

Contact: Dan Holly
Jerry Thomas Public Relations
(919) 448-8221
dan@jerrythomaspr.com

For immediate release:

Grants help efforts to close science and math gap between whites and minorities

St. Thomas, V.I., Oct. 14 – With the help of an \$11.5 million, five-year grant from the National Science Foundation, the University of the Virgin Islands is helping to close the science and math gap. UVI is the only historically black university to receive this type of grant, which funds the Virgin Islands Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (VI-EPSCoR) program.

Together with another \$300,000 planning grant from the NSF for the Math-Science Partnership-Start program, UVI can fund several initiatives, including working with the territory's education officials to strengthen K-12 science and math education.

Dr. LaVerne E. Ragster, UVI President said that the university will work with a variety of stakeholders, including the community, to strengthen science and math.

"This is a very important partnership and initiative, one that has the commitment of the university and the hopes of all partners for the positive impact it can have on the future of the territory," she said.

Dr. LaVerne Terry, the Department of Education Commissioner, added: "The Department of Education is excited about this grant and the opportunity that it provides for improving math and science education in the Virgin Islands. We look forward to strengthening and advancing our partnerships with UVI, VI-EPSCoR and the entire VI community."

The \$11.5 million grant is the second UVI has received for VI-EPSCoR; the first was in 2004. In addition to strengthening math and science education, it will also allow the university to contribute to global research on the impacts of climate change, work closely with decision makers to apply science to effective management of the territory's natural resources and address local and regional environmental challenges.

The math and science gap between minorities and whites was most recently highlighted in a study to be published next month in *Notices of the American Mathematical Society*. The report finds that American boys are underrepresented in high-level math competitions, girls are "highly underrepresented" and minorities are "almost nonexistent."

UVI officials said the grant is important not only to help close the gap but also to show that an HBCU can participate fully in the effort. Typically, NSF gives these types of grants to large state institutions, according to Dr. Meri Whitaker, director of VI-EPSCoR.

With UVI being the premier educational institution in the Caribbean, however, it was not at the competitive disadvantage HBCUs in the states face, Whitaker said.

“We’re being given the opportunity to handle these big grants and we’re showing that we can do it,” she said.

Jennifer Spillman, an assistant professor of Chemistry on UVI’s St. Croix campus, said efforts so far have paid dividends. There has been a strong growth in demand among students for science programs in recent years, Spillman said.