

34th Legislature of the Virgin Islands
Committee on Education and Workforce Development
Testimony submitted by Dr. Suzanne Darrow-Magras, Director, UVI CELL
University of the Virgin Islands ~ Office of the President
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Good afternoon, Honorable Chair Genevieve Whitaker, members of the Committee on Education and Workforce Development, other members of the 34th Legislature, and to the listening and viewing audience. My name is Dr. Suzanne Darrow-Magras, and I serve as the Director for the University of the Virgin Islands, Center for Excellence in Leadership and Learning (UVI CELL). This testimony includes an overview of UVI CELL, including information on courses, programs and our admissions policy.

UVI CELL was established in 2002 to meet the workforce and professional development training needs critical to the economic prosperity of the Virgin Islands and surrounding Caribbean islands. For nearly 20 years, UVI CELL has provided continuing education and training opportunities and has served as a bridge to the University. We are accredited through the International Association for Continuing Education and Training (IACET) and can award Continuing Education Units (CEUs) for coursework. We are also an accredited American Heart Association (AHA) International Training Center.

Over the past two years, UVI CELL has evolved through a change in reporting under the President's Office and leadership by Dr. Haldane Davies, VP of Business Development and Innovation. Mergers with the Institute for Leadership and Organizational Effectiveness (ILOE) and the Center for the Study of Spirituality and Professionalism (CSAP) allowed us to increase quality training and Community Engagement services. We also expanded our capabilities in Consulting, Contracting and Professional Services.

There are ten CELL staff members between the two UVI campuses. At the Orville E. Kean Campus on St. Thomas, we are located at Faculty East. On the St. Croix Albert A. Sheen Campus, we have an office on-campus and a satellite office in Frederiksted. UVI CELL aims to be self-sufficient and generates revenue through consultancies and grants, student tuition, assessment fees, and legislative funding. We also receive funding through the Veteran's Office, as all CELL courses are free for Veterans, and through charitable donations.

We work with government agencies to deliver education and strategic planning solutions and our open enrollment continuing education courses are available online and in-person.

Individuals may subscribe to notifications or follow our Facebook page for updates. Current offerings are posted on our website, www.cell.uvi.edu, along with our Admissions and Enrollment Policies <https://cell.uvi.edu/courses/policies.aspx>. We are guided by the University's Policy Manual and primarily serve adults. Potential students may contact us directly for enrollment support.

Current courses include Grant Writing and Grant Management, Conflict Management, Mediation Training, and our Anti-Money Laundering and Financial Crimes series, among others. We are working to expand offerings in Culinary Arts, Construction Management, Cloud Computing, Cyber Security, Maritime Training, Agriculture and Aviation and align with middle and high schools on curriculum and workforce development pathways.

Our assessment services include administration of the UVI Entrance Exam, PAN testing (Transportation Security Administration and U.S. Customs and Border Protection), Prometric testing (GRE, Praxis, GED, Human Resource Certification) and PSI for VI Licensure tests, including assessments for Plumbers, Electricians, Real Estate agents, Cosmetologists and Barbers.

Through our Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), Safety in Paradise Consultation Program, we offer free, confidential safety and health services to small businesses and partner with the Small Business Development Center (SBDC), and the VI Economic Development Authority (VIEDA) in carrying out many tasks related to the economic growth and stability of the Territory. Our program has been visible in offering COVID-19-related webinars and training sessions. To request an OSHA Consultation visit, visit www.safety.uvi.edu

Notable partnerships include the Division of Personnel for the Certified Public Manager Program, VI Fire Service Emergency Medical Responder training and the VI Bureau of Corrections, where we provide strategic planning, education and reentry planning services. In the reentry space, we also engage with the Department of Labor, the Workforce Board, the Department of Human Services, Youth and Rehabilitation Center (YRC), the Department of Education, the Department of Justice, the Law Enforcement Planning Commission and community and faith-based organizations. We actively work with law-enforcement partners to support public safety, the rehabilitation of inmates, the reduction of recidivism and reductions in serious and violent crime.

In 2019, under the leadership of CSAP Director Dr. Wendy Coram-Vialet, we hosted the Non-Profit Violence Prevention Summit and assisted in writing the Bill, that is now law, to establish the Office of Gun Violence Prevention. In collaboration with the VIDE, we support the Man-Up Academy and Junior University programs, programs for middle and high schoolers, and are launching a new initiative with Rotary International, 'Building Peace through Service,' which will provide monthly virtual student workshops. We also partner with the Attorney General's Office and the VI Police Department on Project Safe Neighborhood research.

Other Community Engagement efforts include our active involvement with the Children and Youth Task Force (CYTF). In conjunction with CYTF Leadership, De. Celia Victor (BOC) and Dr. Greg Guannel (UVI), UVI CELL hosts biweekly virtual meetings, where the emphasis is on the complex needs of children, youth, and their families, pre- and post-disaster, including the impacts of COVID-19. We support training on resiliency, disaster preparedness and trauma-informed methods to cope with stress. Upcoming sessions include Human Trafficking training.

Under the leadership of Dr. Haldane Davies, recent consulting, contracting and professional services include awards through the Government of the VI, Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to develop the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and the Tourism Master Plan for the Territory. We also engage in strategic planning and feasibility studies, including work with the Government Employees Retirement System (GERS) and the USVI Economic Development Authority.

In the coming year, we will work to further engage with our agency and community partners, identify strategic collaborative opportunities, and engage in innovative, evidence-based grant-writing and grant-management efforts. UVI CELL belongs to the community, we encourage all to engage with us and let us know how we can provide support. I thank you for the opportunity to testify before this Committee and welcome any questions you may have.