

The Evolution of Policy to Meet the Challenges of Distance: The Case of UWI Open Campus

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GENERAL OUTLINE

1. Profile of the University of the West Indies including physical location
2. Overview of efforts to increase access over geographic dispersion.
 - a. School of Continuing Studies
 - b. Challenge programme
 - c. UWI Distance Teaching Experiment/Enterprise
 - d. UWI Distance Education Centre
 - e. UWI Open Campus
3. Policy Analysis and Evaluation
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PROFILE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES

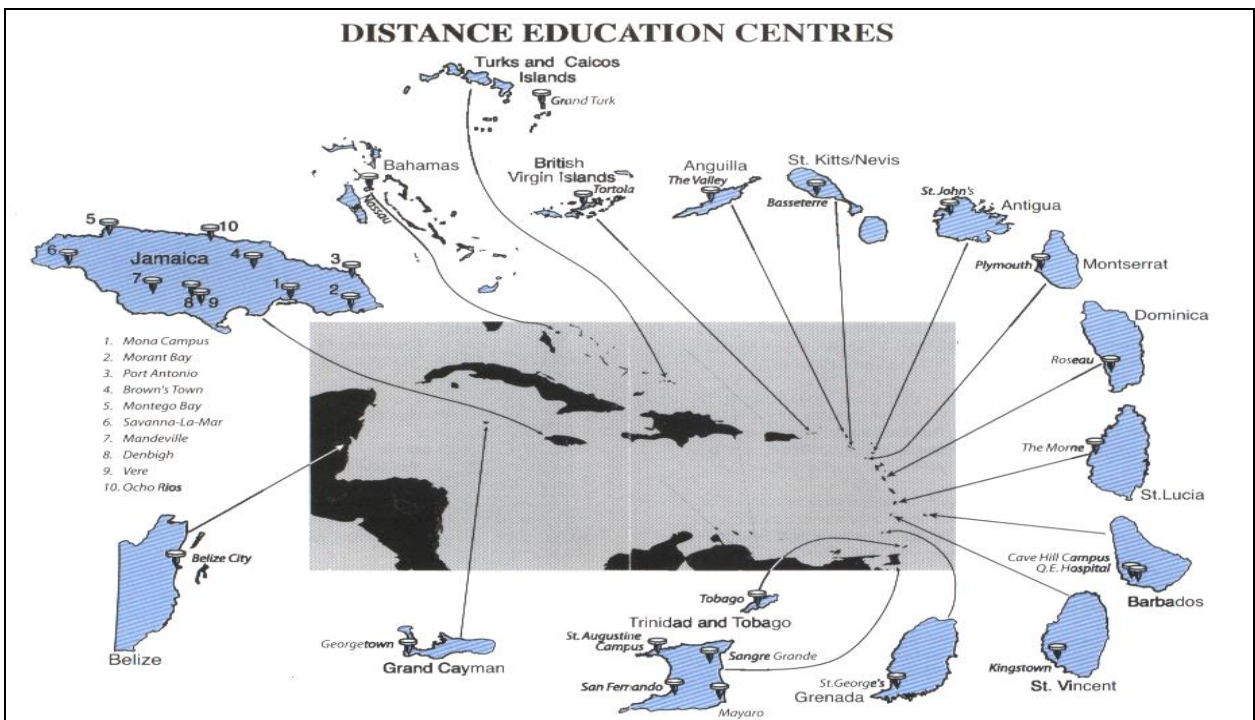
The University of the West Indies (UWI) is located in the Caribbean operating from several locations spread throughout the region (Map 1.1 depicts the countries and territories of the Caribbean).

The University began teaching in 1948 as a University College affiliated with the University of London, and became an independent University in 1962. UWI now has Campuses at Cave Hill, Barbados, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago and Mona, Jamaica.

UWI is a dual mode institution offering teaching by face-to-face as well as distance education. In addition to the three main campuses, the University has centres in all of its non-campus Caribbean countries as well as in the rural areas of Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago, which form part of a network making up The University of the West Indies Distance Education Centre (UWIDEC) in the dispersed territories. UWI also provides tertiary education through the School of Continuing Studies and several Tertiary Level Institutions, which in many cases share physical space with UWIDEC. Map 1.2 identifies the locations of UWI's three main campuses and 16 regional centres. The sixteen (16) English-speaking territories from which UWI operates are Anguilla, Antigua & Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and The Grenadines, the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and the Turks and Caicos Islands.



Map. 1.1 The Caribbean



Map 1.2 UWI Centres in the English-Speaking Caribbean

OVERVIEW OF EFFORTS TO INCREASE ACCESS OVER GEOGRAPHIC DISPERSION

Since its inception, the UWI has been trying to provide access over its geographic dispersion. The Extra-Mural Department of the University College of the West Indies (UCWI) was established in 1947 to serve, at the time, 14 countries in the region. By the 1960's however, as countries in the region moved towards independence and the university itself became an autonomous institution, issuing its own degrees in 1965, the role of the Extra Mural Department was expanded and further clarified (Fergus, Bernard and Soares, 2007). The Extra Mural Department later became the School of Continuing Studies.

Out of the need for access in the region articulated through the university centres, the challenge programme emerged.

The Challenge Examinations programme was introduced in 1978 to allow students in non-campus countries to register and take first year social science and law examinations offered by the UWI, in their home countries. The programme was structured with the expectation that the UWI would only provide a syllabus and recommended readings and the "challenge" would be for the student, through independent study, to successfully complete the examination.

In 1992, with a three-year grant of US\$600,000 from USAID, the UWI embarked on a project which would set the stage for the move toward the birth of a dual-mode institution. The project entitled The University of the West Indies Distance Teaching Experiment (UWIDITE) involved the use of a telecommunications system, initially spanning four English-speaking contributing countries of the UWI (St Lucia, Dominica, Antigua and Grenada) to provide two general classes of programmes. " i) providing for formal university certification ..., and ii) programmes specially designed for the particular groups of participants who receive certificates of participation." (Sherlock and Nettleford 1986, p.229.) Eventually the Challenge and UWIDITE programmes overlapped, with the telecommunications system being used as a means of support to those students in the non-campus countries doing the Challenge examinations. The potential of the UWIDITE system was recognized by the University's administration and funding from various sources provided the resources to expand the teleconference system to 16 countries in the region by the 1990s. Furthermore, an appraisal report, known as the Renwick Report (Renwick, Shale & Rao, 1992) provided the data to cement the University's policy decision to move to dual-mode.

In its Development Plan 1990-2000 the UWI identified distance education as its 3rd highest spending priority out of 19 items. This was in keeping with the university's view in the 1980s that distance education initiatives were vital to efforts to widen access to university education in the region.

UWIDEC was established in 1996 to expand the university's initiatives in distance education. UWI offers degree and diploma level programmes at its thirty (30) centres located throughout the English-speaking Caribbean.

A new vision for UWIDEC was first proposed in 1998 at a meeting of the Board of Non campus Countries and Distance Education, where the then Director of UWIDEC wrote:

"UWIDEC is in a precarious situation (it has neither the authority to help learners and/or Centres/Sites out of their difficulties nor the power to purposefully influence the faculties and/or the administration) and that there is an urgent need for an overhaul as nothing short of an overhaul can help the distance education enterprise at UWI." (UWIDEC/APC 2003, p.4).

In 2003 aspects of the proposal for a re-engineered UWIDEC were implemented. The proposal included the formation of a body for academic management titled the UWIDEC Academic Programme Committee.

In 2007, the Council of the University of the West Indies approved the development of an Open Campus of the University. This decision marked the implementation of an integral aspect of The UWI's 2007-2012 Strategic Plan. The Open Campus is to comprise the outreach sector of UWI, which is currently made up of:

- The UWI Distance Education Centre

- The Tertiary Level Institutions Unit, and
- The School of Continuing Studies – which includes the Specialised Units of the Caribbean Child Development Centre, the Hugh Lawson Shearer Trade Union Education Institute, the Human Resources Development Unit, the Social Welfare Training Centre and the Women and Development Unit.

Policy Analysis and Evaluation

As outlined earlier, the need for the UWI to meet its commitment has seen several incarnations of its outreach efforts. As the institution embarks on a more robust effort at inclusion for the UWI 12, it becomes an imperative to examine the proposed policy frameworks.

The analysis presented in Table 1 seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What policies have been established to enable The University of the West Indies Open Campus to achieve its goals in terms of *human resources, financial resources, technology, pedagogy, and administration*?
2. How do these policies relate to prior policies?
3. What are the likely challenges to effective policy implementation for the Open Campus?

Policy analysis is used here to assess the practical implications of a policy-oriented programme. Policy analysis is a formative process as opposed to a summative one. Essentially, a systems approach is adopted in policy analysis which is grounded in the idea that a programme can be represented as an interrelated series of parts that work together in organic fashion to achieve specific purposes. In the system there must be a coherent relationship among the inputs, activities, and outcomes. These filter into a feedback system which facilitates success of the programme. (Policy Evaluation and Policy Analysis document, 2005). For the purposes of this paper we review the policies in the specific areas identified as inputs into the system and reflect on their potential for success in light of past experiences.

Policy analysis is believed to be more useful when there is a large, troubled organisation manifesting the Rashomon effect, that is, where employees have varied perceptions on the same issue, the issue becomes contentious and there is discord, for example, where they disagree with or do not know the policies. In extreme cases there are decoupled sub-environments, that is, parts of the organisation go off in a direction on their own. While the Open Campus would not necessarily as yet show these effects, there is a great risk of so becoming given the geographic dispersion, localized cultures and differing socialization patterns. It is therefore essential that policies put forward at this early stage take cognizance of this fact.

Table 1: Comparison of Policies and Challenges/Potential Challenges to their Implementation

| Operational Areas | UWIDEC Policies | Challenges in implementing UWIDEC Policies | Open Campus Policies | Potential challenges for Open Campus Policy |
|---------------------|---|---|--|---|
| Human Resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Will use existing human resources in the faculties to provide academic support o Contracts to make explicit duties required by the 'dual mode' staff. o DE work to be counted for Assessment and Promotion. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Motivating academic staff to carry out duties in a timely fashion. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Creation of positions to facilitate the work of the Open Campus o Policy for procurement and development of distance education programmes allowing for free employment of staff | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Ability to employ a large cadre of qualified staff, both due to cost and availability o Increased distance from faculties may impact quality and access to resources |
| Financial Resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Funding from UWI's main source (Centre budget) as well as campus budget o UWIDEC course fees similar to face-to-face students. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Increasing cost, due to large investments of capital. including facilities for students to enable use of new technologies, costs associated with increasing and enhancing student support, adequate staffing and infrastructure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Financial policy on cost of services and fee structure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Increasing cost, due to large investments of capital, including facilities for students to enable use of new technologies, costs associated with increasing and enhancing student support, adequate staffing and infrastructure |

Table 1 Comparison of Policies and Challenges/Potential Challenges to their Implementation
(continued)

| Evaluation Criteria | UWIDEC Policies | Challenges in implementing UWIDEC Policies | Open Campus Policies | Potential challenges for Open Campus Policy based on theory |
|---------------------|--|--|---|--|
| Technology | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Priority given to print material supported by local tutorials, audio, videoconferences and online learning. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o The rapid rate at which technology is changing and the ability of the institution to respond to these changes o Consistent problems of access to new information and communication technologies. o Connectivity and adequate bandwidth to allow for a range of audio-visual interventions as well as reliable communication. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Policy for Distance Education and Online Delivery | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o The rapid rate at which technology is changing and the ability of the institution to respond to these changes o Consistent problems of access to new information and communication technologies. o Connectivity and adequate bandwidth to allow for a range of audio-visual interventions as well as reliable communication. |
| Pedagogy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Courses to be parallel to those on campuses. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Unrealistic deadlines and possible impact on quality o Creation of internal QA processes and procedures . | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Policy for Distance Education and Online Delivery. o Policy for procurement and development of distance education programmes o Policy on QA through UWI's Board for Undergraduate Studies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Unrealistic deadlines and possible impact on quality o Development of culturally relevant courseware o Timely appointment of relevant staff |
| Administration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o UWI would function as a dual mode institution o Enroll 2000 students by 2002 o No provision for open entry o DE in campus countries would be the concern both of the three Campus Principals and of the Board of non-Campus Countries and Distance Education. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Facilitation of efficient and effective communication o Distribution of materials o Registration of students o Administration of examinations o "Inelegant division of responsibilities..." for the Heads of University Centres in the non-campus countries | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Policy for procurement and development of distance education programmes o Policy on "Open Admission" o New organisational structure to incorporate Heads of University Centres | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Management of a distributed system without support of campuses o Resistance to change o Exacerbation of competitiveness among campuses |

Conclusion

Former Director of the UWIDEC, Badri Koul (2003) writes about the challenges faced by the institution:

.... This is the scenario UWIDEC has worked through during the past six years. Its role has mainly been that of crises management, because the University launched an operation for which the necessary mechanisms had not been created, the required personnel had not been put in place [for example, i) no staff was provided to handle course materials for about 2500 students—at an average of 90,000 items (3 courses per learner x 3 items per course x 4 installments per semester) and ii) computer labs were set up without any technical support to keep them fully functional] and the whole operation had not been underwritten appropriately. Today UWIDEC is surviving in its sixth year of operation, the first graduates through the DE modality have already passed out, many with very good credentials (but certainly all with bad memories). Relatively the results are very good and we hope the good part of the related work will continue.” (UWIDEC/APC 2003 p. 4).

To ensure that good memories are indeed a part of the experience of the Open Campus there is need for ongoing policy analysis so that as policy gaps are identified appropriate action can be quickly taken. In this preliminary analysis major gaps have already been identified in the areas of finance, technology and pedagogy, and human resources seems not robustly dealt with, given the anticipated elevated status of the Open Campus.

While a budget has been approved for the Open Campus, appropriate planning for increasing cost needs to be done. Increasing demand for the service as well as increasing cost of and for technology and as well as the need for appropriate infrastructure will lead to increasingly high costs of service. Technology is constantly changing, while maintenance of infrastructure will need substantial capital investments. Ways to financially sustain the Open Campus must be addressed in policy.

With regard to technology, policy for distance education and online delivery speaks to pedagogy and intra-faculty collaboration but does not address the broader contextual issues of access which were evident in the challenges faced by UWIDEC. In addition, pedagogy presents unique challenges in the distance mode environment for a variety of reasons including the need to address issues related to culture and socialization. Policy and policy for the Open Campus must be clear in addressing these issues as well.

The human resources issue is of major concern because it is complex with facets related to the internal ramifications of a new organizational structure superimposed on an existing one that was already fraught with challenges. This is coupled with the fact that the new structure is being perceived even from within the UWI community as a potential intra-competitor for the limited specialist resources in the field of open and distance learning. Issues of job security, tenure and adequate positioning of qualified resources are all critical issues for consideration but seem to be given low priority. The birth of the Open Campus may also be seen by career opportunists as a time to capitalize on systems that are potentially loose and which appear fluid. To ensure that this does not happen, precise and effective human resources policies must be developed urgently.

The urgency of developing a policy framework that addresses more fully the issues outlined and close apparent gaps is to pre-empt the organization demonstrating the more extreme aspects of Rashomon's effect, from which the organization will have more difficulty recovering. It is to avoid extended effort and cost being spent on recovering lost ground rather than on gaining ground in achieving the mission of the Open Campus.

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