

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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UG's Early Childhood Centre of Excellence Collaborates with Int'l Partners to Host Conference on Disability Access and Inclusion



The University of Guyana's Early Childhood Centre of Excellence

The University of Guyana (UG), in partnership with Texas Southern University, the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD), Rutgers Center for Minority Serving Institutions, Carroll Community College, Joyful Signing, and the Ministry of Education (Guyana), on Thursday, October 30, 2025, hosted its inaugural conference on disability access and inclusion which provide a space for participants to “*explore the impact of disability access across the spectrum, from birth to employment.*”

The conference was held virtually under the theme “*Empowering Inclusion, Transforming Futures*” and was open free to all participants. The global conference attracted almost 700 participants from across the world, including individuals with disabilities, academics, practitioners, advocates, policymakers, and students dedicated to advancing accessibility and inclusion throughout the life course.



Dr Lidon Lashley, Director of the University of Guyana's Early Childhood Centre of Excellence (UG-ECCE)



In declaring the conference open, Dr Lidon Lashley, Director of the University of Guyana's Early Childhood Centre of Excellence (UG-ECCE), highlighted the university's leadership in inclusive education and its commitment to disability equity.

“The University of Guyana leads the way in the Global South and Caribbean region in research in understanding the evolving and emerging trends in neurodiversity. As an institution, we are proud of our service to Guyana, the Caribbean, and the wider Global South in expanding research, providing culturally sensitive responses, and developing Indigenous resources for persons living with disabilities,” Dr Lashley said, noting that UG's Inclusivity, Diversity and Equity Policy and the UG 2040 Blueprint aim to ensure one graduate per household, inclusive of persons with disabilities and other diversities.

Delivering the opening remarks, Provost of Texas Southern University, Dr Carol Goodman, underscored the global relevance of disability inclusion and the need for structural change:

“Disability intersects almost every aspect of life. True inclusion means removing barriers and reimagining systems. May we leave here not only informed, but inspired to lead changes in our communities and institutions,” Dr Goodman said.



Dr. Bea Awoniyi, Assistant Vice President of Student Affairs and College Ombuds at Santa Fe College

Keynote Speaker, Dr. Bea Awoniyi, Assistant Vice President of Student Affairs and College Ombuds at Santa Fe College, delivered a compelling address centred on *the power of possibility* and the transformative impact of belief and support in the lives of persons with disabilities. ***“Every student carries a universe of possibility inside them, and every educator holds the key to unlock***



those possibilities. When educators believe in possibility, the impossible does not have a chance,” Dr Awoniyi shared

Dr Awoniyi further urged participants to go beyond minimum compliance toward cultivating belonging, dismantling attitudinal barriers, and designing systems where accessibility is foundational rather than optional.

Emphasising that inclusion requires action and compassion, Dr Awoniyi challenged stakeholders to serve as *“architects of possibility”* and *“quiet heroes behind every complicated puzzle”*, creating environments where persons of all ages and abilities can flourish.

CEO of AHEAD, Mr Stephan Smith, welcomed participants and applauded UG’s leadership in convening the international dialogue. *“We are here to explore possibility. Everything leads from one stage of life to the next, and collaboration across the lifespan is essential. I am impressed by the leadership and vision behind this event.”*

The conference also featured concurrent expert-led sessions exploring inclusive pedagogy, disability rights and policy, neurodiversity, accessible technology, early childhood intervention, employment pathways, and culturally responsive practices across diverse contexts. Participants engaged in knowledge-sharing and explored strategies for strengthening disability support systems from birth through adulthood.

The event forms part of UG’s sustained efforts to champion equity, diversity, access, and inclusion across Guyana and the wider Caribbean. The University’s Early Childhood Centre of Excellence continues to lead in research on neurodiversity, disability access, and inclusive learning. Persons may access a selection of UG-ECCE’s research at the following link <https://ecce.uog.edu.gy/research-professional-development>



UG in Brief

The University of Guyana, the accredited national University of Guyana, now in its 62nd year, was founded in October 1963, three years before Guyana became independent. “UG”, as it is fondly referred to, offers over 180 distinct programmes in over 80 disciplines from Certificates, Diplomas, associate degrees, Bachelor’s Degrees, Master’s Degrees to Ph.D.’s. These programmes are offered in online, face-to-face or blended formats. UG delivers through a system of eight campuses. This includes its 37-year-old community-based Institute for Distance and Continuing Education (IDCE) and the second major campus at Tain in Berbice celebrating its 25th anniversary in 2025, as well as the path-breaking Makatau Forest Campus. The University of Guyana’s student population is over 11,500.

Through its 9 faculties and 10 Research Institutes and Centers, including an accredited College of Medical Sciences, School of Entrepreneurship and Business Innovation and the Faculty of Earth and Environmental Sciences which has been ranked # 5 globally, “UG” has provided education, training and research for over 71,000 alumni over its 62-year history with significant national and global impact. Key faculties include the Faculty of Engineering and Technology, the Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry, the Faculty of Natural Sciences, the College of Behavioural Sciences and Research, the Faculty of Education and Humanities and the Faculty of Social Sciences. The University’s 10 Research Institutes include the recently launched Institute for Marine and Riverine Ecologies and Economies (IMAREE), the internationally important Centre for Biodiversity, the Institute for Food and Nutrition Security, the Institute for Research, Innovation and Entrepreneurship, the Institute for Energy Diplomacy, the Green Institute, the Institute of Gender Studies, the Institute for Human Resiliency, Strategic Security and the Future, and the International Centre for Excellence in Early Childhood Education.

The mission of the University of Guyana is to discover, generate, disseminate and apply knowledge of the highest standard for the advancement of communities, the nation, and mankind

DECC



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UNIVERSITY of GUYANA

within an atmosphere of academic freedom, transparent accountability, pragmatic innovation and universal respect.

UG's forward-thinking Blueprint 2040 is currently setting the course for the University's future design and institutional response to the changing needs of Guyana, the region and the world. It is entering the 2nd of its four phases. UG is currently celebrating its 62nd anniversary with a continued focus on becoming the leading teaching and research University in Guyana.

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