

How the Humanities Opened the Window to the World

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LIKE MOST SIXTH FORMERS, I JUMPED STRAIGHT from high school to college – in my case, to the Mona campus of The University of the West Indies (UWI) to read for a degree in the humanities.

I could hardly wait to begin my journey at the UWI. My passion was foreign languages, so I registered for French, Spanish, and German courses. For the last few years at high school, I lived in Mona Heights – a stone’s throw from the campus – and since some of my friends were already students there, I knew the campus well. I had also met some of the lecturers during Saturday seminars for sixth formers in the last year of high school.

Few students nowadays would have the courage to take on a French course called F212, “The History of the French Language”, which examined the transition from Latin to modern French, with a consideration for French-based creoles in the Caribbean. Notwithstanding, we voluntarily immersed ourselves in courses like those, not because of the ability of the course to generate employment, but because of sheer academic curiosity and a genuine passion for the studies. And happily, the Faculty of Arts and General Studies (now Humanities and Education) had a level of flexibility to accommodate students who wanted to do courses outside their programmes. With my Modern Languages option, I was also able to do courses in educational psychology, an opportunity I greatly welcomed.

The time that I spent at the UWI was rewarding. While the academics brought intellectual growth, there was still an entrepreneurial and a co-curricular restlessness in me that had to be satisfied. I could never sit still. From the first

semester on campus, I became the unofficial house sitter for lecturers who were travelling overseas. I protected the houses, fed dogs, and watered plants. I was voted president of the Modern Languages Society, and apart from setting up seminars at Gibraltar Camp Road and at Bellevue (the one in the hills), language weekends, and promoting French plays on campus, I took forty-five (45) students one Christmas to visit Haiti.

My hunger for multiple activities while at the UWI led to other ventures as well. I taught Spanish at the UWI Extra Mural Department two evenings per week; history at Ardenne Extension School two evenings per week; and I started a Saturday Spanish class for students at the Ardenne Preparatory School. I was a DJ for on-and-off campus parties, an obsession that followed me to France, where I played for campus parties at the University of Nice. And at Mona, my natural curiosity always led me to see what was happening at the Students' Union, at the Sir Phillip Sherlock Centre for the Performing Arts for lunch hour concerts, and at the University Chapel, especially at Christmastime where I thoroughly enjoyed the annual carol service by candlelight.

In fact, while I was at UWI, lecturers often used to invite groups of students for wine and cheese and dinner parties at their homes. As students, we loved these gatherings, and they were my first introduction to dishes like coq-au-vin (chicken cooked in red wine) prepared by the wife of our French lecturer Dominique Onimus, and the legendary curry goat and roti cooked by Lal Narinesingh, senior lecturer in Golden Age Spanish literature, who was from Trinidad and Tobago. These outings may have appeared to be just for eating a meal, but the underlying interaction accomplished so much more, including the development of social agility among students, an essential skill for the working world. I was riveted by the daily dose of engaging conversations among students under the *lignum vitae* trees in the faculty courtyard while students were awaiting their 'top of the hour' classes. The range of topics discussed were as diverse as the dazzling array of students who attended UWI. We all learnt from each other's collective multicultural experiences, and we took it all in stride, as the revelations of each new day made us stronger, bolder, brighter and better citizens of the world.

I am now the co-owner of a marketing company based in New York. The journey from the Faculty of Arts and General Studies to sitting atop New York

City skyscrapers has been a fascinating one with valleys and peaks. Looking back, I now realise that every single experience at UWI, both the academic and the co-curricular, prepared and enabled me, and indeed all of us, to take on global challenges in our professional lives. While the core of my work remains in marketing, my study of foreign languages has brought me untold opportunities. I have utilised those skills to create a reggae programme in French (with my former UWI lecturer Jean Small) for a radio station in Montreal, Canada that was syndicated to ten stations across the French Canadian province of Quebec, promoting Jamaica's music and culture.

I feel that there are no limits to opportunity and entrepreneurship, and the full-bodied education that I was able to secure from pursuing areas within the humanities at UWI was, for me, an excellent springboard to take on all sorts of exciting challenges in the outside world. I create opportunities by identifying and synergising the possibilities, and the humanities equipped me superbly with many of the tools I would later need to turn dreams into reality in an ever-changing world.