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The following is the text of a newspaper essay by UVI President Dr. LaVerne E. Ragster. The essay appeared in the March 10-11 issue of the *V.I. Daily News* and the March 11-12 issue of *The Avis*.

## **"College Hill 4" and UVI**

by Dr. LaVerne E. Ragster

As the University of the Virgin Islands celebrates 45 years of serving the Virgin Islands' higher education needs, millions of viewers throughout the United States, Canada and the Caribbean tuned in last Tuesday to BET for the premiere of "College Hill 4." "College Hill 4" is the fourth season of a reality series based on the lives of eight college students on UVI's St. Thomas campus.

While the students, staff and faculty of UVI are pleased (and, yes, a little amused) with the popular media exposure our university is receiving, we know that television does not present, even-handedly, all that our institution of higher learning has to offer.

First and foremost, the University of the Virgin Islands is a public, Masters II university, based in the liberal arts and focused on providing more than 2,500 students with the academic and life skills they need to pursue professional success. In keeping with its mission, UVI is committed to enhancing the lives of the people of the wider Caribbean through excellent teaching, innovative research, and responsive community service. At UVI, students flourish in programs offering everything from the fundamentals - English, mathematics, education - to specialized courses on such topics as aquaponics and tilapia aquaculture, created to study and protect our magnificent ocean resources.

UVI has produced hundreds of leaders serving in education, government and corporations throughout the world; and provided technical assistance and intellectual resources to the territory and the region. When I look at our current student body and the faculty that nurtures those students, I know that more talented students from our institution will make significant impacts on the world.

The "College Hill 4" opportunity is one that involves students, the university and the community. A cast of eight - four transfer students who came to us from the U.S. mainland, plus four Virgin Islanders - offer viewers a frolicsome glimpse of youthful adventures and mischief, all filmed on and around St. Thomas. "College Hill" shows the parties; it shows the relationships; it shows the conflicts that can arise among friends.

What "College Hill" can't depict fully is the value added to the lives of those who participated in the production, both in front of and behind the cameras, beyond the walls of academia, beyond the confines of physicality itself.

The University of the Virgin Islands seeks to help all of its students to grow into educated, positive citizens and allows young people and non-traditional students alike to take advantage of the opportunities we present here for research, growth and development. The UVI academic

experience validates the eager intellect, which develops to its fullest when challenged and stimulated, and which ultimately is the vehicle for improving the quality of life enjoyed by our students, our alumni and their families.

"College Hill 4" highlights the existence of a small, unique institution before groups of people who normally may not have recognized its value. Speaking strictly in practical terms, we have experienced a tremendous surge in "hits" to our website, and the number of inquiries from prospective students seeking applications has quadrupled since "College Hill 4" bowed. While it's true that our school is depicted in an entertainment-driven format, it's also true that we could never afford to market ourselves as BET has done.

There's no denying that "College Hill 4," to some extent, speaks the truth. The drinking, the sex, the serious anger management issues. All this and more are common among today's college students, and we at UVI believe a "mirror" function is at work as our UVI students see their classmates behaving badly. It's all to the good when they experience a way to see themselves and make some positive changes as a result. The show also provides an opportunity to see how the institution assists students to face and surmount personal development challenges.

The task of every institution is to prepare its students for adulthood.

We at UVI hope this momentary blaze of attention will allow us to illuminate what really goes on here and at so many fine, smaller schools: the learning, the progress, the betterment of all whom we educate and serve. This is the moral compass that guides us. This is what remains and grows, long after saucy television reruns fade from memory.

As the university heads toward the year 2012, when it will celebrate its 50th anniversary, we will continue to be committed to student success, committed to excellence, and pledged to enhance the social and economic transformation of the U.S. Virgin Islands.