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Over 300 Graduate at UVI During Virtual Commencement Event

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UVI graduates participated in the institution's 2021 commencement virtually on Friday, May 14, 2021. By. SCREENSHOT/VICONSORTIUM/UVI

The University of the Virgin Islands on Friday graduated 313 students with degrees in a variety of disciplines, marking another successful year for the institution which two years ago [started offering](#) U.S. Virgin Islands students free tuition.

The range of disciplines, seen in detail [here](#), includes School of Education, School of Nursing, College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, College of Science and Mathematics, School of Business, School of Education, School of Nursing, and Ph. D in creative leadership and innovation.

The event was [held virtually](#) with special performances along with keynote speaker Dr. Raphael Warnock, a reverend and U.S. senator, who encouraged students to work hard and believe in themselves. Growing up in public housing, Mr. Warnock said he was one of twelve children in his family — the eleventh child — and the first college graduate. He said it's not prudent to look at where someone ends up before examining where this person came from. "I believe and my family taught me that I could achieve anything if I believe in God and if I believe in myself," he said. "And they taught me that if I would just discipline my mind and stay focused, I could achieve great things."

Dr. Hall also delivered remarks, with the main theme of his talk seeking to encourage graduates to keep rising.

Days ahead of the graduation, UVI provided graduate stories highlighting the path to conferment for some students. They are below.

Service and leadership have always been at the core of everything that Kelvina Salters was drawn to. Her involvement in school events growing up in St. Kitts had already taught her of the invaluable benefits and thus pushed her to do more once she began her journey at the University of the Virgin Islands (UVI).

Salters' commitment to leadership was demonstrated in her service as a resident assistant, a position she held from her admission in 2018 until 2020. She exemplified the University's core values of civic and global engagement by participating in the Thurgood Marshall College Fund and the Washington Center in 2019.

"Service and leadership are about empathizing with others and helping them to meet their needs," Salters says. "In service to my community and school, I felt that being able to inspire and encourage someone to want to make an impact on the world is a major accomplishment."

Among the things Salters was involved in, she said, her most rewarding experience was being a resident assistant. "This role added significant value to my time at UVI," Salters says. "Being able to connect with my peers on a more intimate level; more than what meets the eyes. It opened a lot of doors for me. I was able to tap into a lot of the resources that were made available to me," she said. "I was also able to glean a lot of interpersonal and professional skills at the same time."

"Having identified my leadership skills and my consistence in academics softened the ground and made my journey a lot easier. I was able to form a bond with members of the University's administration and other students who saw my potential," Salters says.

Salters maintained high academic achievement, making the Dean's List each semester all while taking advantage of opportunities to lead.

She has just completed her first step toward her lifelong goal of becoming a public administrator, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Social Science and a minor in political science.

"It is the beginning of realizing one of my career aspirations," Salters says. "I hope one day that God would open the doors for me to make my mark in this field, particularly in my home country, St Kitts."

As a first-generation graduate, Kelvina says that "obtaining this degree is a sign of victory," Salters said. "My family has always stressed the importance of education in order to improve life. I believe in the saying, "what the trunk couldn't do, the branches must do."

“I will always remember the family feeling, which was a major theme on our campus,” Salters said reflecting on her time spent at UVI. “That feeling of warmth, welcome and love, which is invaluable to a wholesome academic experience. That is one thing that would remain distinct in my mind forever.”

Salters was nominated by her peers on the Sheen Campus to be the Class Speaker at this year’s Virtual Commencement Ceremony.

Ilive Peltier - Moving Forward to a More Sustainable Future

Dr. Ilive Peltier wants to change the world and is well-poised to do so. Having earned a Ph.D. in Creative Leadership for Innovation and Change from the University of the Virgin Islands, the recent graduate and long-time educator is up for the challenge. As a Ph.D. student, Peltier studied the role of education, creativity and innovation in sustainability efforts with a focus on the effects of climate change in the Caribbean. Part of her research and ideas on what can be done to mitigate climate change will be published in a new book this year.

“The Caribbean needs more awareness, needs help, and needs to change the way we relate to and think about our environment,” urges Peltier, who lives on St. John. She remembers visiting the mangroves in Coral Bay after the 2017 hurricanes and being struck by the damage. “I just cried,” she recalls. For Peltier, the hurricanes, which hit both the Virgin Islands and her native Dominica, were another wake-up call to the climate crisis.

“I decided on this area of study, not for personal reasons, but for the benefit of our community, our islands, our region,” she said. Though Peltier initially enrolled in the Ph.D. program’s Education track, she switched to the Creativity track when she became intrigued with studying sustainability and climate change mitigation. “With the world changing and education being the catalyst for social change, I felt that the Creativity track was the better place for an educator like me who believes in the ‘revolution’ of education for sustainability, and the only place this can be done is in a space where the imagination can be sparked even more,” says Peltier.

“Dr. Mohomodou Boncana was my mentor in the program and became like family to me,” she says. “He taught me how to do great research. When he passed away, I promised his family and myself I would be the best researcher I could be.”

In addition to her research and writing, Peltier is actively involved in local community outreach and collaborates with other global changemakers as the Island Innovation Ambassador for the USVI and Dominica. Island Innovation is an international organization whose mission is to drive sustainable change across islands and rural areas around the world. As a representative, Peltier attends workshops on sustainable development and receives networking support to develop her own initiatives locally.

Prior to enrolling in UVI’s Ph.D. program, Peltier taught at Ivanna Eudora Kean High School for eight years and taught at the elementary level for 16 years in Dominica. “Education has been my passion,” she said. In 2009, Peltier earned a Bachelor of Arts in English at UVI. After witnessing the change in demographics in VI public schools and the needs of non-English speakers, Peltier went on to earn a master’s degree in English as a Second Language from Ana G. Mendez University (formerly Universidad del Turabo) of Puerto Rico. In conjunction with the Ph.D. program at UVI, Peltier also earned a Graduate Certificate in Creativity and Change Leadership from State University of New York College at Buffalo.

Speaking about her experience at UVI, Peltier said, “It is the best educational experience any student can ask for. The University is small and provides for a very welcoming environment. I had some of the most supportive professors, and the staff is exceptional. My years at UVI left me with a network of great and helpful acquaintances.”

Leading the Way - Xuxa Garroden Calls on Classmates to Make an Impact

“We can be the impact!” This is Xuxa Garroden’s charge. Her calling to serve others came at a young age. Long before planning her own career and enrolling at the University of the Virgin Islands, Xuxa was driven to serve.

While growing up in St. Kitts, Xuxa recognized that many people didn’t have access to the healthcare they needed. She was especially moved by a neighbor who became a quadriplegic as a teenager after a diving accident.

“I raised funds for him to obtain a medical visa to travel for specialized care,” she recalled. Despite her efforts, however, she soon realized off-island healthcare would be unaffordable. That problem sparked Xuxa’s mission to position herself to help people.

This May, Xuxa will earn a Bachelor of Science Degree in chemistry and plans to enroll in medical school at St. George University in Grenada in the Fall. Reflecting on her time at UVI, she said, “Being mentored by my UVI advisor Dr. Yakini Brandy helped me to gain tenacity and stir discipline. She encouraged me to persevere and reminded me ‘you have what it takes’.” Xuxa also highly credits her success to her aunts and uncles in St. Thomas as well as her family and mentors in St. Kitts for their unwavering support throughout her journey.

As a chemistry major preparing for a future in medicine, Xuxa was very committed to her studies. She moved on campus during her junior year for an easier commute to her classes and her on-campus job as a tutor at the Center for Student Success. She took advantage of opportunities for summer programs at UVI, including participating in research with Dr. Stanley Latesky, chair of UVI’s Chemistry and Physical Sciences Department. “Being able to do research every summer was the catapult for being academically well rounded in my view,” said Xuxa. “It helped broaden my scope of critical thinking and reasoning through independent and group research.”

Xuxa also participated in an exchange program at the University of Michigan in her sophomore year. “It was truly a memorable experience,” she said, recounting the time her anatomy professor took her and a group of students on an overnight camping trip in the snow in Northern Michigan.

Xuxa equates her experience at UVI with opportunity. “UVI’s plethora of programs and academic counseling continues to create a platform for Caribbean students to attain a higher education in an affordable, familiar environment,” she said. “I would encourage others to enroll. It’s a small door with many experiences.”

Prepared for the challenges of the world, Xuxa urges her peers, “Although the degree belongs to us, our mandate now is to contribute and serve others.” And that is exactly what she intends to continue doing.

Xuxa is active in her community and founded a charity known as “We Drive Foundation” in 2015. For her efforts, she received the Queens Young Leader Award St. Kitts and Nevis for Community Involvement by the Queen Elizabeth Trust in 2017. She was also named an Associate Fellow of the Royal Commonwealth Society in 2018 for her work to improve the lives of Commonwealth citizens.

Xuxa earned an associate's degree in General Studies at the Clarence Fitzroy Bryant College in St. Kitts, and worked to save money to continue her education abroad. "My quest to acquire higher education came from my love for my country and the desire to do more for people unable to attain that because of barriers of language and poverty," she said.

She was granted a scholarship to begin her studies at UVI in January 2018 and received another from Sandy Point Benevolent Society later than year. Xuxa was chosen to be the Class Speaker at this year's Virtual Commencement Ceremony on the Kean Campus.

Sandra Antoine: Striving Higher; 'Whatever You Put Your Mind to is Possible'

Sandra Antoine will soon earn her Master of Arts Degree in Educational Leadership from the University of the Virgin Islands. Currently, an elementary school teacher at the Arthur A. Richards K-8 school on St. Croix, Sandra has set forth the path to one day become an education administrator.

Sandra enrolled at UVI as a part-time student, where she started out taking two courses. However due to the untimely passing of her father, Sandra decided to take some time off. "That put my master's courses on a pause, so instead of just taking off a semester, I took an entire year off," mentions Sandra. "After taking a year off, I was blessed with my two last kids, my daughter and son, which required me to take some more time off."

After taking some time off, Sandra decided to re-enroll into UVI to earn her master's degree. "Time was going by and I really wanted to finish my degree program," says Sandra. She recalls reaching out to Dr. Magdalene Tobias for assistance with re-enrolling. "She was really excited to hear that I was re-enrolling, I think she was even more excited than I was," recalls Sandra.

Sandra is grateful for her time at the University and the overwhelming support she received from her family, Dr. Denis Griffith and other faculty members from the School of Education. To students pursuing their bachelors or master's degree, Sandra advised them, "to always find time to pray about it. Whatever you put your mind to do is possible."

She also emphasized for students who are currently enrolled and are raising children, to not be discouraged. "Earning my master's degree is an example that I am setting forth for my four children," added Sandra. "For those students who are parents and are currently working to earn their degree, know that you are setting forth a great example for your children so that they too can be successful and push forward towards something positive."

While enrolled as an undergraduate student at UVI, Sandra remembers waking up early mornings to catch the Vitran Bus in order to attend class on time, while at the same time working a part-time job and raising two children.

In 2005, she earned her Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education. Since then, she has been teaching students for 15 years, a career in which she says is rewarding. "It has been such a great feeling to see some of my students graduate from high school and even college."

With her bachelor's degree in hand, Sandra went on to pursue her master's degree.

In her final semester at UVI, Sandra says her field learning project was challenging yet a wonderful experience. "I had the opportunity to shadow administrators at Adult Education, Eulalie Rivera K-8 school, Central High School and John H. Woodson junior high school," says Sandra. She was able to see first-hand what was taught in her educational leadership courses as it relates to

the personalities of teachers, parents and students.

A Family Affair – Father & Daughter Graduate Together

According to Kerry Harrigan, his daughter Kerrina “has always been a daddy’s girl.” Still, he could not have imagined she would follow so closely in his footsteps. This May, Kerry and Kerrina Harrigan will graduate together from the University of the Virgin Islands (UVI), each earning a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Criminal Justice.

The father and daughter pair say they didn’t really plan it that way. Kerry, who is a 26-year veteran and Lieutenant in the VI Police Department, had already earned an Associate’s degree in Criminal Justice in 2009, but wanted to pursue a higher degree. He started working on his bachelor’s at UVI, but then paused for a while. Kerrina, whose mother is also a police officer, says she chose the field of study not because of her parents, but because she personally found it interesting. When Kerrina enrolled in UVI in the Fall of 2016, Kerry decided it was a good opportunity to finish up his coursework. At the time, they did not realize they would end up finishing together.

“It’s really special to graduate together,” says Kerrina who enjoyed the experience of going to college with her dad. “It was nice to have someone in the class I already knew and to work on assignments together,” she said. “Overall, the experience was very good,” said Kerry, admitting that he may have been a little overprotective of Kerrina at times. He says there was “no competition” when it came to grades. Kerrina was always a very good student.

Kerrina, who graduates cum laude, is thinking of pursuing a Master’s degree in Business Management. Highlights from her experience at UVI include meeting people from different cultures and gaining life skills.

Kerry spoke of the challenge of juggling work, school and family responsibilities. However, he says he loved online learning and being able to work at his own pace. “The coursework really helped me to grow on the job especially as a public speaker,” he says. Compared to past college experience he says, “UVI professors tend to take more time with students and are interested in their wellbeing not just academics. Dr. Sheena Walker, UVI assistant professor of Psychology, was always a great help to everyone.”

Kerry and Kerrina also praised other professors including Dr. Patricia Hawkins-Pierre, Professor David Edgecombe, Professor William Curtis and the late Professor Gene Emmanuel. “I remember Professor Emmanuel really encouraging me to continue and not to quit. Looking back, I would do it all over again.”

Dr. Shamika Williams Moves Full STEAM Ahead

Dr. Shamika Williams is wasting no time putting her education to work. With the Doctorate in Creative Leadership for Innovation and Change, and a concentration in Educational Leadership for Change, that she will receive at the University of the Virgin Islands (UVI), Williams is already applying what she’s learned to her role as the State STEM Director at the VI Department of Education.

“I want to use all of my training to educate students in the Virgin Islands,” she says. “Although I am moving more towards leadership, I am still an educator at heart.”

Williams' doctoral dissertation on STEAM education examined the benefits and opportunities that exist in STEAM, which stands for science, technology, engineering, art and math. Not only is Williams an advocate for STEAM, but she also believes in a more holistic approach to teaching and learning that encourages students to become smart, creative, competitive and compassionate citizens.

Williams began her own education on St. Thomas, graduating from Charlotte Amalia High School. She earned a Bachelor of Science in Biology at Xavier University, Louisiana and a Master's degree in Forensic Science at the National University, California. She considered medical school for a while, but ultimately ended up in education receiving certification as a secondary teacher. "I found my purpose in education," she remarks.

In 2001, Williams began working as a science teacher at Ivanna Eudora Kean High School (IEKHS) where she taught for more than 13 years. In 2013, she received the Presidential Award of Excellence in Mathematics and Science earning the chance to meet President Barack Obama.

In 2015, Williams left the classroom to pursue other positions within the Department of Education where she was the program manager for a grant that provided opportunities for teachers and paraprofessionals to further their education. Since 2016, Williams has served as the State STEM Director. "It's important for me to assist leadership in effecting the change necessary to improve student and employee achievement. They go hand in hand," she says.

As a member of the first cohort in UVI's Ph.D. program, Williams joined four other female students, calling themselves the "Lady Doctors." "I was happy to have been among the first students in the program and it was critical to have a circle of friends," she says. "I would definitely recommend the program. Hats off to the professors in the educational leadership track. They ensured whatever we needed to succeed was accessible."

Williams dedicates her degree to her sons, family and friends.