

UTech and UWI receive \$12-m computer network equipment from Palisadoes Foundation

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The University of Technology, Jamaica (UTech) and the University of the West Indies (UWI), Mona, campus, last week received a donation of computer network equipment valued at over \$12 million from the Palisadoes Foundation.

The foundation is a registered company in the state of California, USA, established by ICT professionals in the Jamaica Diaspora Technology Taskforce, to promote the use and production of ICT services in Jamaica.

The network equipment was formally handed over by Palisadoes Foundation President Peter Harrison to UTech President Professor Stephen Vasciannie, and Dr Gunjan Mansingh, head, Department of Computing, Faculty of Science and Technology, UWI, at a special ceremony held at the UTech's Papine campus.

"This donation of equipment will facilitate Jamaican universities in creating an environment that encourages students and faculty to research, create and use open-source software," a UTech news release quotes Harrison, a Jamaican who is chief technical officer and co-founder of Silicon Valley company, Colovore.

According to the release, Harrison has built the core web infrastructure for several of Silicon Valley's Internet titans and previously worked in IT at *Google* and *Netflix*.

He pointed out that global companies such as Google, Amazon, Facebook, Oracle, Cisco and others are leaders in the open-source software movement, adding that "success in open-source will open many doors".

Open-source software is free to download, access, modify and use. Harrison expressed confidence that Jamaica can compete with the best in the world and have the capacity to create globally competitive software engineers and companies through exposure to open-source software. He pledged the support of the Palisadoes Foundation in continued partnership with Jamaican universities and the IT industry, towards this goal.

Professor Vasciannie, in welcoming the valuable donation and the partnership forged between UTech, UWI and the Palisadoes Foundation, said that “it will support IT operations in all 34 laboratories across the UTech, Jamaica Papine campus,” adding that “the new network will certainly go a far way in enhancing the university’s capacity to provide our students with every opportunity for knowledge-sharing, development of technical competencies, and experience in applying knowledge to problem-solving”.

Dr Mansingh, in her remarks, asserted that Jamaican IT students are among the best in the world despite being less resourced than their counterparts in larger economies. Noting that one of the major challenges with open-source adoption is the lack of trained IT personnel, Dr Mansingh called for both UWI and UTech “to collectively work to train an appropriately skilled workforce in technology that satisfies not only the needs of the region but also competes internationally”.

Dr Sean Thorpe, head, School of Computing and Information Technology, UTech, Jamaica, who was instrumental in spearheading the acquisition of the IT equipment for both universities, said that it will support the continuous development of open-source software projects and will enable the establishment of a local area network for students that is separate from the UTech, Jamaica campus student WiFi network, which will enhance student customer experience. He noted Internet access for the equipment will be provided through a dedicated 200 Mbps data circuit.

The equipment donation was facilitated through the Jamaica Computer Society, which has historically collaborated with the Palisadoes Foundation. President of the computer society, Sheldon Powe, said “Jamaica is a lot better for the equipment donation”, and thanked the foundation for giving back to Jamaica.