

The Virgin Islands Consortium

UVI President Says Danish Scholarship Program Gives Students Otherwise Hindered By Funds An Opportunity To Study Abroad

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University of the Virgin Islands president Dr. David Hall receives Danish Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen during his visit to the US Virgin Islands for its Centennial Transfer Commemoration. 1 April 2017. © Aisha-Zakiya Boyd.

ST. THOMAS -- UVI President David Hall has said that the Danish government's commitment to start a five-year scholarship program for 10 UVI students annually was a blessing in many forms, among them giving students otherwise hindered by funds the opportunity to study abroad.

"We are honored and delighted to welcome the Danish Prime Minister, who has impressed us all with his thoughtful remarks and insights," said Dr. Hall in a press release the institution of higher learning issued this afternoon. "One of the things that this scholarship program means is that our commitment to globalization will have a concrete reality. Not only will our students bring insights, observations and stories back home to the Virgin Islands, but the Danish funds will also help to remove economic barriers for students who wish to study abroad but would otherwise be limited by financial constraints."

The program will be funded through the Danish Finance Act of 2018 and will begin that same year. It commits \$143, 300 annually for 10 students to study for one semester at participating Danish universities, and funds the students' tuition and living costs.

"I am very pleased to announce this scholarship program," said Danish Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen. "We Danes are aware that the 250-year history in which Denmark played a crucial role in the Virgin Islands has not been told the same way in both countries. We can't change the past, but we can try to learn from it and find common ground by enhancing the interaction between Denmark and the Virgin Islands. If we invest in the future by empowering youngsters with the knowledge and insight that higher education provides, we will build a base for a stronger commitment to shared values and interests in the future."

Following the presentation of the study-abroad scholarship program on Saturday, Mr. Rasmussen enjoyed a private conversation with several UVI students, one of whom has already studied in Denmark and is planning to return for his master's degree, according to UVI.

"Students from the Virgin Islands will definitely benefit from experiencing a different educational system," said Jesus Arista, a senior computer science major. "The Prime Minister is very intelligent and oriented toward the future. His commitment to education reflects his determination to solve problems, particularly with regard to developing clean energy technologies."

Zandria Acosta, another senior computer science major, shared her impression of the Prime Minister as well. "Prime Minister Rasmussen is a thoughtful world leader who shows humility and respect at a time when we sometimes question the integrity of our leaders," said Ms. Acosta. "He approached the questions we asked thoughtfully and had a calm demeanor that allowed us students to feel as if there were no barriers. His visit also solidified the connection between the U.S. Virgin Islands and Denmark, creating real opportunities for students to consider the study abroad scholarship."

The Danish prime minister visited the U.S. Virgin Islands for the centennial celebration of Transfer Day, which took place on March 31 and marked the transfer of the former Danish West Indies to the United States. Prior to presenting the scholarship program at the University, Mr. Rasmussen announced Danish funding for a number of community-based social and cultural projects aimed at recognizing both the positive and negative impacts of Danish rule over the territory.

Such projects include the restoration of parts of a former Danish sugar plantation residence on St. Croix, which today is a museum; supporting the critical work of the St. Croix-based Queen Louise Home for Children, which helps vulnerable children across

the island, and assisting with My Brother's Workshop on St. Thomas, among others. The Danish government also wished to use the Centennial as an opportunity to reflect on Denmark's involvement in the Virgin Islands, since it is viewed as crucial that knowledge about the period of slavery not be forgotten.

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