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UVI Approves Degrees Dance, Music Performance and Theater, Aquaponics and Horticulture; Covid Policy Updated

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Young woman dancing Raymonda ballet on stage By. GETTY IMAGES

The University of the Virgin Islands Board of Trustees during its regular quarterly meeting on Saturday voted to establish a bachelor of science degree program in aquaponics and a bachelor of science degree program in horticulture. The board also voted unanimously to approve a new academic degree major in dance, music performance, and theatre.

UVI said the bachelor of science degree program in horticulture is designed to provide students interested in horticulture with the requisite knowledge to support their interests and career goals.

Horticulture is a growing field of employment with a 14 percent job increase in 2022. Students will be required to complete 120 credit hours plus two credits of physical education, including general education coursework, UVI said. Fifty-five credit hours in required horticulture courses, including plant pathology, general horticulture, and tropical horticulture, and eight credits in elective horticulture courses, including tropical agroecology, forest and nursery management and special topics in agriculture research, and entomology are needed.

The institution of higher learning said aquaponics is an emerging and evolving industry with an estimated market of \$1.5 billion in 2022. The bachelor of science degree program in aquaponics is designed to provide students with in-depth knowledge and understanding across different disciplines to support their interests and career goals. The students will be required to complete 120 credit hours plus two credits of physical education, including general education coursework. Also needed are 50 credit hours in required aquaponics courses, including aquaculture production, aquaculture techniques, and hydroponics and aquaponics, and nine credits in elective aquaponics courses, including introduction to biotechnology, agricultural regulations, and principles of agricultural business.

Regarding the major in dance, music performance, and theatre, UVI said the major is a performance-based degree aimed at creating skilled performers and technicians who will be critical to the overall success of artistic endeavors in the territory and beyond, UVI said. Students will complete 48 hours of general education coursework to allow for more performance-based courses within the majors.

At the meeting, the board approved a modification of the policy for admitting international students whose primary language is not English. The modification allows for a mid-tier threshold for the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) scores for non-English speaking students and requires students to be enrolled in fundamental English skills courses while concurrently enrolled in existing courses for English as a Second Language (ESL) predicated on the students' TOEFL scores, placement scores and advising by the Center for Student Success. This policy modification will not affect local students or students attending UVI through partnerships with other Eastern Caribbean countries.

While in Executive Session, the board approved a revised vaccination policy that permits a testing protocol to substitute for the vaccination requirement for unvaccinated students. In making this decision, UVI said the board considered improving health conditions in the territory and the transition from a pandemic to an endemic phase of Covid-19.

With the changes to the policy, unvaccinated students can attend in-person classes and participate in other campus-based activities. However, to live in the residence halls students still must be vaccinated. Unvaccinated students who desire to attend in-person classes will have to submit to testing on a periodic basis, the regularity of the test will be determined based on an agreement between the UVI Administration and the Department of Health, UVI said. It is anticipated that the testing will be twice a month initially but will be reduced to monthly as conditions continue to improve.

This testing exception does not apply to employees, though they are encouraged to be tested as appropriate, according to UVI. In addition to vaccinations and testing, all students and employees are encouraged to continue to take precautions and utilize masks, social distancing, and sanitation measures.

The board also approved a new policy for awarding posthumous degrees created to establish the minimum standard criteria and procedures under which posthumous and memoriam degrees may be recommended to the President and the UVI Board. UVI said the policy is intended for students who pass away before completing all the requirements for their degree and to recognize their academic achievements or connection to the university.

In other action, the board unanimously re-elected Henry Smock to serve as chairman and Oran Roebuck as vice-chairperson.

“I thank all of the Trustees for their faith in myself and Trustee Roebuck. We have a lot on our plate, both today and coming up. I do appreciate the confidence,” said Board Chair Henry Smock.

During the President’s Report, UVI President David Hall highlighted the achievements of UVI students and faculty as well as various university initiatives. As is customary during the board meetings, Mr. Hall presented the President’s Appreciation Award in recognition of the excellence and commitment of those UVI employees or units that have performed exceptionally within the last quarter.

This quarter’s award was presented to the Commencement Committees, under the leadership of Nereida Washington, associate vice president for Operations and Business Services - St. Croix; Gail Steele, Board of Trustees liaison, and Una Dyer, director of Presidential Operations, that were responsible for the production of the 2022 Commencement Ceremonies. “For the first time since 2018 we had in person ceremonies and this was a wonderful accomplishment,” stated Mr. Hall.

Additionally, the UVI president presented a second President’s Appreciation Award to Vice President for Institutional Assessment and Information Services, Sharlene Harris and V. Veda Richards, associate director for Human Resources and Organizational Development/director of Employee Benefits and Immigration Services, for their work and creativity in leading the planning and implementation of the University’s Employee Wellness Day initiative.

“The Wellness Days were a much-needed reprise for employees that helped to improve the morale and collaborative engagement among those who took part,” he said. “The outstanding leadership of Vice President Harris and Associate Director Richards was critical in ensuring that health and wellness remain a priority for our employees.”

Also at Saturday’s meeting, Board Trustee Erica Johnson Creamer, chair of the Governance Committee, presented the results of the Board’s 2021-2022 Self-Assessment. “Overall, the assessment results indicated we have a very solid body, working efficiently and effectively to meet its duties and responsibly to the University and to the people of the Virgin Islands,” said Trustee Creamer, who provided a summary of the annual assessment report.

Board Chairman Smock reported that while in executive session, the board approved and received reports and updates on the following:

1. Approved Executive Session Minutes of the March 5, 2022, Meeting of the Board
 2. Received a report from Dr. Hall regarding the vaccination policy and approved a revised policy
 3. Received a report from the Academic Research and Student Affairs Committee and approved tenure for eligible faculty members
 4. Received a report from the Finance and Budget Committee
 5. Received an update on personnel matters
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1. Received an update on legal matters from legal counsel

The next scheduled meeting of the Board of Trustees will be held on Saturday, Oct. 22, 2022.