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UVI's 2023 Commencement Shines Spotlight on Philanthropic Spirit of 'Vivacious, Iconic, Profound' Class

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The University of the Virgin Islands' 2023 Commencement Ceremony at the Albert A. Sheen Campus on St. Croix on Thursday, May 11, 2023. By. MEDIAONE

ST. CROIX — The University of the Virgin Islands marked a momentous occasion today as it celebrated the 59th Commencement Ceremony on St. Croix, honoring the achievements of the island's Class of 2023.

The festivities unfolded at UVI's Albert A. Sheen Campus, with the St. Thomas event scheduled for Friday at the Orville E. Kean Campus.

During the first ceremony, a sense of pride and accomplishment filled the air as 96 degrees were conferred upon the graduates. The Class of 2023, affectionately calling themselves the "Vivacious, Iconic, Profound Class of 2023," embarked on a remarkable journey of academic growth and personal triumph.

Addressing the audience of graduates, faculty, and esteemed guests, University President Dr. David Hall expressed his deep admiration for the graduating class. In his opening remarks, he acknowledged the resilience displayed by the graduates in the face of adversity. "You and others had doubts, but you overcame them. The pandemic had an enormous impact on you, but you did not let it stop you," Hall affirmed.



Among the standout graduates was Kimberly Gereau, a school of business student who graduated magna cum laude with a bachelor's degree in management. Ms. Gereau's journey was marked by remarkable perseverance and determination. Despite losing her home during the hurricanes of 2017 and the passing of both her parents, Ms. Gereau remained undeterred in her pursuit of education. Reflecting on her accomplishments, she expressed, "This is really a dream come true for me. This is for my ancestors."

Ms. Gereau, who currently works in the field of youth development as a unit director at the Caribbean Center for Boys & Girls, emphasized her commitment to community and progress. She encouraged others to pursue their goals regardless of age or perceived limitations. "It doesn't matter whether you're 50, 40, 20, just keep going, continue on," Ms. Gereau passionately advised.



Shanisa Emmanuel (Credit: Ernice Gilbert, V.I. Consortium)

Another outstanding graduate, Shanisa Emmanuel, exemplified dedication and perseverance in her educational journey. Having earned her bachelor's degree in business administration with a concentration in accounting from UVI in 2018, Ms. Emmanuel received her master's in accounting during the ceremony. She currently holds a vital role as the team lead for the 2024-2025 government of the Virgin Islands budget cycle at the Office of Management and Budget. Ms. Emmanuel's boss, OMB Director Jenifer O'Neal was present at the ceremony in support of her employee.

Ms. Emmanuel spoke candidly about the challenges of balancing work, school, and motherhood. However, her unwavering determination for personal growth and her daughter's role as an inspiration kept her motivated. "Next stop is my CPA," Ms. Emmanuel declared, highlighting her future aspirations.



From left to right: Deputy OMB Director Monique Ferrell, OMB 2024-2025 GVI budget lead Shanisa Emmanuel, OMB Director Jenifer O'Neal, Abbelle Bakr and Lucas Pascal in the back. (Credit: Ernice Gilbert, V.I. Consortium)

Dr. Hall, the UVI president commended the graduates for choosing to pursue their education within the Virgin Islands, acknowledging the global experiences they gained through student exchange programs, Passport to the World, and various conferences. He also celebrated the graduating class's generosity, noting that the campus achieved an impressive 86 percent giving rate, demonstrating a commitment to giving back.

The keynote speaker for the ceremony, Dr. Michael Eric Dyson, captivated the audience with his insightful address. Known for his extensive work as an author, professor, and political and cultural commentator, Dr. Dyson weaved lyrics from Hip Hop music into his speech, eliciting enthusiastic applause and cheers from the graduates. He emphasized the importance of celebrating black pride and achievements, urging the graduates to embrace their identity and strive for excellence. "You ain't gotta hang your head for nobody. You proud to be black!" Dr. Dyson passionately asserted.

The university bestowed honorary degrees upon two remarkable individuals, further highlighting their significant contributions. Dr. Dyson was recognized for his exceptional achievements and received an honorary degree. Joining him in this prestigious recognition was Clema S. Williams-Lewis, executive director of the Women's Coalition of St. Croix, who was honored with a Doctor of Humane Letters degree. UVI acknowledged Williams-Lewis as an inspiring protector of the vulnerable and a profound servant of justice, peace, and healing.

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