

The answer to the question is clear: UVI is serving us well.

Davida R. Siwisa is the University of the Virgin Islands' director of public relations.

We are responding to certain points raised in your editorial of June 18 entitled "UVI: Can we afford it?" We do not attempt to answer the question in the heading, as it has already been answered by this community and the thousands of alumni who have gone on to successful careers. Rather, we provide details to answer questions raised in that article and to list just a few of UVI's accomplishments beyond the measure of dollars in contributing to the Virgin Islands.

As to The Daily News' question: Where do Virgin Islands graduates go for jobs after graduation? The demographics for both current enrollment and recent graduates are at approximately 44% part-time students and 56% full time. The former are, for the most part, adults already in the work force who attend UVI while seeking a degree, for career advancement or personal enrichment. Nearly 60% are non-traditional students aged 25 to 50 plus. A substantial number of our full-time students are employed locally and abroad. We are proud of alumni who are bankers, fiscal officers, CPAs, teachers, nurses, doctors, prime ministers, scientists, former Rhodes scholars, Pulitzer Prize winners and legislators. Many graduates are part of the V.I. work force and others have sought further academic challenges.

As to The Daily News question: What of students from other islands after they graduate? Only 26 of this year's 322 graduates were international students. Most of these students are from the Eastern Caribbean and either go on to graduate studies or return home to pursue their careers.

OTHER VOICES: Davida R. Siwisa

As to The Daily News question "Can UVI afford to go forward with its lofty plans" and the statement that "More than \$20 million per year is pulled from the General Fund to support UVI." Approximately \$24 million is allocated to the university from the General Fund, though the amount received is sometimes less. It takes close to \$40 million to operate the university. We secure the additional funds through tuition, grants, fund-raising, investment interest on endowed funds, bond issuance and revenue generating operations. This is the same process that all state institutions engage in to augment government allotments.

We assume questions raised about capital expansion plans refer to UVI's 10-year capital improvement plans. To finance these improvements, the Board of Trustees recently approved the university's plan to refinance existing bonds to take advantage of lower interest rates and to explore other potential borrowing sources.

This capital financing is to be accomplished with no additional debt service cost to the V.I. government. This comprehensive plan would renovate existing space and reassign offices and departments without any new facilities being built. The improvements will reduce operating costs by saving on energy consumption and mitigating potential damages from windstorms. We would also centralize offices, thereby increasing efficiency and adding needed classroom space.

As to The Daily News question: Is UVI preparing people for the jobs that exist in the V.I....and the coming decades?" Of the 2,500 students

enrolled this past year, nearly 60% were in the areas of business administration, accounting, education, nursing, biology, computer science and psychology. This is very much in keeping with the needs of the community that we do serve.

To further meet the challenges of the coming millennium, UVI students, faculty and staff have been networked and on the Internet for years. We recently advanced our associate's degree in computer science to a bachelor's degree. Our administrators and faculty are in the process of a detailed revision of our curriculum to keep addressing the needs of our community and advances in higher education.

Our research and public service component plays a vital role in the life of this community through the Agricultural Experiment Station, Cooperative Extension Service and other departments.

Thirty seven years is young in the life of an institution, yet UVI boasts a technological readiness, community-focused curriculum and achievements that are on par or rival schools twice our age. The August 1998 issue of *Postsecondary Education Opportunity* reports that on average states appropriate 12% on higher education. The V.I. government appropriates approximately 5%, considerably less than the nationwide average. Puerto Rico's recent legislation mandates that 9% be spent on higher education.

Despite its budgetary shortcomings and in light of its achievements, UVI was affirmed by its accrediting body as "A V.I. jewel." We are your university – yesterday, today and tomorrow.

The Daily News, Friday, June 18, 1999

The Daily News of the Virgin Islands

A Pulitzer prize-winning newspaper

Founded by

J. Antonio Jarvis and Ariel Melchior Sr.

UVI: Can we afford it?

Can the University of the Virgin Islands afford to go forward with its lofty plans? Can it even afford what it has?

We think it's time to reassess the real needs of our community and establish an institution around those needs rather than try to continue supporting a mainland-style university that seems to be out of touch with the citizenry it is supposed to service.

The logic escapes us, but UVI officials last weekend said even though they are still struggling, things are better this year than last. Better? The fact is, UVI is almost totally dependent on a bankrupt government for support.

More than \$20 million per year is pulled from the General Fund to support UVI, in addition to tuition and revenue from other sources. But only a handful of local students graduate. The university's St. Croix campus graduated 111 students this month, and 211 received degrees on St. Thomas. Where do Virgin Islanders go for jobs after graduation? What happens to the students from other islands after they graduate from UVI?

UVI can have a crucial role in preparing our citizens for the local workforce. But it cannot offer every major that a mainland university does. Remember, we are a community of only 120,000 people. Throughout the United States colleges are closing departments and dropping programs as they redirect themselves.

Is UVI preparing people for the jobs that exist in the Virgin Islands, and the ones that will exist in the coming decades? If the territory wants to attract high-tech industries to locate here, does UVI's curriculum provide the training these future employees will need?

The university is looking at capital expansion. But it needs to understand that just because it can borrow money to construct new buildings, it needs to have another source of money to maintain and operate those facilities. Or, will that come from the General Fund too?

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