

The Virgin Islands Consortium

UVI's Free Tuition Program Shows Early Signs Of Success, Hall Says

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University of the Virgin Islands President Dr. David Hall said during a Finance Committee budget hearing Wednesday that while full data was still unavailable, the free tuition program signed into law by Governor Kenneth Mapp earlier this year is already showing signs of success, with enrollment up 16 percent year-on-year -- a percentage that is expected to grow.

The program begins this Fall and [secures \\$3 million](#) from the Internal Revenue Matching Fund to the University of the Virgin Islands Scholarship Revolving Fund to keep it operational.

Students must go through a verification process fueled by the U.S. Department of Education and be awarded financial aid and other grants before being supplemented by funding from the free tuition plan.

According to Mr. Hall, once a student applies for and completes the free application for federal student aid and has accepted all available federal financial awards and other financial aid and grants, then the difference in tuition is provided by the program and funds are posted directly to the student's account.

U.V.I.'s tuition is currently \$4,773 per semester, Mr. Hall said. Since the free funding awarded is generated based on the difference of aid the student receives, the range of free tuition awarded is anywhere from \$86.00 to \$4,631.00. The average tuition awarded in the program to date is \$3,553.00.

Applicants who qualify for the program total 773. This includes 596 students who have completed the entire application and gone through the verification process. However, only 475 students submitted all of their documents and have met all of the requirements, including maintaining a 2.5 GPA, and were fully approved.

Almost 1,000 students still do not qualify for various reasons that include GPAs under the stipulated 2.5 requirement and unmet residency requirements.

Shirley Lake-King, UVI chief financial officer and vice president for administration and finance, testified that of the \$3 million obligated to the free tuition policy program, less than \$690,000 has been awarded to students to date. Mr. Hall, however, explained that the funds were not solely to cover the fall semester. Funds are also being retained for the spring to cover students who do not qualify this semester and students attending during the summer term as well.

The UVI president added that there are still a large number of students going through the verification process and other students are in the process of registering and enrolling. "The hard numbers will be provided after orientation," Mr. Hall explained.

In addition, \$400,000 from the fund is budgeted to help students improve their GPAs to achieve the 2.5 requirement and qualify for the free tuition policy. This includes high school programs and existing U.V.I. students.

Philanthropic contributions

Senator Novelle Francis inquired about the total philanthropic contributions the university received for fiscal year 2019. Mr. Hall said that U.V.I.'s goal is \$3 million, and to date they have received \$2 million. He assured Mr. Francis that the university will achieve its intended goal in the remaining months of the year. "Because the funds are endowed, they have the potential to carry over to another academic year," Mr. Hall said.

RT Park contributions

[The Research and Technology Park](#), called the RT Park, launched programs aimed at advancing economic development in the U.S. Virgin Islands. One of those programs, the VI Talent Bank, is focused on attracting Virgin Islanders with degrees in technology back to the territory to work with companies within and outside of the RT Park.

Peter Chapman, the park's executive director, testified that contributions to U.V.I. this academic year will be well over \$1 million. These funds are disbursed in an ongoing basis to the university and are generated by the success of the businesses that the park attracts.

Free tuition program for senior citizens

A total of \$240,000 has been designated for a free tuition program for senior citizens. Title 17, Chapter 33, V.I.C. was amended through Act No. 5358 to allow persons sixty years of age or older, who are qualified by the Department of Human Services, and who are domiciled in the Virgin Islands for at least one year, to enroll, attend, audit, or take for credit, provided they qualify, any class or course of study at the University, free of charge on a space-available basis.