

# U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES ELIGIBLE FOR FREE COLLEGE TUITION AT UVI

ST. THOMAS, U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS, February 8, 2019 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Beginning with the 2019-2020 academic year, students who have graduated from secondary school in the U.S. Virgin Islands will have one less concern about their college careers: tuition payments.

That's because the Territory has adopted legislation to provide financial aid for tuition to residents of the Virgin Islands for post-secondary education at the University of the Virgin Islands (UVI).

"With the passage and signing of Act 8155, the Virgin Islands becomes the first Territory and the University of the Virgin Islands now becomes the first historically black college and university (HBCU) that provides comprehensive free tuition to students within its state or jurisdiction," said President of the University of the Virgin Islands, Dr. David Hall. "This is one of the few programs in the nation that provides free tuition for baccalaureate degrees."



The Virgin Islands Higher Education Scholarship Program (VIHESP) is available to residents of the U.S. Virgin Islands who have graduated from a private, public or parochial high school without regard to age, date of graduation or household income.

The full tuition scholarships can be applied towards study for a student's first associate's or bachelor's degree. In order for new students to qualify for the funds, they must apply for full-time admission to UVI no later than the published application deadline and must have applied for federal assistance through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). For 2019, the deadline for applying for admission to the University is March 1, 2019. New students applying for admission in the Spring 2020 semester must apply by October 15, 2019.

In signing the bill into law, then-Governor Kenneth E. Mapp stated: "This new law and the opportunities it creates will be a positive 'game changer' for many families. Providing tuition for young Virgin Islanders sets them on a path of achieving their dreams and aspirations."

Newly elected Lieutenant Governor Tregenza Roach, then senator, was the main sponsor of the

legislation.

Approximately 1,700 students are expected to qualify to receive the tuition benefit, according to President Hall, potentially helping to increase the percentage of Virgin Islanders who have college degrees and move the Territory to a "more appropriate" level of degree-holders in the population.

"A college degree is no longer a luxury that the rich and the academically and athletically gifted individuals can obtain," Dr. Hall said. "Higher education is a basic necessity and must be provided in the same way we provide other basic necessities."

Recipients of the tuition aid, which would supplement students' federal scholarship awards, university scholarships, and private donations, will be required to maintain a Grade Point Average of 2.5.

"What truly makes the Virgin Islands approach to free tuition unique and compelling is that funds are also being set aside to support students in their quest to excel. The Act provides funding so that the University can establish new academic support programs to help more students in high school obtain a 2.5 Grade Point Average (GPA) and new programs at the college level that will help them to maintain a 2.5 GPA," said President Hall.

The other unique feature of the program is that it applies to any individual who meets the requirements regardless of when they finished high school.

"There are individuals in the Virgin Islands who have put their educational dream on hold five, 10, 15 or even 20 or more years ago," said Dr. Hall. "This policy enables and inspires them to now pick back up those dreams, brush them off, and pursue the fulfillment of that degree that they never were able to achieve in the past because of financial limitations."

The free tuition law includes an in-Territory work service requirement, ranging from two months to three years, for all students who receive a scholarship. The obligation to work in the Territory must be completed within seven years after graduation.

The University will collaborate with the Virgin Islands Department of Labor to secure job placement for scholarship recipients.

VIHESP provides for an annual appropriation of \$3 million from the Internal Revenue Matching Fund to the University of the Virgin Islands Scholarship Revolving Fund. In addition, President Hall stressed that "private donors must continue to support the University with scholarship contributions in order for this transformative program to sustain itself."

"I encourage all Virgin Islanders to take advantage of this transformative opportunity to make their future brighter and their educational burden lighter," said President Hall.

#### About UVI

The University of the Virgin Islands is a learner-centered institution dedicated to the success of its students and committed to enhance the lives of the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands and the



University of the Virgin Islands graduates

wider Caribbean through excellent teaching, innovative research and responsible community service. UVI is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

For further information, visit [www.uvi.edu](http://www.uvi.edu).

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