

TESTIMONY OF PRESIDENT DAVID HALL  
UNIVERSITY OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

AT THE HEARING ON  
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM:  
EVALUATING ITS ABILITY TO MEET THE  
NEEDS OF INSULAR AREAS

BEFORE THE  
COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES  
HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON INSULAR AFFAIRS, OCEANS  
AND WILDLIFE

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Good afternoon, Chairwoman Bordallo, other members of the House Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife present, other testifiers, ladies and gentlemen. My name is David Hall and I serve as President of the University of the Virgin Islands (UVI), the only public, higher education institution in the U.S. Virgin Islands. It is an honor to have this opportunity to appear before this distinguished body to offer testimony on the topic, *Technical Assistance Program: Evaluating Its Ability to Meet the Needs of the Insular Areas*.

In offering testimony on this topic, I would like to begin by providing some contextual information to the Subcommittee in an effort to establish the significant role of the University of the Virgin Islands and its importance to the educational, social, cultural and economic growth, development and stability of the U.S. Virgin Islands and the wider Caribbean. Though I am just a couple weeks shy of marking my one-year anniversary as President of the University of the Virgin Islands, I want to share with you how honored I am to be serving as the 5<sup>th</sup> President and to place, on the record, how impressed I am with the potential of UVI. The University of the Virgin Islands is a historically American, uniquely Caribbean, and globally interactive institution.

### **Brief History of UVI**

UVI was chartered in 1962 by the Legislature of the U.S. Virgin Islands as the College of the Virgin Islands (CVI) a publicly funded, co-educational, liberal arts institution - by Act No. 862 of the Fourth Legislature of the U.S. Virgin Islands. The first campus opened in 1963 on St. Thomas with land donated by the government. In 1964, the college opened a second campus on St. Croix. In its first four years, CVI offered associate's degrees and, in 1967, added bachelor's degree programs in liberal arts and education. During the next decade, the college added master's degree programs in education, business and public administration.

The College of the Virgin Islands was awarded land grant status by the U.S. Congress in 1972, which allowed for the establishment of the Agricultural Experiment Station and the Cooperative Extension Service on the St. Croix campus. Since then, many other centers, programs and services have been added, including the Eastern Caribbean Center, the Small Business Development Center, the William P. MacLean Marine Science Center, the Sports and Fitness Center, and the Wellness Center, slated to open its doors in August 2010.

The College was renamed as the University of the Virgin Islands in 1986 to reflect the growth and diversification of its academic curricula, community and regional services, and research programs. Later that year, Congress named UVI one of the United States' Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), making it the only HBCU outside of the continental United States, and still maintains that status.

Today, UVI is a Baccalaureate Diverse institution offering associate's, bachelor's, and master's degrees on two campuses along with an array of sponsored and certification programs. In its relatively short history, the University has produced heads-of-state, attorneys, physicians, teachers, nurses, entrepreneurs, numerous elected officials, a Truman Scholar and two Rhodes Scholars (Richard Skerritt and Quincy Quinland), among others.

## Location and Campuses

The University of the Virgin Islands is located in the Eastern Caribbean, 45 miles east of Puerto Rico. The 388-acre St. Thomas campus includes academic facilities, administrative and student service buildings, and residence halls with a capacity for 290 students. St. Croix, the largest of the U.S. Virgin Islands, is home to a 130-acre campus which includes academic facilities, and a student life complex including residence halls. In addition to these campuses, the University maintains the Virgin Islands Environmental Resource Station on the island of St. John under an agreement with the National Park Service.

Over the last several years, the University acquired additional acreage adjacent to the St. Thomas Campus on which the University expects to develop more facilities. By decreasing the volume of deferred maintenance at an approximate cost of 16 million since 1999, and improving the physical condition of classrooms, offices, residence halls, grounds, and information technology infrastructure, UVI has significantly improved its physical plant. The institution has decreased its vulnerability to hurricanes with hardened physical structures, underground electrical line-transmission, and control of its own water system.

## Academics

While UVI's initial academic programs reflected the University's beginnings as a liberal arts-based institution, recent additions to the curriculum demonstrate the University's commitment and evolution as an institution that understands the needs of the Virgin Islands as it continues to design programs to address those needs. Initiatives since 2000 include general education reform, collaborative programs with local, regional and national institutions, new course offerings and degree programs in mathematics, engineering, early childhood education, criminal justice, process technology, psychology, and cohort-driven graduate programs in Mathematics for Secondary Teachers, Marine and Environmental Science, and School Psychology. Our most recent addition is a Master of Arts degree in psychology, with counseling, approved by the Board of Trustees in June 2010. The University has also expanded its videoconferencing technology and online capabilities to extend instruction to locations beyond the two campuses, to include St. Maarten and St. Kitts.

UVI offers 7 master's degree programs (4 standard and 3 cohort-driven), 25 bachelor's and 11 associate's degree programs. The University has 238 full and part-time faculty members. Of these, 110 are full-time faculty members – 74 percent of whom have terminal degrees in their field. The academic departments are organized into five colleges and schools: the School of Business, School of Education, the School of Nursing, the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, and the College of Science and Mathematics.

To improve retention and introduce students to first year general education courses, the UVI curriculum offers a comprehensive Freshman Year Program which provides academic advisement, academic support services, and remediation in English, Reading and Mathematics. The Freshman Year Program also facilitates interdisciplinary study and career planning activities.

To enhance its curricular offerings, the University has cooperative agreements with other institutions including a partnership with the Boston University (BU) School of Medicine whereby students, after meeting certain qualifications, may be provisionally accepted to the BU School of Medicine in their sophomore year and receive bachelor's degrees from UVI after spending two summers and their senior year at Boston. In the field of engineering, UVI has articulation agreements with Columbia University, the University of South Carolina, and Washington University in St. Louis, which result in degrees from both UVI and the partner university. UVI also has several special articulation agreements and collaborative ventures which result in faculty and student exchanges, faculty and student research, and program development in both the Caribbean and the U.S. mainland. A member of the National Student Exchange (NSE) consortium since 1980, UVI students have the opportunity to spend up to one year at one of the participating institutions enjoying UVI tuition rates and students attending other member institutions may enroll at UVI opting to pay their "home" tuition & fees or UVI's.

The academic programs at UVI are further enhanced by the research activities of the faculty. The University receives approximately \$15 million annually for sponsored research. The University's success in acquiring grant funds helps to attract faculty, provides valuable research opportunities for students, and serves the community by enabling faculty to investigate issues with Virgin Islands, wider Caribbean, national and even global relevance.

### Accreditation

Since 1971, the University has been accredited by the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools. The bachelor's and associate's degree programs in Nursing are accredited by the National League for Nursing, Accrediting Commission. The University's decennial review by the Middle States

Association occurred in 2007, resulting in a full accreditation with a Periodic Review Report due in 2012.

### **Student Demographics**

UVI's students are the pride of the institution. The University enrolls approximately 2600 students; 60 percent on the St. Thomas campus and 40 percent on the St. Croix campus. Overall, undergraduate full-time students outnumber part-time students on both campuses. The enrollment includes 172 students registered in graduate programs. Students' average age is 25 years and many work full time while attending UVI. Most (92%) students are from the Virgin Islands with the origins of remaining students evenly split between the U.S. mainland and other Caribbean islands. Women constitute 73% of the student population, which is reflective of the high school graduation statistics in the U.S. Virgin Islands where male students have a much higher drop-out rate than females. In fall 2009, a new initiative was launched to recruit and retain more male students as a means to address this community concern. Seventy-five percent of the students are black, seven percent are Hispanic, four percent are white and the remaining students are other ethnicities. In May, 2010, which marked UVI's 46<sup>th</sup> Commencement Exercises, there were a total of 312 graduates, with 100 of that number on the St. Croix campus. A total of 41 graduate degrees were awarded, while 166 Bachelor of Arts; 57 Bachelor of Science; 21 Associates of Arts; 15 Associates of Science; and 10 Associate of Applied Science degrees were awarded. With this graduating class, the University now has approximately 7300 alumni.

### **Finances**

UVI has been financially stable with a balanced budget for many years. For Fiscal Year 2009-2010, the University is slated to receive 62 percent of its general operating revenues of \$49 million from the Virgin Islands Government. There continue to be efforts to further diversify the University's funding. Although several capital improvement projects have been funded through federal grants, bonds and special appropriations, further diversification and more aggressive fundraising is needed in order to reduce the impact of decreases in government funding. The Foundation of the University of the Virgin Islands (FUVI) has a 15-member board which oversees the investment of the University's endowment. In 2008-2009, the UVI annual fund raised approximately 1.3 million dollars.

## **Other Programs & Services**

### **Community Engagement and Economic Development**

In addition to the academic research which directly impacts the territory, the University offers programs and instruction to address the needs of the community.

### **Community Engagement and Lifelong Learning Center (CELL)**

The University meets the needs of non-degree seeking students in the territory through the Community Engagement and Lifelong Learning Center (CELL) established in 2002. The Center has made significant progress towards the realization of a professional consulting arm designed to meet current and emerging needs for professional and workforce development, corporate training, consulting and professional services, and personal enrichment. The programs utilize the University's faculty, staff, students, alumni and affiliates to provide a pool of expertise that is responsive to clients' needs. Programs are offered through a range of teaching modalities that include face-to-face instruction, self-paced study and online instruction. Confidence in the CELL product has led to increased demand. CELL is an authorized provider of the International Association for Continuing Education and Training (IACET). As an authorized provider, CELL grants IACET accredited Continuing Education Units (CEU's). The IACET CEU is internationally recognized as a measure of quality in continuing education and training.

### **Research and Public Service**

The University of the Virgin Islands addresses two of the major elements of its mission, research and public service, through the strategic efforts of the units in the Research and Public Service Component. Collectively, the Agricultural Experiment Station, the Center for Marine and Environmental Studies, the Cooperative Extension Service, the Eastern Caribbean Center, the Research Publications Unit, the Small Business Development Center, and the Water Resources Research Institute are principally responsible for defining and solving problems through research and providing quality services that address needs identified by the community.

### **Reichhold Center for the Arts (RCA)**

The RCA is on the St. Thomas campus and has an annual season which showcases international acts, nurtures and spotlights local Caribbean culture and talent, and hosts regional exhibitions. It includes a Digital Media Institute to provide instruction in the use of digital media to both youth and adults. The Center has its own foundation with an endowment of over \$9.3 million.

### **Virgin Islands University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (VIUCEDD)**

The VIUCEDD, a community outreach program which is primarily federally funded, was established to enhance the quality of life of the developmentally disabled and their families and to provide them with the tools necessary for independence, productivity and full inclusion into community life. The center educates child care providers and educators who work with children of differing abilities and also connects disabled people and their families with a wide variety of services.



## University of the Virgin Islands Research and Technology Park

In 2002, legislation was enacted which enabled the establishment of a Research and Technology Park with the initial thrust of development to be on St. Croix. The Virgin Islands Government awarded UVI \$2.5 million to support start-up operations and granted the park \$7 million for expansion and development. In the coming years, the park has the potential to diversify the University's revenue sources and to develop a technology sector that will diversify the territory's economy, creating new employment opportunities in the Virgin Islands. The President and three additional UVI Board members sit on the Board of the Research and Technology Park. UVI and the RTPark have been and continue to work on identifying mutually beneficial park tenants.

## The Importance of UVI to the Caribbean Region

Although the foregoing contextual information is extensive, I believe that it is vital to ensure that each member of the Subcommittee has a clear sense of the institution which I am here representing this afternoon. Further, it is important to also share the mission statement, which serves to inform the establishment of priorities and guide strategic undertakings. Specifically, *the University of the Virgin Islands is a learner-centered institution dedicated to the success of its students and committed to enhancing the lives of the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands and the wider Caribbean through excellent teaching, innovative research, and responsive community service.*

With respect to enhancing the lives of the people in the U.S. Virgin Islands and the wider Caribbean, the University has focused its efforts, to a significant degree, on ensuring the affordability, availability and accessibility of higher education for the residents of the U.S. Virgin Islands and persons from the Caribbean region. The institution has been diligent about making this possible by ensuring tuition and fees are affordable for the student population of UVI; by offering courses at times that fit the schedules of non-traditional students; and expanding video-conferencing capabilities to reach more students.

In its 48 years of existence, the University of the Virgin Islands has had a significant impact on the Caribbean region, having been the higher education institution of choice for many who have key leadership positions in various governments across the Caribbean region. UVI continues to draw a significant pool of students from island nations across the Caribbean and we are engaged in several organizations across the Caribbean where we help shape the focus and agenda of higher education in the region. This type of involvement has far reaching implications, as we can help to build friendships with neighboring Caribbean islands, to the benefit of the larger U.S. community. The University has also recently been sought out by an institution on one of the Caribbean islands to provide technical assistance and guidance in their quest to obtain accreditation for their public institution.

Within the U.S. Virgin Islands, the University's impact has been far-reaching. Not only has UVI been actively engaged with workforce development matters, but the University has been sought out by government agencies across the Territory to provide research and other technical assistance on a wide range of projects and initiatives. UVI is viewed as a resource that has demonstrated its capacity and commitment to working with both the public and private sectors of the Territory to enhance the living and working conditions of the residents. Additionally, a significant amount of the research that has been conducted by scientists at UVI has focused on marine and environmental issues that have implications for the health of residents and the sustainability of the environment.

### **The Importance of DOI-OIA to UVI**

Because of the strategic, geographic location of the U.S. Virgin Islands, the ongoing viability of University of the Virgin Islands is particularly important and has major implications for the overall educational and economic health of the Territory. The need for this viability has been recognized by the Office of Insular Affairs of the Department of the Interior through which funding that has been provided in the past to support various projects and initiatives of the University. This partnership continues to be healthy and since I joined the University in August 2009, I have had several opportunities to dialogue, in person as well as telephonically, with Asst. Secretary (of the Interior for Insular Areas) Anthony Babauta and Basil Ottley, Desk Officer for the USVI. We also have good working relationships with Nikolao Pula, Director of Insular Affairs and Charlene Leizear, Director of Technical Assistance. The partnership between DOI-OIA and UVI over the years as well as the relationships that have developed among staff from both agencies has resulted in financial and technical assistance to UVI over the years that have been invaluable to both the University and the OIA.

Specifically, the Department of the Interior through the OIA has also invested \$2.5 million in Salt River Marine Research Park. It is a collaboration of universities that will conduct vital research on our fragile marine resources. The current crisis in the Gulf cannot better speak to the need to invest in marine research that leads to greater understanding, protection, and use. We believe that OIA investment in the project and the Congress' continued support will make this research center great for the Virgin Islands but essential to the sustainability of the marine resources of the Americas.

Additionally, the DOI-OIA was the primary source of funding for the Sports and Fitness Center on UVI's St. Thomas campus, investing approximately \$7.5 in the project. Additionally, over the past five years, the DOI-OIA has invested an additional \$1.5 million for repairs and training and sports equipment. The substantial financial contribution has had a significant impact on the economic stability and growth of the Territory, and more particularly of the island of St. Thomas. One tangible means



whereby this has occurred is through the hosting the Paradise Jam Basketball Tournament at the Sports and Fitness Center. Paradise Jam is now the largest NCAA Division I Basketball Tournament in North America and according to the U.S.V.I. government, brings in over \$9 million dollars a year into the Territory's economy. Additionally, the Sports & Fitness Center is an integral part of UVI, housing classrooms, hosting UVI sporting events, commencement exercises, concerts and other major university events. The Department of Interior also provided over \$1 million dollars for the funding of the UVI Wellness Center which is set to open on the St. Thomas campus in August, 2010. This facility will provide for the health and welfare of the UVI community as well as other residents of St. Thomas. It is also anticipated that the facility will be an asset in the recruitment and retention of UVI students. One of the other areas that has been funded by the DOI-OIA has been the University's Eastern Caribbean Center which has received approximately \$250,000 to complete various population and household surveys. The information from these surveys have been useful for decision-makers as well as for the University, with respect to planning.

Notwithstanding the assistance noted above, given the current economic situation of the Territory, it is important to put on the record that now, more than ever, there is a need for the DOI-OIA and UVI to review the role of the DOI-OIA with respect to technical assistance and seriously consider the strategic expansion of this role to assist the University ensure that both traditional and non-traditional students in the Territory are able to affordably pursue higher education at the University of the Virgin Islands. Over the years, the University's budgetary allotment from the local government has declined and though it had become level over the past two fiscal years, the economic state of the local government has resulted in the reduction of the University's budgetary appropriation that the University has been receiving from the local government, reducing the University's flexibility with respect to the use of these funds and resulting in fiscal constraints. Although the University has done its part by increasing tuition and fees over the years, it is critical that the only available, local public institution remains affordable and accessible to persons in the U.S. Virgin Islands and wider Caribbean who are seeking higher education.

### **Critical Areas of Need which Require the Support of DOI-OIA**

To that end, I would like to focus the remaining portion of my testimony describing some initiatives that are critical to the growth of UVI in order for it to reach its full potential. Assistance from the DOI-OIA in the form of seed and capital funds to advance some of the projects and initiatives will go a long way in assisting the University to leverage its assets to bring other opportunities to the Territory.

First, through an extensive process which involved all stakeholders across the University and members of the University's Board of Trustees, four major facilities have

been identified as critical to UVI's expansion and strengthening of academic programs in the sciences, in particular, and more generally across the University. The four critical facilities needed are: **a 100 bed residence hall facility** which would help address the continuous and consistent demand for campus housing; **a science building** which would provide additional classrooms, consolidation of science faculty offices, and consolidation and expansion of laboratories; **an academic building** which would provide additional classrooms, faculty offices and consolidation and upgrading of laboratories on the St. Croix campus; and a **multi-purpose building** which would accommodate a gymnasium, wellness center, and student activities center, and serve as venue for commencement exercises.

Second, the University is embarking on two cutting edge initiatives that have received support from the DOI-OIA, namely the Salt River Marine Science Center and the Caribbean Green Energy Institute. As mentioned previously, OIA has already invested \$2.5 million in the Salt River Marine Science Center project. This is a significant and tremendous investment; however, to make the Center a reality, significant additional resources will be needed. Additionally, we have begun work, with colleagues across the nation, on the establishment of the Caribbean Green Energy Institute. The Memorandum of Understanding that Assistant Secretary Babauta signed with the Department of Energy and the Government of the Virgin Islands to formalize the Virgin Islands Energy Development in Island Nations (EDIN) has also proved invaluable to UVI. Through EDIN, the expertise of the Department of Energy and its National Renewable Energy Laboratory have provided us with the technical support and mentoring to assist in the establishment of the Caribbean Green Energy Institute. In collaboration with Dr. Kao of the University of California, Berkeley and Dr. Kammen of Harvard University, UVI, along with key local partners, has been exploring the feasibility of developing an institute that can be a leader in the Caribbean with regard to the deployment of renewable energy and energy efficiency in the Caribbean. OIA technical grant support and capital investment dollars in a building would be instrumental in assisting UVI to stand up this institute so as to leverage the tremendous support that the U.S. Department of Energy has been providing. The talk of the new Green economy will become more than a conversation. It will translate into research and entrepreneurial opportunities, jobs, and innovations that will protect and sustain our fragile ecosystems.

Third, the University seeks technical assistance support as well as seed funding as we explore the viability of the expansion of our Early Childhood programs to include Child Care Facilities that would serve a dual purpose of proving a location for students to carryout clinical work, as well as serve as a child care location for single students whose educational pursuits are limited or constrained with respect to child care.

Fourth, the University would like to explore, with the assistance of DOI-OIA, the possibility of funding for the establishment of a Hotel and Resort Management

Program, to commence fall 2011. This program has the capacity to significantly impact the quality of service received by the thousands of tourists who visit our islands. Additionally, the University would ask that DOI-OIA explore the possibility of also funding Centers of Excellence that would solidify the academic areas within the institution and increase the competitive edge of UVI with respect to recruiting and retaining the brightest the best of the students who graduate from high schools in the U.S. Virgin Islands and the wider Caribbean.

In closing, it is important to note that the University of the Virgin Islands is poised to become a great university. The achievement of greatness for the very special institution can be achieved through the harnessing of the institution's internal and external powers. The internal powers are the dedicated students, faculty, administrators, Board members, and the strategic geographic location of the University. The external powers are agencies like the Office of Insular Affairs within the Department of the Interior that make the difference in our ability to have the technical insights and resources to compete in a global educational environment. Without your support and that of other external agencies, we will not reach our full potential. I thank you for your continued interest in the insular areas and particularly in the U.S. Virgin Islands and the University of the Virgin Islands. I look forward to a continued positive working relationship.