

UWI/GUARDIAN LIFE 'PREMIUM' TEACHING AWARD CEREMONY 2008

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Thank you Madame Chair.

Madame Chair; Principal – Pro Vice Chancellor and Principal [Professor Clement Sankat](#); Chairman, Guardian Holdings Limited – [Mr. Arthur Lok Jack](#), our feature Speaker, [Professor Bridget Brereton](#); Deputy Principal, [Prof. Rhoda Reddock](#); Campus Registrar – [Mr. Jeremy Callaghan](#); Campus Bursar – [Mrs. Lylla Bada](#); Members of the Awards Committee, awardees, colleagues, students, guests.

This year is rather special. It marks the 10th anniversary of the collaboration between the UWI and Guardian Life of the Caribbean Limited in hosting the 'Premium' events – the UWI/GL Teaching Award for Excellence and the Open lecture series. The collaboration has been a very rewarding one for both parties who have the common goal of recognizing and rewarding excellence in teaching. We thus take a retrospective view of the collaboration and the resultant programme to see what has been working well, what we can improve on and perhaps most importantly how we build on what we have in the future – as Ranald McDonald would say we look back and review to "feedforward". This is the thinking on the Committee that informed the choice of our feature speaker, Professor Brereton. We wanted someone who we are confident has the expertise to research and speak to the brief history of the 'Premium' Teaching Awards in the context of making the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning real. The theme for today is *10Years on: Making SoTL real*.

We selected this theme because we strongly believe that excellent teaching is indeed scholarly work marked by conscious decisions, deliberation, questioning, reflection, knowledge of teaching as a discipline and practice that is grounded in more than a homely philosophy. UWI lecturers who have been judged as 'excellent' exemplify this scholarship, and the programme, in recognizing their achievement, promotes teaching scholarship. In the context to this setting I want to briefly address three issues:

1. Guardian Life's commitment and the UWI/GL Committee and its workings
2. The judging process
3. The value of winning

Guardian Life of the Caribbean Commitment and the UWI/GL Committee

I think that it is telling that after successfully supporting the Awards programme at St. Augustine, Guardian Life of the Caribbean sought to begin a similar programme on the other two campuses. These programmes commenced in 2006, and tangibly demonstrate the commitment of our corporate partner to promote teaching excellence at the tertiary level in the region. In my view this is a measure of the worth and value of the 'Premium' Teaching Award programme. I would thus like to commend Guardian Life of the Caribbean for their continuing support on a macro level, but I would also like to take this opportunity to pay special tribute to their representatives on the Awards Committee – Mrs. Maria McMillan (Group Vice President – Corporate Communications, Guardian Holdings Limited) and Ms. Caira Cudjoe (Manager, Corporate Communications, Guardian Life of the Caribbean) who display tremendous professionalism and commitment, and with whom we have had great pleasure working.

I would also at this time like to acknowledge the work and commitment of other members of the committee. For, you may be aware staging an event like this requires long-term planning

– making decisions, follow through, attending regular meetings, which sometimes start as early as January of the current year, and most importantly, action. This is in no member's job specifications – it's all voluntarism, and we have been diligently pursuing our course unwaveringly for ten years. I feel then that I must acknowledge the commitment and dedication and sustained interest of the members of the UWI/GL Committee.

The Judging Process

I would like to briefly outline the judging process for selecting teaching excellence awardees. This process usually commences with the participation by aspiring nominees in a workshop which targets the preparation of their **teaching portfolios**. (A very few excellent teachers do not need this guidance). Preparation of these portfolios requires nominees to reflect on their practice and articulate their philosophy. The nominees must provide evidence of the strategies and techniques they use in their classrooms; they must provide evidence that these strategies and techniques result in learning successes; they must show that their students also find the strategies and techniques useful and feel that they are benefiting from their classroom experiences, and nominees must also provide evidence that their peers hold them in high regard. This is indeed a tall order especially when there is a historical component to the evidence. In other words there must be evidence that this is the normal practice and not just a one-shot affair.

Therefore, I would like to pay special tribute to this year's nominees. Thank you nominees for daring to prepare and submit your portfolios to scrutiny by experts in the field.

The portfolios are assessed by experts in teaching who have experience in assessing teaching portfolios. They are all from Universities abroad and in fact have never visited the Caribbean/University. The chief judge is Dr. Dale Roy of Mc Master University in Canada. There are two other judges - Dr. Helen Gale, University of Wolverhampton in the UK and Prof John McGeachie, University of Western Australia. As is customary this is no easy task for the judges who after much deliberation and emailing around the globe, must agreed on the awardees.

This year two nominees followed the portfolio preparation guidelines closely enough to move on to the submission stage to the judges. They were both found to be worthy of the award. The judges highlighted the evidence contained in their portfolios that they felt supported their selection as award winners. Some of the comments for the respective candidates included:

Candidate 1

The portfolio of this candidate [showed evidence of an excellent practitioner. There is sustained effort in curriculum development and high level structuring of the student learning experience in the classroom.... There is evidence of the active promotion of the scholarship of teaching and conduct of research.](#)

[The candidate revamped two Year 1 courses, both of which were in lecture format, and she introduced more cases and more active learning. Of particular interest is her work on the second year research methods course that culminates in group projects ...](#)

[She continues to have clear goals, to create broader ways of measuring learning, that she works to create that broader learning and that she publishes to help others in the programme identify areas for action.](#)

Candidate 2

Overall this is an extremely thoughtful and reflective portfolio, showing major personal questioning about student empowerment and ways in which this has been put into practice with classes...

Then she did something quite brilliant. She deduced two key teaching principles through reflection on a story of her past ... that a teacher needs to reduce fear if learning is going to take place, and that learning is dependent upon relationships.... I was impressed with her use of student eportfolios and with her documentation of this work in a published paper

These excerpts from the judges' assessment clearly show the quality of the practice of excellent teaching, and the reflective and scholarly component, where the candidates not only thought about the kind of learning experiences they should provide their students but reflected upon their strategies and wrote about them to share with their colleagues. And I do think that this process as at the heart of teaching and learning effectiveness and scholarship.

The value of winning the teaching excellence award

The value of the teaching excellence award is observed in a number of outcomes and successes that award winners have been able to lay claim to subsequent to their winning the UWI/GL 'Premium' Teaching Award. For example, two winners went on to win the "Distinguished Teacher" Award of the Association of Atlantic Universities Dr. Kim Mallalieu and Dr. Shirin Haque. Winners have also gone on to win the Vice Chancellor's Award for Excellence – Dr. Haque, Dr. John Campbell and Prof Kit Fai Pun. We do see our award programme as a stepping stone for further recognition. However, what is really very important for us at the IDU is the notion that we do in fact have among us **world class teachers** ... who hold their own in both regional and international contexts and therein, perhaps, lies the strongest reason why good and effective teaching must be more fully recognized and rewarded.

The 17 winners, and those added tonight, form a nucleus of professionals "who can create and sustain a significant learning community ... a community that can re-examine and transform current assumptions about the ways we engage learners in the learning process."

I thank you...