

The Virgin Islands Consortium

UVI To Confer Nearly 300 Degrees During 2019 Commencement

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Staff **May 14, 2019**



The University of the Virgin Islands will confer just under 300 degrees at the 2019 Commencement Ceremonies set for this week. The ceremonies will take place at 1 p.m. on Thursday, May 16, on the campus grounds of the Albert A. Sheen Campus on St. Croix and on Friday, May 17, at the Sports and Fitness Center on the St. Thomas Campus.

CNN Political Commentator, Lawyer and Former State Legislator Bakari Sellers will deliver the keynote address, UVI said.

UVI will bestow honorary degrees upon two prominent alumni - Cornel Williams and Dr. Simon Jones-Hendrickson. Cornel Williams will receive an Honorary Doctorate in Business Administration at St. Thomas' commencement ceremony and Dr. Simon Jones-Hendrickson, a former dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, will receive an Honorary Doctorate in Humane Letters on St. Croix.

This year's class speaker on the Albert A. Sheen Campus is Christopher Michael Rosario and Anyah Ferris will be the class speaker on the St. Thomas Campus.

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 to accommodate persons parking at Reichhold Center, the Administration and Conference Center (ACC), and the upper campus.

The ceremonies will be livestreamed on UVI's YouTube page - <https://www.youtube.com/user/UVIvideos>. The ceremony's livestream can also be found on the homepage of UVI's website – www.uvi.edu.

[DaVybe 107.9](#) FM will broadcast the commencement ceremonies. You can also listen live using the TuneIn App. [WUVI 97.3 FM](#) will simulcast DaVybe's stream online.

2019 Commencement Statistics

	St. Thomas	St. Croix	SXM
School of Business			
Master of Business Administration	1	3	
Master of Business Administration & Accounting (Dual Degree)	0		
Master of Accounting	1		
Bachelor of Business Administration	30	24	
Bachelor of Arts	18	11	1
Associate of Arts	2	1	
Total School of Business	52	39	1
School of Education			
Master of Arts Education	1	1	1
Master of Arts School Guidance and Counseling	2		
Master of Arts Educational Leadership	2		
Bachelor of Arts	9	6	4
Associate of Arts		2	
Total Education	14	9	5
School of Nursing			
Bachelor of Science	6	14	
Associate of Science			
Total Nursing	6	14	
College of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences			
Master of Arts in Public Administration	5	6	

Master of Arts in Psychology	2	1
Bachelor of Science	4	0
Bachelor of Arts	32	13
Associate of Applied Science	6	3
Total College of Lib & Arts	49	23

College of Science & Mathematics

Master of Arts in Mathematics for Secondary Education		
Master of Marine & Environmental Sciences	9	0
Bachelor of Science	48	6
Bachelor of Arts	2	0
Associate of Science	7	1
Associates of Applied Science	0	7
Total College of Science and Math	66	14

Ph.D In Creative Leadership for Innovation and Change

2

Total Creative Leadership for Innovation and Change 2

Statistics contained in this press release refer to degrees conferred in the fall (December 2018) and the spring (May 2019) unless otherwise noted. Students whose degrees were conferred in December are also listed in the commencement booklet for the May ceremonies. They also have the option of participating in the ceremonies.

Interesting graduate stories

Samuel Liburd Jr. An Ivy League Homegrown success story

As teenager at the Ivanna Eudora Kean High School (IEKHS), Samuel always knew that his passion for science would land him a career one day in medicine. The St. Johnian scholar received the Edmund Penn Scholarship, which funded his four-year journey at UVI. Liburd attributes his academic success in science to his father, who is a Biology teacher at the IEKHS.

With graduation imminent, Liburd recalls his first interaction with UVI as a recent high school graduate and participant in the Math Behind Science Program. It was in his first year at UVI that he decided that he wanted to pursue research. Subsequently Liburd spent his sophomore summer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Summer Research Program in computational neuroscience, an experience which birthed a dream to complete a M.D.-Ph.D. program. Torn between his love for research and his childhood dreams of becoming a medical doctor, Liburd was sure that the M.D.-Ph.D. was the perfect way for him to complete both. Liburd returned to UVI the following Fall with renewed purpose.

An enthusiastic Liburd recalls his early preparation for applying for the M.D. Ph.D.

According to Liburd, “it was a tedious process that I began in May 2018.” It was during the recovery of Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017 that Liburd prepared for the MCAT exams. If there was ever a moment on this journey where Liburd felt overwhelmed it was at this time where he studied without electricity and internet, while taking an overload of credits and juggling classes.

After earning top MCAT scores, Liburd applied to about 20 universities, he was interviewed by eight of these schools including, the University of Maryland, Emory University, and Mayo Clinic’s M.D.-Ph.D. programs. In Fall 2019, after earning a Bachelor’s of Science in Biology from UVI, Liburd will matriculate at Yale University to complete a M.D.-Ph.D. focusing on biomedical engineering, tissue engineering and regeneration for medical use, 3D tissue printing and engineering.

An overjoyed Liburd says he is happy he stuck to his goal as it is a great feeling to be accepted into the program.

“After all I went through preparing and applying for these programs I knew that if I could survive this, I could survive my M.D.-Ph.D.,” Liburd said. “These universities are really competitive with acceptance rates below 10 percent, many students do research and publish first before applying, I didn’t have any of that but thankfully I still got in.”

Natasha and Vernosha Henry: Sisterly Success

Vernosha and Natasha Henry are both graduating on the Albert A. Sheen Campus with Bachelor of Science in Nursing. They are a part of the second cohort of students to do so.

Vernosha’s journey at UVI was not like many of her peers. She did so while being a first-time single mother.

According to Vernosha, “it was difficult, I missed many of my son’s milestones,” Vernosha said. “I woke up early at mornings and hopscotched between my mother’s and siblings’ schedules, as they were the ones who looked after my son while I attended classes.”

As a means of desperation and sheer commitment, Vernosha recalls bringing her son to class with her at times when no one else could tend to him.

“My lecturers were very supportive, and most of my classmates were too,” Vernosha said. “When I did clinicals at the hospital I woke up at 4 a.m. just to ensure my son was taken care of for the day and I made it to the clinicals on time—this was perhaps one of the most challenging encounters I’ve had in my life.”

In addition to Vernosha’s challenges as a single mother and full-time student, she struggled greatly in her fourth semester where she failed a course which set her graduation back by one year. This setback was bittersweet for her as she would have to spend an additional year to earn her degree; however, it also meant that she will now be graduating with her little sister.

“At first it was really disappointing when I failed, however being in the same year as my sister was beneficial to me, she was very instrumental in improving my study habits, I believe it is more of an accomplishment to be graduating with her,” Vernosha said.

Natasha on the other hand began her journey at UVI on the St. Thomas Campus, but later transferred to the Albert A. Sheen Campus when the ability to earn a Bachelor of Science in Nursing became available on St. Croix. Returning to St. Croix also meant that she could now be a part of her nephew’s life.

Natasha too describes the nursing program as challenging; she remembers crying every time she got less than a B in her classes. As a committed student Natasha did everything in her power to secure top grades, even if it meant giving up her social life and committing fully to her studies. These efforts certainly did not go unnoticed. Natasha copped the award for the highest GPA as a junior in 2018, then again in 2019 for the highest GPA in the graduating class, the Nursing School Dean’s award for academic excellence and professional nursing qualities, as well as the UVI Nursing faculty award for leadership.

When asked how she feels about her upcoming graduation, Natasha says she is ecstatic.

“I am the one person in my class who is getting everyone excited about graduation,” Natasha said. “I am constantly posting on my social media accounts about graduation. This journey took me five years instead of four and the best part of it is that I will be graduating with my sister. I am very happy to have my sister by my side.”

Dr. Andrea Dorsey: At the Pinnacle of Virgin Islands’ Academic, Community and Spiritual Success

Andrea Dorsey will earn her Ph.D. in Creative Leadership for Innovation and Change this Spring and has done so within three consecutive years. Dorsey is the first UVI employee to earn this new degree.

Born and raised in the U.S. Virgin Islands, Dorsey always knew that she was going to complete a terminal degree. She first earned her bachelor’s degree in biology, then her master’s degree in education counselling both at UVI.

Utilizing her experience as a church and community leader, volunteer and academic advisor, Dorsey navigated effortlessly through her doctoral program while working full-time. As such, her day would begin at 6 a.m. with meditation, and end at 11 p.m. after completing three-hour classes, group assignments, project meetings, and lecturing part-time—an experience she says would not have been possible without a tremendous amount of sacrifice.

Dorsey believes that her doctoral degree is more about creating positive change.

“The degree symbolizes a sense of empowerment and serves as a source of inspiration for others particularly young people and women in the community and throughout the world,” Dorsey said.

Andrea accredits her success to the guidance and support from her parents, who instilled in her that education is not an option, but rather a requirement. For Andrea, this degree

has equipped her with the tools to become a highly trained creative leader who is able to harness her greatest potential.

“I am passionate about empowering others around me to achieve their greatest potential by living on purpose through the harnessing of their skills in order to dominate in their spheres of influence,” Dorsey said. “My training through the doctoral program has prepared me to continue my life work which is to teach others the skills that they need to build leaders, achieve higher levels of productivity and develop sustainable solutions.”

Jessica Nagel: A Journey without Excuses

Jessica Nagel grew up in Indiana and always wanted to become a veterinarian, a dream that later transformed into a passion for marine biology, and the successful completion of a Master of Marine and Environmental Science (MMES) from UVI.

In 2017, just after graduating from St. Joseph’s College in Rensselaer Indiana with a bachelor’s degree in biology with a concentration in wildlife, she enrolled in the MMES program at UVI in a cohort of 12 students just two weeks before Hurricanes Irma and Maria. The aftermath of the storms meant no electricity, no labs, damaged buildings and no office to work from; however, these occurrences were not excuses for late assignments and poor performance. According to Nagel her professors worked assiduously to ensure that the high standard of the program was maintained.

For Jessica, the memorable moments of her degree did not only include her studies, she enjoyed the outreach programs she participated in and loved partaking in the community events where she interacted with St. Thomas Community, especially the Youth Ocean Explorers Program. Jessica also worked as a teacher’s assistant where she assisted students and conducted lab experiments.

When asked how she feels about graduating Jessica said that she is dedicating the degree to her grandfather who passed away in February 2018.

“It is indeed a bittersweet moment, I am sad to leave all my friends behind, but I am so grateful for the experiences I got in the MMES program, which made me very marketable in the field,” Nagel said. “It is a fast-paced program, it was a lot of work and I am relieved it is over, I am on to the next step where I can begin putting my theory into practice.”

Jessica was determined to complete her studies and defended her thesis on April 12, 2019 where she researched: Using bioacoustics to measure the effects of hurricanes on bats in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands. Remarkably Jessica is the first of her cohort to defend her master’s thesis and to graduate in May 2019.