



*Center for Excellence in Leadership and Learning*  
*Office of the Director*



**UVI CELL**

February 28, 2025

Honorable Kurt Vialet, Chairman, Committee on Education and Workforce Development  
 Legislature of the Virgin Islands  
 3022 Estate Golden Rock  
 Christiansted, USVI 00820

**Testimony: University of the Virgin Islands Center for Excellence in Leadership and Learning (UVI CELL); Workforce Development in the US Virgin Islands**

Good day, Honorable Chairman Kurt Vialet, members of the Committee on Education and Workforce Development, other members of the 36th Legislature, and to the listening and viewing audience. My name is Dr. Suzanne Darrow-Magras, I am the Director of the University of the Virgin Islands Center for Excellence in Leadership and Learning (UVI CELL). I appreciate the opportunity to testify on UVI CELL's role in the VI workforce development system.

UVI CELL, a division of the University of the Virgin Islands, was established in 2002 to meet workforce and professional development needs critical to the economic prosperity of the Virgin Islands. With facilities and staff on St. Thomas, St. John and St. Croix, UVI CELL is committed to supporting the intellectual and professional development and transformation of students and the workforce in the Virgin Islands, wider Caribbean, and the world as part of the University's mission, and to serve as the premier institute for personal enrichment and consultancy, locally and globally through innovative leadership and collaborative partnerships. UVI CELL is accredited through the International Accreditors for Continuing Education and Training (IACET).

UVI CELL has three service lines: Continuing Education and Workforce Development, Community Engagement, and Economic Development. We serve a diverse range of customers including the local workforce, community members and organizations, government agencies, local businesses and University partners. We strive to be revenue-generating and self-sustaining, and we are growth-focused. We are supported by federal grants, local appropriations and awards, contracts, private partnerships and donations. Each year, we served approximately 2000 customers with a variety of in-person and online programs, events and services. I would like to thank our UVI CELL staff, instructors and student workers for their commitment to the our community and service excellence.

We are grateful for the support of the Legislature for funding that allows us to develop and sustain programs. Annual Legislative funding supports career and technical education programs, and recent Legislative funding was appropriated for the development and implementation of the Certified Residential Real Estate Appraiser and Surveyor Technician Certification programs. The Certified Residential Real Estate Appraiser Program is currently available for student registration and classes start on March 12<sup>th</sup>. This online course was developed under the guidance of Ms. Elissa Rock Runyon, Appraiser and Board Chair of the Virgin Islands Board of Real Estate Appraisers. The

course runs through June 30, 2025, and prepares students to take the VI Certified Residential Appraiser Exam.

The Surveyor Certificate program is being developed under the guidance of local surveyor and Civil Engineer, Mr. Keon Rawlins. We have identified a shortlist of stateside, online Surveyor Technician Certificate programs that meet for-credit academic expectations, and we expect to finalize a partnership in the next month. We have developed complimentary in-person coursework and fieldwork that will provide students with hands-on experiences. Graduates will be eligible to enroll into Associate of Applied Science degrees in Surveying Technology and Bachelor of Science Degrees in Surveying Engineering. Program recruitment is expected to start in April 2025.

Other workforce development initiatives, educational and training opportunities and collaborations include:

- VI Department of Labor, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) programs in demand areas that lead to industry-recognized certification including: Renewable Energy Specialist, Sustainability Professional, Administrative Assistant, Clinical Medical Assistant, Mental Health Technician, Stress Management and Wellness Coaching, Childcare Worker and Child Day Care Management, Culinary Arts, and the Penn Foster Online High School Diploma program.
- VI Department of Education, State Office of Career and Technical Education, Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Grant (AEFLA) program offering Adult Basic Education, GED, ESL and Citizenship programs. We also offer a VI History and Culture course that meets VIDE teacher certification requirements and online teacher certification coursework for Career and Technical Education instructors, in partnership with the VI Board for Career and Technical Education, where I am also a Board Member.
- Initially funded through a one-year FAA grant, our Coral Wings Aviation program offered private pilot and drone pilot training to high school students. We are moving to a tuition/fee-based model to open these programs to the public this year. Our FAA-approved test centers on St. Thomas and St. Croix will come online in March. Currently VI residents must travel to Puerto Rico or Florida for testing. We partner with the Virgin Islands Chapter Tuskegee Airmen Inc.'s Youth Aviation Club to provide free access to simulation equipment on St. Croix and expect to partner with the emerging VI Technical College to offer beginner and advanced drone pilot certification. Each summer, we support the Organization of Black Aerospace Professionals and the ACE Academy to introduce youth to career opportunities in aviation and aerospace. We recently met with Aecon Group Inc./SkyCity, the selected terminal developer for the Cyril E. King and Henry E. Rohlsen Airports, to identify aviation operations and management workforce development needs.
- American Culinary Federation (ACF) Certified Fundamentals Cook program, with experiential learning through our Wild Sage Restaurant on St. Thomas, and our Diageo-sponsored 'Learning Skills for Life' Bartending program on St. Thomas, St. John and St. Croix. In the Fall, we will launch our partnership with the UVI Hospitality and Tourism Management program to provide culinary students with college credit for coursework and establish a degree pathway. Culinary is another area of potential partnership with the VI Technical College. We also partner with the VI Professional Charter Association to support

Culinary and Customer Service training for their Marine Apprenticeship Program.

- EDA University Center, where we are subgrantees to the University of Puerto Rico Mayaguez, and offer Entrepreneurship courses, one-on-one mentoring and small business support, including a custom Veteran’s Entrepreneurship course. We partner with the SBDC, the UVI RT Park and VI SCORE. All VI Veterans are eligible for free tuition for all UVI and UVI CELL courses through the Veteran’s Affairs Office. The VI EDA Office often refers potential EDC Beneficiary participants to UVI CELL for connection with the University on continuing education, grant partnerships and workforce development opportunities.
- Bureau of Corrections in-facility and reentry education programs including high school, career and technical education programs, parenting, cognitive/behavioral programs, workforce preparation and employment assistance programs. UVI CELL supports a monthly public Reentry Action Group, and I serve as the Secretary of the VI Continuum of Care Council on Homelessness in support of reentry housing needs. We actively work with law-enforcement partners including the Department of Justice, the Law Enforcement Planning Commission and the Office of Gun Violence Prevention to support public safety and the rehabilitation of those impacted by the criminal justice system.
- VI Division of Personnel, Certified Public Manager Program. Graduates earn six credits towards the UVI Master of Public Administration Degree. This program equips government professionals with advanced leadership and management skills to enhance public service efficiency and effectiveness. Participants engage in a rigorous curriculum that integrates real-world problem-solving, strategic planning, and ethical decision-making to foster innovation and excellence in the public sector.
- ‘EmpowerU’ Youth Summit (formerly ‘Man Up’), engages all students ages 12-18 and includes panel discussions and breakout sessions to prepare youth for post-secondary education and workforce transitions, and supports mental health awareness and social well-being. This year, we held the St. Croix session on February 8<sup>th</sup>, St. Thomas on March 1<sup>st</sup> and look forward to the St. John session on March 15<sup>th</sup>. We also hosted a, ‘Beyond 40 Women’s Health Forum’ on St. Croix on May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2024 and will bring this event to St. Thomas and St. John this year. Both programs are generously funded by EDC beneficiary, Digital Lending Innovation, LLC.
- Taxi and Tour Certificate Program, in collaboration with the VI Taxicab Commission and the VI Department of Tourism. After an extended pause to allow partners to strategize improvements on course delivery, we are happy to share that the program is back on track and we expect to start enrolling students in March. Classes will take place on St. Thomas, St. Croix and St. John.
- Assessment services, including the UVI Entrance Exam, Prometric, PSI, PAN, TEAS and Kryterion testing, and other certification exams, including VI licensure exams, in partnership with the VI Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs.
- We have thousands of self-paced online courses, professional development and certification programs available through our UVI CELL student platform. We welcome inquiries from

the public on adding courses to our portfolio.

As a success story, I would like to highlight the recent Grand Opening of the UVI St. John Community Resource and Development Center (CRDC) on February 11<sup>th</sup>. Located in the St. John Marketplace, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Suite 201 and 201B, the space includes an administrative office and community gathering area, as well as a separate classroom and computer lab. UVI CELL partnered with the Small Business Development Center, the Apex Accelerator Program, the VI Department of Education State Office for Adult, Career and Technical Education, the VI Workforce Development Board and the American Job Center to bring the office vision to life. UVI has not had an official presence on St. John since Hurricanes Irma and Maria damaged the former Center, and the St. John community, UVI President Safiya George, UVI Cabinet members, St. John Administrator Shikima Jones-Sprauve, Senator-at-Large Angel Bolques and other dignitaries turned out to celebrate this momentous occasion. The space is available for youth and community programs, and we welcome all to partner with us to ensure service equity for St. John.

Despite barriers and challenges to workforce development in the VI, including funding challenges, engaging out of school youth with significant education gaps, and ensuring for VI industry-focused programs, UVI CELL is committed to providing high-quality, accessible, and industry-aligned programs that equip individuals with the skills needed to thrive in the local and global economy. Through strategic partnerships and innovative learning solutions, UVI CELL remains dedicated to bridging education and employment gaps, fostering career growth, and strengthening the workforce of the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The community can stay up to date on all our events and programs by subscribing to our mailing list on our website, [cell.uvi.edu](http://cell.uvi.edu), and through contacting us at [cell@uvi.edu](mailto:cell@uvi.edu) or calling (340) 693-1100.

Chairman Vialet, this concludes my testimony. Thank you for the invitation to provide information on UVI CELL's role in VI Workforce Development. I thank you for the opportunity to testify before this Committee and welcome any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



**Suzanne Darrow-Magras, PhD**  
Director, UVI CELL