

---

## EDITORIAL

This second issue of Volume 1 of the *Caribbean Teaching Scholar* cuts a swath across institutions with submissions from the University of Guyana, the UWI, Cave Hill, the UWI, St. Augustine and the Arthur Lok Jack Graduate School of Business. It is important that, as the journal becomes more fully established, we maintain our attractiveness beyond any one campus or institution. This also justifies the breadth of our peer reviewers who are from both within and outside the region.

The articles in this issue feature research into methods and approaches for enhancing student learning experiences and performance. Most address the increased use of technologies. Others raise a host of issues and challenges that must be considered as we shape our management of learning effectiveness in the changing classroom landscape. The overarching implication of the technology in teaching thrust is that the introduction and effective use of technology to enhance teaching and learning is a strategic enterprise that must be continually researched toward the goal of learning improvement. Also, in this issue, we introduce *Tales from the Field* where authors recount ways in which their practice has been impacted, and they share, through the medium of the journal, special interests that can make a difference to the practice of their colleagues.

The focus of the first article is the determination of the impact of selected factors on student performance in an introductory Biochemistry course in the Bachelor's in Agriculture degree programme. Victor Mlambo, Department of Food Production, Faculty of Science and Agriculture, UWI, St. Augustine utilised course work grades as an indicator of student performance. He also surveyed the first year cohort for data on student demographics, learning preferences and entry qualifications. Relationships/associations were made among factors such as gender and learning styles, gender and entry qualifications, age and learning preferences and age and qualifications. Generally, selected factors did not appear to impact performance given an impressive performance in the course work by a large proportion of the cohort. However, a cause for concern was the consistently lower performance of students who were admitted into the programme with the Diploma in Agriculture. The suggestion was made that such students may need a targeted course to specifically address their learning gaps.

The second paper presented examined the use of gaming to improve programming skills in an advanced computing class. The paper was submitted by Colin A. Depradine, Department of Computer Science, Mathematics and Physics, UWI, Cave Hill. The paper posits that the abstract and mathematical nature of computer programming resulted in elevated failure rates. This piece of research is aimed at making the abstract and difficult more relevant and palatable. The researcher thus created a meaningful learning environment, through electronic and computer gaming, that allowed students to explore and experiment. Preliminary

results on using computer games as a mechanism for introducing students to fundamental object-oriented principles in an advanced programming course showed significant improvement in both course work and final examination when compared with previous year.

Balraj Kistow, Arthur Lok Jack Graduate School of Business, examined the use of blended learning modalities in the postgraduate management programme offered by the school. The introduction of blended learning was favoured by the majority of students who felt that it offered more flexibility and convenience through the online component. However, students expressed the views that peer interaction and networking opportunities were important to graduate education in the management programme. Thus, they preferred a blended approach where at least 50% of the programme was offered through traditional face-to-face methods. Further, the extent of enjoyment and value of the online component was related to a variety of factors including the age of the student, clarity of the online materials, and the student's facility with the learning management system.

Kemuel Gaffar and Lenandlar Singh of the Department of Computer Science, University of Guyana and Troy Thomas of the Department of Mathematics, Physics and Statistics question the readiness of lecturers of a particular Caribbean University to use Web 2.0 technologies in their teaching. The question of lecturer readiness is seen as critical in the context of limited administrative support, equipment and skills and inadequate infrastructure. The study also investigated factors impacting the benefits of adopting Web 2.0 technologies in the learning process. While there were positive indicators of lecturer readiness, the extent of adoption of Web 2.0 technologies did not mirror this readiness, signaling the need to address the facilitating conditions. Students surveyed on the use of the technologies, indicated the existence of such limiting factors as internet connection speed, familiarity with moderators and frequency of feedback. The existence of these limiting factors suggests the need for purposive action to be taken to effectively adopt Web 2.0 technologies in higher education classrooms.

The paper submitted by Godfrey Steele, Department of Liberal Arts, Faculty of Humanities and Education, UWI, St. Augustine also focussed on use of technology. In this paper an attempt is made to understand the nature and quality of students' online experiences in a communications course. The researcher, working from the viewpoint that there is some underlying dissatisfaction with the nature and quality of students' use of online learning support, investigated student experiences in two offerings of the same communication course to compare the quality of online and traditional submissions. The study combined textual analysis and survey results to analyse and discuss emergent issues relevant to the submission modes. Access to online facilities is in high demand by students with more of them wanting improved technical facilities and more focus on assessment on examination resources and a wider range of activities. However, the quality of traditional submissions was higher than those submitted online. Nevertheless, online submissions were preferred for convenience or economy while but traditional submissions scored high on reliability and the perceived lack of technical

challenges. The research has highlighted that there are emerging trends and issues with increasing use of technology in teaching that need to be addressed.

David Dolly, Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension, UWI, St. Augustine brings us tales from the field as he recounts three years of his online teaching experience. This practitioner employed a blended mode of delivery to meet the need of a very diverse population of full time, part time and evening students. Using specific theoretical frameworks, it was determined that, on the one hand, the effective incorporation of online teaching into practice as good planning and teaching, and an ability to generate discussion and interaction were instrumental in this regard. On the other, professional satisfaction and institutional support also have an impact. This practitioner identified a number of features that were integral to learning effectiveness in the online environment. These included: the teaching experience requiring reinforcement of classroom discussion and interaction; increased communication in courses to and from students; meeting prompt deadlines and the ready introduction of topical and global events. There were several challenges to the practitioner in this new paradigm that demanded technological competence and access to the technology and better institutional support. Recommendations that emerged from the three-year long experience include initiatives pertaining to student and faculty readiness, addressing inherent enabling and disabling factors, strengthening the relationships between participation and success and the impact of group learning.

This publication is one of the products of the Educational Research Association (ERA)<sup>i</sup> of The University of the West Indies (UWI) and provides a vehicle for the dissemination of research information of particular relevance to education in the Caribbean context. The journal is an online, peer reviewed publication.

Anna-May Edwards-Henry  
Executive Editor

---

<sup>i</sup>The Educational Research Association (ERA) is proposed by the University of the West Indies (UWI) as an umbrella body with a focus on research in all disciplinary areas of education (e.g. engineering education, history education, teacher education, vocational education, business education), and at all levels (e.g. tertiary, secondary) within the national system. The Association views Education in its broadest sense to include, for example, policy, teaching and learning, administration and leadership.

The primary goals of this Association are to provide a common platform for discourse within the educational community, encourage and facilitate a progressive education research agenda, and to provide mechanisms for the dissemination and promulgation of relevant research findings. By promulgating and disseminating relevant research findings we adopt an approach to education decision-making that is reflective of best practice. The Association recognises Education as a discipline in its own right, the best practice of which, as for any other discipline, is supported by research and empirical evidence. A strong view of the Association is that educational research must be studied and structured based on evidence of the culture, social environment, resources and the context of practice. While the Association acknowledges that in the local context much work has been done in the educational arena there needs to be a stronger and more deliberate connection among the various elements and contributors to our growing knowledge of education, and more deliberate efforts to facilitate a culture of practice based on evidence.