

Navigating Higher Education in a Pandemic Teaching and Assessment in the Time of COVID-19 and Beyond

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THE DISARMING EFFECTS OF A DEFIANT COVID-19 PANDEMIC forced educators to adopt strict physical distancing measures to prevent virus transmission. Furthermore, educational institutions at all levels worldwide embraced the unexpected challenge to teaching, by transitioning from face-to-face delivery to various modes of online teaching and learning. Higher Education Institutions sought to adapt, improve, and creatively respond to the unique situation using a variety of distance learning technologies.

The twenty-fifth volume of *The UWI Quality Education Forum* invited academic essays which share the challenges, successes, and general experience with remote/online teaching and learning within the context of the pandemic. The volume comprises eleven essays that share the following:

- Lessons learnt from the sudden transition to remote teaching;
- Remote teaching and assessment;
- Online education in the Caribbean: Challenges and opportunities;
- The online education imperative and the challenge of limited resources: Institutional and/or cross-institutional perspectives;
- Expanding access to higher education through online/remote teaching;
- Best practices for online delivery in a pandemic;
- Adapting discipline-specific pedagogy to online mode.

Indeed, we now present an engaging collection of well-researched essays that

have emerged from different areas of the Academy – medicine, literature, law, engineering, computer sciences, and education. In a very powerful and credible personal testimony entitled “FIRST PERSON: COVID-19 and the ‘New’ University Reality,” *Eldon V. Birthwright* provides a unique critical perspective on his experience with online teaching and counselling, in a North American University, both prior to and during COVID-19. His experience during the pandemic has been especially instructive. He invites us to take an objective approach to the new, necessary paradigm and admits both the challenges as well as the rewards to be gained from interacting and engaging with students in a new space. Birthwright firmly presents the accompanying challenges as contributing to a very beneficial experience of collaboration, discovery, and mutual growth. Indeed, his sincere introspection, reflection, and sharing serve as a significant allure into the remaining articles in the volume which will make an invaluable contribution to the broad debate on the ways in which COVID-19 has affected course deliveries in the Academy.

Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) in the Social Sciences

Trevor A. Smith and *Suzette A. Haughton* collaborate in producing a sterling contribution on Student Satisfaction with Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) at The University of the West Indies (The UWI) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their collaborative research utilises the Expectation Confirmation Theory as the basis for addressing students’ satisfaction with ERT in the Faculty of Social Sciences. The study is driven by the claim of Hodges et al. (2020) that online/remote learning carries a stigma of being lower in quality than face-to-face and these hurried moves to do remote teaching may confirm this negative perception. The study utilises the survey design and factor analysis with descriptives and a final sample of 115 students. The study determines that student engagement, student access, connectivity, and communication along with recorded materials and online examinations are the satisfaction areas to be focused on in the ERT environment. The authors offer recommendations regarding student engagement, connectivity, and communication in situations of high levels of dissatisfaction, as well as pedagogical guidance to lecturers who are less confident/experienced in the ERT environment.

Emergency Remote Teaching and Medical Education

“The COVID-19 pandemic has had profound impact on medical education world-wide,” point out **Russell Pierre, Helen Trotman, and Andrea Garbutt**. Indeed, their sterling evaluative study of students’ perspective of and satisfaction with emergency remote teaching and learning in the Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) Programme, in the Faculty of Medical Sciences, Mona, serves to confirm this. Furthermore, through univariate analyses in the summarising responses and the thematic analyses of open-ended questions, the researchers learnt that students’ perception was “positive, enthusiastic and more engaged with active learning strategies” (Pierre, Trotman, and Garbutt 2021).

Online Teaching and Assessment in Law

The next essay in the volume takes us from the medical field to the field of law. “Transitioning to Online Teaching, Learning, and Assessment in the COVID-19 Era: Understanding Student and Faculty Perspectives” written by **Wendell C. Wallace, Akinee Harry, Roshanna Ramdass and Sharlene Salina** examines the challenges, benefits, opportunities, and lessons learnt as a result of the sudden transition from face-to-face to online modes of TLA at The UWI, St. Augustine campus. A qualitative phenomenological approach was adopted and data collected from a cohort of postgraduate criminology and criminal justice students (n=20) and their lecturers. Thematic analyses of the data emanating from semi-structured interviews with students and lecturers indicated a multiplicity of challenges, benefits, new opportunities, and lessons learnt (Wallace et al 2021).

Remote Online Assessment in Computing Courses

Ricardo Anderson presents his findings in an essay entitled, “Exploring Strategies for Assuring the Integrity of Remote Online Assessments.” He draws attention to the fact that while some universities had embraced remote teaching and learning well before the COVID-19 pandemic, the integrity of remote assessments remains a significant concern for institutions and employers who demand competence in graduates (Anderson 2021). Prior to the pandemic, several tools were used, and different strategies explored for assessing students; however, the assessments done during this period revealed several anomalies across computing courses at

The UWI. This paper explores the experiences and challenges with final assessment across computing courses, including suspected cheating. Discussion of experiences, analysis of anomalies and recommendations provide generalisable assessment guidelines for assuring the integrity of assessments (Anderson 2021).

Google Classroom in the COVID-19 Pandemic

In a very interesting article, presented as “Transitioning to a Digital Educational Environment: A Lecturer’s Perspective on Migrating to Google Classroom During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Trinidad and Tobago,” **Jason Robert Rameshwar** highlights a case study in educational digital transformation using Google Classroom. It was made through direct observations of each student’s response to changes in the educational platform and style of learning. This involved administration of ad hoc open-ended unstructured qualitative questions to students during the transition. The students’ feedback identified thematic areas (of digital well-being, digital transformation and online platform access) that were used in a scoping literature review using Google Scholar. The effect of transitioning from the physical classroom to an online platform revealed that the majority of students were able to access the system with limited disruption. Practical implications of this experiential case study would be the application of the developmental elements of the digital transformation policy (Rameshwar 2021).

Foreign Languages Teaching (FLT) in the COVID-19 Pandemic

In this volume, three articles bring matters related to the teaching and learning of foreign languages to centre-stage. **Nadine Karil Barnett’s** commendable article entitled “A Whole New World: Educator’s Transitioning to a New Paradigm – An Evaluative Case Study” advances the view that the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the thrusting of educators into the world of virtual spaces and platforms also means that training for the educators needs to include the acquisition of Virtual Classroom Educator Competence (VCEC). The paper shows the levels of VCEC in which four educators began and how, through experience, they attained higher levels of VCEC by the end of the semester. The survey approach reveals the challenges, solutions, and lessons learnt in the virtual classroom during that first semester of transition.

In “The Impact of Technology in Professionalising Translation Graduates: E-Learning Experiences in The MA in Translation”, **Tamara de Inés Antón** posits that recent changes in the translation industry now mean that the translator must also effectively use new technologies including information and communication technologies (ICT) and computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools as part of translation curricula. de Ines Anton describes how course content and assessment were restructured to account for recent developments in translation pedagogy, as well as the new virtual environment.

Maite Villoria Nolla explores and appraises new technologies in foreign language teaching in the essay “Approaches and Initiatives for Navigating the Teaching and Learning of Spanish Language in the Context of COVID-19”. She analyzes the implementation of innovative pedagogical and methodological approaches adopted in the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures of the Faculty of Humanities and Education at The UWI during the COVID-19 pandemic. Among these are strategies incorporated into the design of classes such as the inverted class or “Flipped Classroom”, collaborative writing and online reflection, gamification, and Virtual Intercultural Exchange. The aim is to see whether these strategies, including intercultural awareness, have improved Spanish as a Foreign Language learning skills (Villoria Nolla 2021).

Expanding Access to Higher Education During a Pandemic

The conceptual paper, “Redesigning Higher Education: Expanding Access During a Pandemic and Beyond” by **Lyn R. Keith** cautions higher education leaders against investing an inordinate amount of time responding to the immediate challenges of COVID-19 at the expense of planning for the long term (Keith 2021). Keith proposes that institutions of higher learning need to now redesign themselves (agility) and reconsider their business strategies as they contemplate the question of access. More critically, these institutions must now consider how they can provide for the new customer market segments, the changing nature of work, and resultant workforce development requirements in the age of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) (alignment) (Keith 2021). The debate is engaging and interesting.

Managing COVID-19 in the Assessment of Student Teachers

“Turning Conventional Teacher Education Clinical Practice Assessment on its Head: A COVID-19 Inspired Response to Practicum Assessment” is the essay done by *Dian McCallum* in which she examines the use of two assessment strategies – microteaching and demonstration teaching – as “remote emergency response” to the need for an alternative approach to the assessment of the practicum following the closure of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study led to a recommendation for diversifying the assessment of the teaching practicum.