

BIOGRAPHY



DARA M. COOPER
INNOVATOR  EDUCATOR
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I grew up in the faculty housing neighborhood of the University of the Virgin Islands (UVI) St. Thomas campus, directly across the gate from the Michael J. Kirwan Terrace school and housing projects. Raised by my parents, Drs. Vincent and Fenella Cooper, who were both professors at UVI, as well as prominent members of the local community, fostered a lifelong connection to the University and the Virgin Islands.

Being a "University brat" afforded me numerous experiences of attending scholarly and humanitarian-focused activities, travel to various on and off-island experiences with my parents, and ongoing learning opportunities with many of their colleagues. This early exposure to a vast range of subject matter was very insightful in both my personal and professional development.

My three children also grew up around the campus while I worked there, experienced everything I participated in, and attended UVI before and after graduating from high school. For over 15 years, I worked at the UVI School of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service office, providing services to farmers and the community through research, education, and outreach. I also taught as a Communications professor and was the University's programming and station manager of WUVI AM, FM, and online radio for both campuses throughout the territory.

Both my outreach and radio at UVI roles connected me to the community, along with my non-profit work and consulting business. Outside of my university-related work, I remained involved in the historical, cultural, and expressive arts social environments and groups. I participated on various non-profit or government boards and kept active in the lives of my children at their schools and extra-curricular activities. Wherever I travel, the same types of engagement are my norm, and I am involved with national and international organizations of various initiatives. Voluntarily, I also support community organizing, organizational development, and mediation efforts.

Nationally since 2022, in my most recent role as the Communication Specialist for the USDA NIFA Southern Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program, I have attended conferences, meetings, events, educational institutions, and on-farm tours throughout the southeastern USA, I utilize my public relations, networking, public speaking, and multi-media skills.

Whether freelancing with media outlets or functioning in employment or contractual roles, my innate skills and interests have always fit or adapted perfectly to any job's responsibilities. Using new media journalism, which I learned while obtaining my Masters degree at Full Sail University, I help tell and share the stories of those within and throughout the food system, which allows individuals and wider communities to learn from each other more easily. This is my work and life purpose.

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