



CENTRAL BANK OF  
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***“Global Citizenship : the Implications for  
Today’s COSTAATT Graduate”***

***Keynote Address at***

***COSTAATT 2005 Graduation Ceremony***

*by*

*Ewart S. Williams,  
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Firstly, I would like to thank Dr. Peters, your President, for inviting me to share this momentous occasion with you. It’s really an honour to be part of your celebration.

Secondly, I would like to congratulate all of you who are graduating today. Your achievement is a happy culmination of intense dedication, hard work and in many cases (I’m sure), significant personal

sacrifice. I am certain that in this graduating class, there are countless personal stories of persistence and courage. Many of you have sacrificed a lot for your certificates – working long hours, raising families and still finding time for classes and study. Many of you have worked several years to get to this point, advancing at your own pace.

To all of you, I extend my profound appreciation for your perseverance and dedication.

I also want to congratulate you proud parents, spouses, children, siblings and friends who deserve to share this experience with you. Don't deceive yourselves graduates, there is no one among you who could truly say that you accomplished this by yourself. Anyone who has had some measure of success should recognise and acknowledge that the support of others was indispensable to one's achievement.

Graduates, there is no need to worry since I know that graduations are not a time for long speeches – particularly at ten o'clock on a Saturday morning – so I wouldn't take long to say the few things I have to say.

My **first point** to you is that you should be justly proud of your achievement. You are benefiting from a new dispensation, a new movement in Trinidad and Tobago that sees tertiary education no longer as the privilege of a few but as an inalienable right of anyone

who wishes to take advantage of it. I was part of the old paradigm whereby you went through 'A' levels and then went on to a three-year university, probably to pursue one of the traditional lines of study – medicine, law, the liberal arts, engineering, etc.

The 'A' level programme was seen as a way of identifying those who were considered to be “**university material**” and those who were destined to be “professionals”. Some still characterise this approach as a way of achieving “excellence”. In hindsight, even if it succeeded in creating an “educated elite”, it left far too many short of their potential.

**But thankfully, the world has changed radically.** Globalisation and the reduction of trade barriers have put all countries in economic competition with each other. The CARICOM Single Market and Economy, through its provisions on labour mobility, has made every worker in your field in the CARICOM region your potential competitor. Employers must now be constantly striving to increase productivity to remain in business; and like the private sector, governments and state enterprises, are being called upon to be more efficient and more effective.

In short, economic transformation in the current competitive global environment requires a highly skilled and adaptable workforce. Employers now insist on workers with general problem-solving competencies as developed through tertiary education. Given the

greater demand for training and re-training in a constantly widening range of competencies, dependence on the traditional three- or four-year universities has turned out to be inadequate.

The United States, the world's foremost economy, recognised this a long time ago, at the turn of the last century, and pioneered the **community college**.

The network of community colleges in the United States expanded rapidly in the early 1960s. Today, in the U.S., community colleges educate about one-half of the nation's undergraduates. Community colleges are now recognised as centres where students can gain skills to expand their job opportunities and improve their chances for career advancement.

Community colleges are thriving in several parts of the world by providing opportunities and options to all those who are interested in education and learning.

In Trinidad and Tobago, we have been very late in adopting the model. Fortunately, COSTAATT and a few other institutions have recently stepped forward to fill this void.

In line with the trend worldwide, COSTAATT is here to provide access to all our citizens who want tertiary education, even if they did

not achieve 5 CXC or any 'A' level subjects. COSTAATT is also now accessible to the adult workforce who understands the importance of continuing education and upgrading their skills.

Graduates, according to a recent World Bank study, (*"Time to Choose - Caribbean Development in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century"*), the Caribbean lags behind Latin America, in terms of the **skills gap** - defined as the average level of post-secondary school education. You would be even more surprised to learn that Trinidad and Tobago lags behind both Barbados and Jamaica in that we have a larger skills gap. The World Bank report explains that we are way behind both our Caribbean neighbours, because we are not as far advanced in terms of the development and expansion of community college education.

Graduates, Trinidad and Tobago is making rapid strides to close that **skills gap** as quickly as possible, through the establishment of the University of Trinidad and Tobago, through the expansion of a network of private tertiary institutions, and through your COSTAATT.

Your associate degrees and your certificates now tell employers here in the region and in the wider world that you have gone through rigid training in your respective discipline and can now operate at a higher level of productivity.

A **second** bit of advice that I would like to give to you today is this.

If ever it was so in the past, **no longer can you see your education as synonymous with individual development**, as opposed to and separate from community and national development. **You no longer could afford that** such is the crisis in which our communities and our nation find themselves.

Not that you should not have your personal ambitions. In fact, the training you have received from COSTAATT and your associate degree will surely help your earning potential and your career goals.

What I am saying, however, my dear graduates, is that you need to find a way to use your education to make your communities and your country better. We all need to do this; and the country helped to pay for your education so you have an obligation to contribute.

And you can do this in a number of ways – for example by teaching others to read and write; by getting those who are reluctant, to be more interested in higher education; by working to dispel the suspicion, the distrust and the hatred that currently undermine our social fabric; by your own example and by other means of trying to reduce the coarseness of sensibility that seems to be taking over our country; by promoting more civility in how we interact, in how we

speak to each other; in how we drive on the roads; there are countless ways. And as the calypso says, *“if ever your country needed you, is now”*.

A **third** plea, I have for you today – both ladies and gentlemen – is that we all make a special effort **to lift the level of male achievement**. My dear graduates we have been talking about gender disparity in educational attainment for so long that we have come to accept it is as inevitable and something about which we can do nothing. The data for the Caribbean show that female completion rates in secondary school are close to 50 percent better than their male peers. I am told that about 60 percent of COSTAATT enrolment is female. As for this current graduating class, only about one-third is male. The cumulative consequences of this situation are grave indeed, in terms of lost opportunities for the male population, in terms of family stability and in terms of increasing crime and delinquency.

We need to find remedies, and graduates, you are in a good position to help. Let the young brothers who are staying away know that they are running out of excuses – the community college framework gives greater flexibility in terms of entrance requirements - staggered course offerings, lower fees (now with Government’s new policy, no cost) and perhaps a less stressful environment. To the male graduates, you need to be mentors and role models to your male peers. Let them know that in the next ten years or so more than 50 percent of available jobs will require a post-secondary education.

My **fourth** point, dear graduates, is my fervent hope that COSTAATT has whetted your appetite for more education, more learning. As you know, in the U.S., community colleges are an accepted way for students to begin their higher education. They start off with the associate degree and certificate programmes, which lead to transfer opportunities at four-year colleges and universities. I understand that there are already transfer arrangements in place for COSTAATT graduates at some U.S. universities, but it is more important that similar arrangements with UWI and UTT be put in place soon. These are required in order to maximise the benefits of the COSTAATT experience.

In addition, to you graduating nurses, information technologists, graduates in business, agriculture, human resources management, liberal arts (to all you graduates), **you are now in a world where your education needs to continue**, a world in which you are required to update your skills continuously. Keep in mind that those who do not upgrade their skills will be left behind.

Whilst I am dispensing advice let me offer some to COSTAATT. You are doing an excellent job in providing tertiary educational opportunities to a section of the population that was not adequately catered for previously. And as you know, education is perhaps the most effective way of strengthening democratic institutions, of promoting the



development of human potential, and of fostering greater understanding among our peoples. Yours is a noble mission indeed.

Taking the cue from examples in the U.S., COSTAATT can further its mission by: establishing special links (by partnering) with communities; by expanding programmes of remedial education; in short, by taking education and learning to the communities. In the same vein, COSTAATT should also seek to intensify its links with the private sector so that COSTAATT students are assured meaningful employment opportunities when they graduate.

Graduates, I hope I have not exhausted your patience but I would like to leave you with a quote that I stumbled on. It comes from the award-winning movie *"Field of Dreams"* and it says:

*"Dream lofty dreams, and as you dream so shall you become. Your vision is the promise of what you shall one day be.*

*One who cherishes a beautiful vision, a lofty ideal, will one day realise it.*

*Be bold with your dreams. Don't settle for the easy questions. Aim high.*

*Create your own 'field of dreams'"*

Congratulations to all you graduates.