.

Thraen offered congratulations to UVI President David Hall, Provost Camille McKayle and faculty that worked on these program expansions and curriculum offerings. “I found it particularly rewarding to know that in the midst of what we had to deal with COVID, that faculty and professors would find the time to develop the new courses, which broadens what the offerings are for the University. As well as it puts us at a level with what’s happening in best practices with other Universities,” said Thraen.

Additionally, the board unanimously passed a revision of the Policy for Conferring Emeritus Status and approved Trustee Emeritus status for Alexander A. Moorhead. Appointed and confirmed to the Board of Trustees for UVI in March 1996, Moorhead served continuously until May 2020. He was re-elected every five years to serve as a member for five terms. During his 24-year tenure, he served under three University presidents and as vice chair for 16 years. He served as chair for five years.

“We are genuinely going to miss this man,” said Board Chairman Smock. “He really helped to keep me focused on what was important with University affairs. I know he will continue to talk with us and stay in touch with the University.”

“There came a time when we were bogged down, unbelievably. I have been on many boards of other organizations; nothing compared with just how horrible our progress was in our meetings until Alex Moorhead required us to take a close look at the expediting potential of Roberts Rules,” said Trustee Reverend Dr. Wesley Williams. “We discovered that we can do our business exactly the way that we now do it. So, our meeting times just collapsed overnight; what was a very difficult assignment serving on this board became, relatively speaking from a procedural standpoint, a ‘breeze.’”

As is customary, Mr. Hall highlighted the excellence and commitment of those UVI employees or units that have performed exceptionally with the President’s Appreciation Award. This quarter’s award was presented to the collective faculty, Technology Support Team, Dr. Timothy Faley, Dr. David Morris and Kedisha Charles.

“Not only did each faculty member creatively make this transition and adjustment that was needed because of COVID-19, but they did so in a seamless and thoughtful manner,” Mr. Hall said. “Students felt that the instruction that they received was at a high level. They were pleased with the thoughtfulness, intention and professionalism that our faculty members demonstrated during this period and I really want to highlight that contribution.”

A few members of the Information and Technology Services (ITS) staff were awarded for their work in forming part of the special Technical Support Team during the pandemic.

“Many faculty members were having to make this transition to virtual or remote teaching for the first time and they needed the support of others to help them make this transition and to do it in a short period of time,” Mr. Hall stated. “Though many individuals contributed to this, I want to recognize Ameeta Javda, Bryan Thomas, Dannica Thomas, Elroy Richards and Cherie Wheatley. They provided technical assistance, coaching and helped to provide a secure platform upon which the faculty could achieve their educational objectives.”

Also receiving the President’s Award were business professor Dr. Timothy Faley, physics professor Dr. David Morris and senior Information Systems and Technology major Kedisha Charles. They were awarded for their collective collaboration on producing 3D masks and other protective gear for frontline workers throughout the Territory.

“Just as we are supposed to be committed to helping our students and achieving our goals, we also have a mandate to serve the community and to be mindful of the needs that others are facing,” Mr. Hall said.

Due to a reduction in the Fiscal Year 2020 allotments appropriated to the University in the amount of \$3.3 million, a prior structural deficit of \$1.1 million and other operating considerations, the board unanimously approved changes to the Fiscal Year 2019-2020 operating budget of \$46.9 million. The budget includes a nine percent reduction.

Board Chairman Smock reported that while in executive session, the board approved the following:

- Minutes of the March 7, 2020 Meeting of the Board
- Approved two candidates for Faculty Emeritus status
- Approved UVI Next Report and Recommendations
- Approved 2020 Board Goals
- Received an update on the Free Tuition policy
- Received a presentation from the administration on the plan for reopening after COVID-19
- Had a discussion with President regarding personnel matters
- Received an update on legal matters from Legal Counsel
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Smock thanked outgoing Trustee Dr. Adam Parr for his service as faculty representative and Raven Phillips for her service as student representative on the Board.

The next scheduled meeting of the Board of Trustees will be held on Saturday, Oct. 24.