



NEWS RELEASE

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Georgetown, Guyana

UG graduate and lecturer win inaugural 2018-19 Guyana Innovation Prize

Ms Lisa Dublin, a graduate of the University of Guyana (UG), and Dr Dawn Fox, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Chemistry, are the winners of the inaugural 2018-2019 Guyana Innovation Prize. The Innovation Prize is an initiative of the Guyana Economic Development Trust (GEDT), a U.S. based, independent philanthropic organisation that incubates and supports start-up enterprises to boost the private sector of Guyana. The award provides pre-seed funding to commercially viable research in agro-processing and technology from students, alumni, and faculty of the University of Guyana. The total prize is US \$10,000 and it will be presented to the winners at the Diaspora/Entrepreneurship conference in July.

The GEDT also partners with the Guyana Marketing Corporation to provide Innovation Prize Fellows with technical support, including market analysis, product-market fit, supplier sourcing and package design. This helps move the product idea from the laboratory to the shelves, homes and offices.

The winning team's project is based on using processed coconut as a low-cost water filtration solution. The focus of the project is to optimise the production of granular coconut-shell activated carbon to produce a low-cost activated carbon that is effective in improving water quality.

According to Ms Oslene Carrington, Chief Executive Officer of the Guyana Economic Development Trust, "through the fund, the Diaspora has an opportunity to give back to our society using a platform that is not connected to anything except a desire to see really great things happen." She emphasised that it is "... a desire to empower our university, a desire to empower our young people, and a desire to empower our intellectuals to develop new ways of doing things, things that will ultimately have our country thriving and successful".

The Guyana Innovation Prize sees promising research ideas being selected based on a competitive application process. Selected Innovation Prize Venture Fellows are then paired with mentors, both in and outside of Guyana, over a 12-month period, to help develop business plans and revenue models for commercially viable, scalable businesses.

Vice-Chancellor of the University of Guyana, Professor Ivelaw Lloyd Griffith, lauded the initiative: "Major kudos to Ms Carrington and the Guyana Economic Development Trust for this powerful initiative, which is a major way to celebrate and incentivise Entrepreneurship and Innovation. Let me also extend congratulations to the winners—Senior Lecturer Dr Dawn Fox and alumna Ms Lisa Dublin, who are innovation front runners. Professor Griffith further stated, "Ms Carrington approached me with the idea last year as a way to support Project Renaissance's emphasis on entrepreneurship and innovation and to give back to her native land. The splendid work she and her team have done in the diaspora and in Guyana in bringing the idea to fruition is itself a powerful example of innovation. I deeply appreciate it".

The Vice-Chancellor also thanked the individuals at UG who were part of the collaboration that translated the idea into reality: Dr Gerry Yaw, Director of Strategic Initiatives; Professor Leyland Lucas, Dean of the School of Entrepreneurship and Business Innovation (SEBI); and Dr Troy Thomas, Director of Undergraduate Research.

Ms Dublin graduated from the University in 2017 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Chemistry, and is currently employed as a Laboratory Analyst in the Environmental Department of Guyana Goldfields. She is responsible for monitoring the ion chemistry associated with the effects of the mine site on the waterways. In 2017, she presented her undergraduate research project at the McNair's Scholar's Conference for Undergraduate Research in Florida. Her project focused on developing cost-effective systems for water treatment using natural waste materials.

Additionally, Ms Dublin participated in the Undergraduate Research Conference at the University of Guyana in 2017 and 2018. Outside of her academic work Ms Dublin was a member of the University of Guyana Chemistry Club and the Campus Lion's Club.

Additionally, Dr Dawn Fox is also a graduate of the University of Guyana. Her overarching research interest is in converting local materials, especially waste materials, into value-added materials to solve environmental problems. She has extensive experience in characterising sorbents with microscopy and spectroscopy, water and wastewater treatment, and water quality analysis. She and her undergraduate students made aqueous phase sorbents using a variety of materials local to Guyana, including waste sawdust, coconut shell, and rice husk. In 2016, she co-founded a group called Women in Science & Engineering (WiSE), to support, empower and advocate for girls and women to pursue and flourish in STEM careers. In 2018 she became the first Guyanese to be awarded the Organisation for Women in Science for the Developing World – Elsevier Foundation Early Career Award for scholarship and research in the Physical Sciences.

The duo were determined the winners ahead of four other University of Guyana graduates. The other applicants were: Rebecca Harris (Bachelor of Science in Chemistry minor in Biology) who endeavours to formulate a more natural, inexpensive product that can be used to fight against various fungal infections; Tandika Harry (Bachelor of Science in Agriculture), exploring the application of beeswax and cassava starch to extend the postharvest life of mangoes; Juanelle Marks (Bachelor of Science in Computer Science), with a focus on Computerized Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CCBT): Towards Unlearning Learned Helplessness and Shavon Sharif (Bachelor of Science in Agriculture and Forestry), who intends to explore the use of vinasse (waste) as an organic fertilizer on crops.

The Guyana Innovation Prize is not a research grant but rather it makes available funding to commercialise research. The funds are provided by members of the Guyana Diaspora to invest in the development of scientific and technology forward-looking ideas that are commercially viable, and can become businesses and provide jobs. The Trust's aim is to advance the private sector and economy of Guyana by supporting innovative ideas that reflect the future of science and technology.

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UG IN BRIEF

With a current enrollment of some 8,000 students, The University of Guyana (UG) has graduated more than 20,000 students who have gone on to successful careers locally, regionally and internationally. The University is also a major contributor to the national economy and to business and industry. Established in 1963 on a part-time basis with shared space at Queens College, UG moved to its own campus at Turkeyen in 1970 and expanded in 2000 with the addition of the Tain Campus. It now offers more than 120 Under-graduate and Post-graduate Programmes including the Natural Sciences, Engineering, Environmental Studies, Forestry, Business, Urban Planning and Management, Tourism Studies, Education, Creative Arts, Economics, Law, Medicine, Optometry and Nursing. Several online programmes are available and The UG also offers extra-mural classes at four locations through its Institute of Distance and Continuing Education (IDCE). The UG also offers the opportunity for student engagement in debating, sports, and cultural, religious and professional activities.

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