THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES  
CAVE HILL CAMPUS  

REMARKS

PRESENTATION OF A WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE VAN  
BY THE MARIA HOLDER MEMORIAL TRUST

WEDNESDAY, 24TH APRIL 2019

PROTOCOL ...
Director, Office of Student Services, Ms. Dale Lynch and staff of the Office of Student Services, Trustee of the Maria Holder Memorial Trust, Ms. Mary Brewster, UWI Colleagues, Members of the Media, Good morning and a special welcome to all who are visiting Cave Hill Campus for the first time. We are here to thank the Maria Holder Trust on the presentation. We are very pleased with all we have been doing for our students with disabilities.

This care and professionalism is evident in the range of services provided to our students, and we know that there are always areas where we can improve and we are quite willing and determined to do so. Over the years, the Cave Hill Campus has had a number of students with disabilities, whether physical, medical or learning, and we have introduced a number of strategic and operational elements aimed at ensuring that this segment of our student population adjusts successfully as they participate in higher learning, the core activity of the campus, as well as non-academic pursuits.

The Campus’s commitment to this group of students is reflected in two (2) of the Core Values of The UWI Triple A Strategic Plan 2017-2022, namely Diversity and Student Centredness. Further, in this the second year of our Strategic Plan, we intensify our efforts to fulfill our goal to be a university for all, making tertiary level education more accessible, while being creative, caring, accountable, motivated and professional as the Campus aims to not simply satisfy, but exceed the expectations of our stakeholders.

For many years, the Cave Hill campus has been providing accommodation to students with disabilities of various kinds. One of our earliest dedicated efforts,
and I was very involved in this, was the construction of a ramp, in 1994, to the Main Library, subsequently renamed the Sidney Martin Library, to accommodate a regional participant on the Summer Institute in Gender and Development. Also, on that occasion, classes were held at the ground-floor level only, while creative ways were introduced to ensure that student’s full participation in and out of the classroom. Our efforts have been relentless through the years and are ongoing and continuous to ensure that Cave Hill is seen by all to be a fully inclusive campus environment.

In January 2014, The UWI Cave Hill Campus Student Disability Policy was adopted by the Campus’s Academic Board. This policy promotes “an inclusive campus that enables the productive participation of all students regardless of disability” and calls for the provision of accommodations for students with disabilities. These accommodations are geared towards enabling them to participate in all aspects of campus life, including accessibility to our various resources, services and amenities. These students, current as well as prospective, must enjoy the same level of access to every facet of campus life as their fellow students, without being disadvantaged.

UWICAPD was founded in September 2016 and launched in March 2017. Its mission is “to provide a voice for all students at The UWI Cave Hill with any disability (permanent or temporary) whilst bridging the gap between campus administration and students with disabilities”. During the launch, the Campus publicly stated that it is a disability-friendly institution, and today, we wish to reiterate this position. Some of you may recall I said then “We will not rest on our laurels. We will continue to closely monitor our learning and leisure environment to ensure that, overtime, all impediments to their progress are removed”. UWICAPD, your voice has been heard. Cave Hill Campus’s commitment to our differently-abled students remain. The Campus is happy to respond to the needs of its communities and we encourage our students to continue to let us know how we can better serve you.

Ladies and gentlemen, over the years, the Office of Student Services at Cave Hill has been coordinating services for students with disabilities through collaboration with the Office of the Deputy Principal, the faculties, the Guild of Students, the Student Health Clinic, the Maintenance Department, Campus Security, among others. The Campus currently provides special accommodation to students with visual impairment, hearing impairment, paraplegia, dyslexia, and other disabilities. These include transporting wheelchair users and students temporarily or
permanently disabled through accident or medical condition, providing help with assistive devices, specialised furniture, retrofitting campus infrastructure, the opening of the Kerryann Ifill Unit in the Sidney Martin Library for our visually impaired students, to name a few. This unit is named after the immediate past President of the Senate and the first blind person to graduate from Cave Hill.

Please allow me to make mention here of another one of our outstanding alumni, the late Kregg Nurse, in whose honour an annual scholarship is offered each year. The award is made to any individual with a disability who has successfully completed at least one year of post-secondary education, in any field, and who wishes to continue formal training at the tertiary level. Mr. Nurse was a certified general accountant who had muscular dystrophy. He passed away at the tender age of 27 but he left such an indelible impression on those of us who knew him, or came into contact with him while he was here that he remains today a source of inspiration to many. I can recall his amazing attitude and zeal and I wish to commend those students who were inspired by him for their similar boundless enthusiasm. I also commend our own staff for their immense contribution.

It is with great satisfaction, therefore, that Cave Hill Campus is happy to partner with the Maria Holder Memorial Trust. Your Mission, which includes to improve the quality of life of vulnerable people, particularly in Barbados, is in harmony with our objectives as it relates to students with disabilities. This morning’s handover ceremony makes the clear statement that the Cave Hill Campus not only understands the needs of our more vulnerable students (those with disabilities), but will seek to respond to these needs in concrete ways. The Campus expresses our deepest gratitude for the funds donated by the Trust enabling us to respond to our students with disabilities’ need for specialised transport by purchasing a new wheel-chair accessible van, now appropriately rebranded. This vehicle, which sits within our view, is a most welcomed addition to our current fleet and, like all the others, is already transporting our students to and from the Campus. We are very grateful.

In closing, ladies and gentlemen, I note that the handover of this bus comes at a time when there is a national conversation about public transportation in this country. We have followed that conversation very closely, and take note of the intent to add dozens of electric buses to the state-operated fleet in a few months.
(August is the targeted timeframe). We would welcome seeing some of these buses specially outfitted to cater to the disabled community.

Cave Hill, as a Smart Campus, has been making significant strides in preparing this region for the digital revolution, the adaptation of renewable energy solutions, the uptake of artificial intelligence and related advanced technologies. We look forward, therefore, to lending support to the new national transportation initiative by undertaking any requisite studies as it relates to impact on the grid, geographic placement of charging ports/stations, performance over diverse terrain, battery lifespan among other issues. It is an exciting time to be part of a Smart Campus and I know my colleagues are eager to put their research skills to aid the national effort.

I thank everyone for coming this morning to witness this handover and I wish you an enjoyable and productive day.

Professor V Eudine Barriteau
Pro Vice-Chancellor and Principal
April 24, 2019