

The University of the West Indies

Cave Hill Campus

Student Awards Ceremony 2017

Tuesday, April 04, 2017

Good evening, and welcome to the 2017 Student Awards Gala, a very special welcome of course to our dedicated and committed sponsors, your generous and consistent investment in these students makes all of this possible and worthwhile, and we thank you.

Students, it gives me tremendous joy to see so many of you here today, you who have captured the top scholarships, awards and prizes for outstanding academic performance. Let me offer heartiest congratulations to you and say that you are on the right track. Keep up this level of performance and achievement and you will emerge with first class honours, distinctions or high commendation. In the process you will join a distinguished cohort whom I have started to meet and

greet personally in a special reception, during the week of our annual graduation ceremony. For those of you who are completing your degrees this academic year, the senior management team and I look forward to welcoming you to that special reception to celebrate your scholarly achievements. Mark the date, October 19th, 2017 in your calendars; because if we welcome you, it means you have excelled in your degree programme.

As I have indicated in my message to you this year, you have justifiable reason to be proud of those achievements that have caused you to be here this evening. You have proven to be worthy recipients of your upcoming awards because you have been subjected to a highly competitive and rigorous process which resulted in your capturing from among your peers, the top prizes on offer. You are here because of your disciplined and dedicated work and exceptional performance. I am certain that your sponsors are as proud of you as you are of yourselves and I would urge you to join me in thanking them for their continued

financial support for higher education in these very difficult economic times.

I read last week in one of the local newspapers that I gave an alleged response to a Government minister who, according to the newspaper, had stated that graduates come into the workplace with a piece of paper but they do not know what to do. The report did not state what type of graduate the minister was referring to but juxtaposing the minister's comments against my own might have given an impression that the reference was to university graduates and not just any tertiary level graduate. In any case, the reporter did state that my comments were in an apparent response to those made by the minister. They were not. I was not even aware of the Minister's comments before. However I do welcome remarks by honourable Ministers and members of the public. We are a public institution and we value holding ourselves accountable for fulfilling the University's mission and living up to our vision.

My remarks were made at last Tuesday night's opening of the Mandela Freedom Park. There, I stated quite emphatically that at the University

of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, we take our educational mandate very seriously and we are not a degree mill. It is a comment I have made repeatedly and will continue to do throughout my tenure as Principal. By that I am saying to all of you here, you must leave this institution qualitatively different to when you entered. We do not view your university years as an assembly line production, onto which we stamp “University graduate” at the end of those years. We do intend and expect you to graduate with skills and knowledge in your area of study. But more critically, we want you to inculcate a burning desire to make Caribbean societies better, to translate your love for your respective countries into a commitment to improve the quality of life in the entire Caribbean region. You may wonder, this sounds like a tall order from the Principal. It is not, it is quite simple but very effective and powerful. Wherever you show up, give your best, and then improve on that. If we all did what we are supposed to do, to the best of our abilities, if we actively seek solutions to reoccurring challenges, if we approach our responsibilities with commitment and dedication, the kind you displayed

to earn your awards this evening, we would lift the level of wellbeing in our societies.

Even as important as the qualifications you gain, is the attitude you bring to the workplace and the community space. I have heard anecdotally that our graduates behave as know- it- alls. If you do, then abandon that attitude. It is counterproductive and prevents real learning. If you understand the significance of recognizing yourself as having a vested stake in Barbadian\Caribbean societies, in your willingness to learn new skills in the work place, you will be demonstrating that the Cave Hill Campus is not a degree mill.

A degree from The UWI is a worthy qualification. Besides coming from an institutionally accredited, quality assured University, it guarantees its holder unrestricted passage within the CARICOM region for the purpose of employment and assures employers that they are getting a highly trained graduate with flexible competencies required for changing Caribbean economies and societies. We are staring at the digital economy and the Cave Hill Campus is becoming a smart Campus to deal

with the digitized knowledge economy. You will not simply be a trained apprentice equipped for an industrial economy, although we would argue that the training of a UWI graduate is of such to enable him or her to also hold their own in whatever sphere you find yourself.

I am well aware of the arguments about a proliferation of graduates who are over qualified for available jobs. And this may even be true for one country, but not throughout the CARICOM region. It is time for UWI graduates to see the entire region as their place of employment. For example, with the discovery of oil in Guyana, very soon our Caribbean neighbor will have a demand for highly skilled productive workers in a range of occupations; petrochemical engineers, accountants, lawyers, caterers, to name a few. I give you our students an assurance that as a UWI graduate, you will enjoy employment mobility, you will be in a better position to acquire a job and earn more than non-graduate citizens over your lifetime. You are being educated to think, to apply your skills in new areas, to question and share ideas, all of which will allow you to

demonstrate responsible citizenship, contribute to your intellectual growth and the region's ongoing economic and cultural development.

Generally, the debate over the work-readiness of a university graduate has tended to be narrowly-focused on whether a graduate is able to hit the ground running after landing a job. It is a debate that excludes the fact that there is still need for work place learning, it is a debate which excludes a candidate's ability to think critically, and to analyse and present evidence. These are skills which are increasingly in demand in knowledge-based economies. These are the types of skills on which we are focusing in an overall mission that may be summarized as aiming to ensure that everyone who enters UWI, Cave Hill, has the opportunity to realize their full potential and highest ambition.

We want our graduates to be as work-ready as they can be for their varying work places when they secure a job. We recognize that work-readiness is a skills premium, and it is for this reason that we have a robust internship programme that is led by our Office of Student Services working assiduously with our various faculties and the

corporate sector. I want to thank all the companies who last year provided our students with internships. They were led by Ansa McAl who made 18 internships available. On behalf of the students, I say thank you and encourage others to join the internship programme.

We will do our part to prepare the students and we encourage, employers, businesses and the public sector to provide students with the opportunities to learn on the job. Do not expect the skills of a CEO or a Chief Financial Officer at entry level positions. We will provide you with a graduate competent and capable of entering the workplace, and who has to adapt to translating knowledge into rapidly changing workplace practices. Do not resort to criticism without a willingness to provide on the job training, mentoring and internships to your future labour force, customers and clients. When our graduates attain the required fit right our economies and societies prosper. These young people represent our collective future. Collectively we have a responsibility to prepare them for work and solid citizenship. Today, I am a more skilled University Administrator than I was ten years ago.

Each one of us in leadership and management faced our own learning curve. Let us not pretend we entered our various workplaces as CEOs and Leaders.

At Cave Hill, our aim is that every student who enters the world of work would have had a period of internship or job attachment to give them that vital employee experience. That is the aim, we are not there yet. We accept there is no guarantee that the student internship positions will be in line with the jobs they eventually secure based on their qualifications or employment availability, but we believe internships are vital components of work place readiness that all employers want.

Globalisation has altered the face of employment. Global compatibility requires a new mindset and cross-cultural skills. Industry and business require more graduates with 21st century skills such as critical thinking and analytical competencies, cognitive load management, cross-cultural intelligence, the ability to formulate and solve interdisciplinary problems, all with a sophisticated approach to research and understanding of the relevance of research.

The proliferation of information technologies has contributed to altering the public perception of the university. Instead of being seen as only physical campuses, which some viewed traditionally as Ivory Towers, today's universities make increasing use of virtual technologies and ICT driven educational platforms. Universities are proving that we are worthy catalysts capable of driving economic development and adding significant value to our immediate communities and further afield. For example, whether you like what is expressed or researched, no one can accuse the Cave Hill Campus of being isolated from the Barbadian\Caribbean community. The UWI Cave Hill Campus is a proud participant in the national \regional space. We are not educational carpetbaggers. We are an intrinsic part of this region, and we are here to stay.

Students, once again, I congratulate you on your outstanding achievements. To our donors, sponsors, and benefactors, I offer the Campus' heartfelt thanks to you, for your generosity in enabling us to educate these young women and men, thank you. And to everyone here,

I look forward to welcoming all of you on Easter Monday, April 17th,
4PM to the RBC-UWI Race for the Kids do sign up.

I thank you.