

The Virgin Islands Consortium

UVI To Award Over 300 Degrees At 2017 Commencement Ceremony

VIC News / **Published On May 05, 2017 08:20 PM /**

Staff **May 05, 2017**



The University of the Virgin Islands will award more than 300 degrees at the 53rd annual Commencement Ceremonies on May 11 and 12, on the Albert A. Sheen Campus on St. Croix and on the St. Thomas Campus, respectively. Over 100 degrees will be awarded at 1:30 p.m. on Thursday, May 11, on the grounds of the Albert A. Sheen Campus. More than 200 degrees will be awarded at 1:30 p.m. on Friday, May 12, in the Sports and Fitness Center on the St. Thomas Campus.

The class speaker on the Albert A. Sheen Campus will be Carlotta M. Walcott. The class speaker on the St. Thomas Campus will be Monel Marcellin.

Iyanla Vanzant – prolific and commanding author, inspirational speaker, television personality and healer of people, will be UVI's 2017 commencement keynote speaker, and will receive an honorary doctorate. Outstanding educator Ruth Elma Thomas and musical icon Stanley Jacobs 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 Da-Vybe Radio Station 107.9 FM and will stream live online 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 ceremony will also be broadcast on 1090 AM/97.3 FM. Both ceremonies will also be live streamed on UVI's YouTube channel or from these direct links: May 11, Commencement on the Sheen Campus and May 12, Commencement on the St. Thomas Campus.

Interesting Graduate Stories on St. Croix

Andrea Brathwaite, a 39 year-old mother of six, started her journey toward a college degree from the University of the Virgin Islands 21 years ago, in 1996. Back then, she said, she was a teenaged mom whose parents valued education and were nevertheless prepared to pay for her education. But she wasn't ready. Shortly after she started classes, she dropped out to raise her son.

Her first child led to a second, and a third, until eventually she was the mother of six. It wasn't easy. In addition to the overwhelming work and expense associated with raising a large family while holding down a demanding full-time job as a para professional at Ricardo Richards Elementary School, Brathwaite faced a number of challenges that included the deaths of her father and half-sister; an accident in which she sustained numerous first and second degree burns; and a seemingly endless series of financial struggles. Throughout everything, however, she clung to her dream of one day earning a university degree.

Brathwaite returned to UVI several times over the ensuing years, but was always thwarted by a lack of time and money. Nevertheless, when she attended the graduation of a good friend and co-worker who had gone to UVI to pursue her dream of becoming a teacher, Brathwaite had an epiphany. During the ceremony, a nursing student was being honored for pushing through her studies and completing her degree even as she was being treated for cancer. "I realized right then and there that if this woman could do it, I could too," said Brathwaite. "I'm alive. I'm healthy. There's no reason why I can't do this."

And so she did. With assistance and encouragement from a mighty support system that included her mother, sisters and significant other; her co-workers and friends; and eventually a growing network of professors and staff at UVI, she leaned into the completion of a Bachelor's Degree in Information Systems and Technology. The journey has been a challenging one, just as Brathwaite suspected it would be, but her determination and persistence have earned her a consistent place on the Dean's List since 2014, and very soon she will graduate on St. Croix with the Emerald Jubilee Class

of 2017.

"I felt really excited today as I picked up my invitations," said Brathwaite. "It's been a struggle, but there have been so many professors that kept encouraging me. I was very fortunate to attend such an amazing and supportive institution."

Erick Willie, the first tubist to graduate from the University of the Virgin Islands with a Bachelor of Arts in Music Education, immediately put his degree to use upon graduating in 2014. He started to teach music at Arthur Richards Junior High School on St. Croix, and has been introducing youngsters to the joys of band, choral and Quellbe music for the last three and a half years.

Willie derives great satisfaction from working in the classroom, but knew that he wanted to be involved with shaping the direction of public education, particularly with regard to incorporating the arts into the core academic curriculum. So he returned to UVI for a Master of Arts in Educational Leadership. He will graduate on May 11, on the Albert A. Sheen Campus on St. Croix.

"The biggest challenge for me was finding a balance between being a student again, and being a teacher," said Willie. "But the program was exceptional, and I was able to do an internship with the administrators at my school, which enabled me to see what a principle really does. Based on that experience, I definitely want to pursue educational administration and leadership. There's such a huge need for initiatives like band that will raise school pride, and get students to feel enthusiastic about learning."

Willie himself was first exposed to music as a junior high school student who went on to become a valued member of the band at the St. Croix Educational Complex. He started out as a trumpet player, but when the band director said that tuba players were needed, Willie volunteered. He fell in love with the instrument. He had always dreamed of becoming a teacher, and was excited to learn that UVI would allow him to merge his two passions by training to become a music teacher.

"A lot of people have asked me why I didn't go to study in the states," said Willie. "I reply by asking them why I would want to study in the states when I can attend a school right here in the Virgin Islands that produces the best of the best." Willie continued, "A lot of people overlook UVI, and that is a mistake. This university has helped me to develop as a musician and as an educator. Through both programs I've learned so many strategies that I've been able to implement in the classroom. And I had a great time doing it."

Interesting Graduate Stories on St. Thomas

Alpheia Browne, an accounting major from St. Kitts, is not only about to graduate summa cum laude from UVI on the St. Thomas Campus, she is also preparing to leave a legacy. Having realized that there was a great opportunity for students involved with professional associations while at The Washington Center for Internships and Seminars last fall, she spearheaded an initiative to reactivate the National Association of Black Accountants (NABA), and the National Association of States Board of Accountancy Students Centre for Public Trust (NASBA Student CPT) at the University of the Virgin Islands.

"When students become members of professional organizations, they gain access to all sorts of information about scholarships, internships and job opportunities," said Browne.

"I feel happy and proud of the achievement. But I'd feel even happier if I was sure the organization would remain up and running after I leave." Browne continued, "It will be a lot of responsibility for the student who steps in to fill my executive position, but it's definitely worth it. If your college is not an active member of NABA or some other comparable organization, it puts you at a big disadvantage in terms of being nationally and internationally competitive."

While a student, she interned at Central Union Mission in Washington D.C. and at Domino's Pizza Inc. Corporate Headquarters in Ann Arbor, Michigan. She also served as a Thurgood Marshall College Fund Student Ambassador for 2016-2017, and as a Resident Assistant from 2015 – 2017.

Browne has several good job prospects on the horizon thanks to the excellent professional network she cultivated during her time as an undergraduate. She said she is excited to leave behind the student life as she embarks on the next phase of her journey in which she will join a community of business professionals among whom she has already established numerous connections. Browne also feels profoundly grateful to UVI not just for the fine education she received, but also for the empowerment and mentoring that have prepared her for a promising career.

"UVI has helped me to clarify exactly what I want to do," she said. "It also helped me build a great professional network filled with connections and references through a variety of internships, revamping NABA, and launching the NASBA Student CPT on campus." Browne continued, "I also want to credit my advisor, Dr. Dion Gows, who has become a true mentor to me. I know that our relationship will continue long after I leave this University."

Browne will begin preparing for the Certified Public Accountant (CPA) licensing exam shortly after graduation. She is currently in the process of deciding where she wants to live and work, but is open to a variety of national and international possibilities that include St. Thomas and her home island of St. Kitts.

Aron A. Gumbs is not just about to graduate from the University of the Virgin Islands with a Bachelors of Arts Degree in Hospitality and Tourism Management. Gumbs is about to graduate with \$10,000 in start-up capital to launch King Events, the mobile event and wedding planning service that he created and subsequently developed within UVI's 13D Entrepreneurship program and competition that started last fall. He placed third in the competition, which earned him the \$10,000 that will soon be used to jump-start King Events.

Originally from Anguilla, Gumbs confessed that when he was looking at colleges, his dream location was Las Vegas. But the costs were too high so he settled for the University of the Virgin Islands, figuring that he would stay two years and then transfer. Because the Hospitality and Tourism program allowed him to follow his passion, and because a significant portion of his education unfolded through hands-on internships that allowed him to hone his skills and make great contacts at the same time, he eventually saw no reason to leave.

"It has been wonderful to learn in and out of the classroom," said Gumbs. "Because of my summer internship experiences at Black Orchid Florist and Events and Ani Villas on

Anguilla, and at International Capital Management Company (ICMC)'s concierge and property management division on St. Thomas, I got to experience what it felt like to truly be in my zone." Gumbs continued, "I also made so many contacts through my program and these jobs that I have new clients even before King Events has officially launched."

King Events will be a mobile business, existing without a storefront but with a large vehicle in which Gumbs will be able to transport numerous samples to event and wedding planning house calls. This will allow him to be very flexible, which is important as highly customized events are to be the cornerstone of the business. Gumbs is not yet sure whether St. Thomas or Anguilla will function as a home base for his company, but he expects to work internationally as his company grows. He feels indebted to UVI, he said, for preparing him for a bright future in which he has the luxury of earning a living by doing what he most loves.

Feature Image: Crystal Peter. (Credit: Ernice Gilbert, VIC)