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Guyanese among 16 graduates of Caribbean science programme

August 25, 2013 By [admin](#)

Sixteen students including a Guyanese have graduated from the 2013 Student Programme for Innovation in Science and engineering (SPISE), a science initiative staged to provide training for students in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math), along with Mandarin.



Former Bishops' High School and now Queen's College student Deowattie Vanessa Narine (third from left); NAMILCO Managing Director Bert Sukhai (fourth from left) and other NAMILCO officials at the ceremony to hand over the company's sponsorship of Narine's SPISE programme

SPISE is a yearly programme conducted by the Caribbean Science Foundation (CSF). This year, students from 10 Caribbean countries took part in the four-week programme during which they were involved in university-level courses in calculus, physics, biochemistry, entrepreneurship, humanities (one Caribbean concept) and Mandarin. They also did laboratory work in robotics/electronics and biochemistry.

The participating countries were Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Guyana, Grenada, Jamaica, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago. The programme, which was held in Barbados with training sessions at the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill campus, began on July 20 and concluded on August 17. The students were afforded the opportunity to attend classes, which were taught by leading professors from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). The National Milling Company of Guyana Inc (NAMILCO) had sponsored Deowattie Vanessa Narine of Bishops' High School to attend the programme. Narine, 17, was the Caribbean Examination Council's (CXC) Best Science Student in 2012.

Through the programme, students were also allowed to participate in a career seminar series during which they were exposed firsthand to the career paths, decisions and experiences of six distinguished professionals, in science and engineering, from the diaspora and the region. The instructors at the seminar included faculty members from the University of the West Indies and senior management from the U.S. biotechnology industry.

SPISE is led by CSF's Interim Executive Director, Professor Cardinal Warde, and is designed according to the popular and highly successful minority introduction to engineering and science programme at the MIT.

Final project

At the end of programme, students had to present to the public their final projects based on robotics and entrepreneurship. With the robotics competition, students modified underwater robots (donated by the MIT Sea-Grant programme) in order to retrieve floating balls on the water surface and placing them into a basket. This was a true test of their innovation, ingenuity and engineering design skills.

As for the entrepreneurship competition, teams of students had to pitch their business plans and then answer tough questions from the audience, including Peter Williams, managing director of the Light and Power Holdings and Dr DeLisle Worrell, governor of the Central Bank of Barbados. Even under such intense pressure and scrutiny from these eminent business experts, the students held their ground. Members of the audience were given fake money to invest in the teams they found most persuasive, and thus the winner was determined.

The students had also performed two skits, entirely in Mandarin, to display their newly-learned language. The skits "The Crazy Waitress" and "Shopping Day Gone Awry" were well received by the audience. These performances were especially

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M	T	W	T	F	S	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	
« Jul						

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impressive since the Mandarin instruction comprised only 12 hours in total over a three-week period.

Invaluable experience

In the end, the students found the SPISE experience invaluable, and this was reflected in an exit interview in which they commented about the new and difficult materials they learnt and how their confidence to compete with other students in their age group from any part of the world was boosted.

The SPISE is one of CSF's education reform initiatives with the long-term goal of helping to diversify the economies of the region by stimulating more technology-based entrepreneurship within the region. It is anticipated that students who complete the SPISE will eventually attend some of the best science and engineering universities in the world, and become scientific, engineering and business leaders in academia and industry within the Caribbean. Key partners in the SPISE are the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill campus, and the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC).

Students were able to take part in the SPISE programme free because of the donations from sponsors such as Scotiabank East, the United States embassy in Barbados, the Eastern Caribbean, Light and Power Holdings, Neal and Massy Foundation, the Central Bank of Barbados, the Caribbean Development Bank, Belize Telemedia Limited, the Belize Public Utilities Commission, Trinidad and Tobago's Education Ministry and Division of Youth Affairs, NAMILCO, Friends of Guyana, Friends of Jamaica, the Caribbean Diaspora for Science, Technology and Innovation, the family of Linda Su-Nan Chang Sah and Nicholas Brathwaite's PETNA Foundation.

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