

Student Support Systems and Student Success in Higher Education

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THE UNIVERSITY OF THE 21ST CENTURY IS CHARGED with the task of providing programmes and resources that are designed to ensure positive outcomes and student success during and at the end of their period of study. Indeed, Higher Education scholarship is firm in the claim that effective student support systems promote the intellectual, personal, and academic development of students from diverse socioeconomic, cultural, and secondary school backgrounds, and with a range of mental and physical abilities. It is through thoughtful, strategic planning and implementation of innovative student support systems and practices that universities will enhance students' commitment to learning, help them to become self-aware individuals who are determined to achieve personal and academic success, and prepare them for the world of work or further studies.

This volume of *The UWI Quality Education Forum* comprises an interesting collection of essays from a wide cross-section of disciplines. Each paper brings a welcome focus on its specific discipline which is grounded in the broad considerations of student support systems. "Academic Integrity and the COVID-19 Pandemic: Supporting Students, Strengthening the Academy" offered by **Ruth Baker Gardner** and **Mark-Jeffery Deans** examines the sudden shift from face-to-face to emergency remote learning that required higher education institutions (HEIs) to implement or reinforce measures to strengthen academic integrity systems. Using a content analysis approach, the authors investigate the strategies used by twenty HEIs globally to support students in developing and practising academic integrity in the online environment.

The second essay entitled, "Scaffolding Graduate Research Supervision in a

Higher Education Caribbean Context” by **Debra Ferdinand-James** and **Clau-dette Medina-Charles** makes a sterling contribution to the debate. This paper describes the guided support or scaffolding provided to both research supervisors and their supervisees in graduate research seminars in a Caribbean context. The study is guided by three sub-questions: (1) *How has scaffolding been used in graduate research supervision to provide guidance and support in Master’s level research seminars for both supervisors and supervisees in a Caribbean context?* (2) *What does the use of scaffolding in graduate research supervision reveal to research supervisors and their supervisees in Master’s level research seminars in a Caribbean context?* and (3) *What are graduate supervisors’ reactions to the use of scaffolding in providing written feedback for Master’s level research seminars in a Caribbean context?* The researchers used a convergent parallel mixed-methods approach in quantitating the qualitative feedback given in emails to graduate students’ research supervisors on their supervisees’ research proposal presentations and a qualitative thematic analysis for supervisors’ reactions to this feedback in integrating their findings. The implications of the study results for practitioners, researchers, and policy makers as key stakeholders in graduate research supervision are discussed.

“Caribbean Student Services Practitioners’ Contributions to Higher Education’s Mission,” by **Stephanie Bent** focuses on student services in the Caribbean since the 1990s. The author uses a decolonising methodological approach to answer the research question: *How do student services practitioners use their understanding of holistic development to serve the purposes of higher education in the Caribbean?* These findings demonstrate that student services practitioners engage in institutional work enacting agency to identify strategies to shape institutional practice (Lawrence, Suddaby, and Leca 2011).

Leesha Roberts presents “Pandemic Pedagogy – Challenges and Achievements: Using CANVAS and ZOOM to Teach an Undergraduate Course at Iere University during COVID-19”. Her narrative inquiry reviews the emergence of an Instructor’s “Pandemic Pedagogy” while teaching third-year students an Introduction to Research course during Semester Two of 2020. The Instructor used her field notes, the LMS analytics and semi-structured interviews with students to discover the emerging themes about pedagogical barriers and achievement encountered with online teaching during COVID-19. The inquiry findings included: the Instructor’s reflections on various online pedagogical strategies that contributed to her “Pandemic Pedagogy” and students’ reflections regarding the sudden shift of course modalities. This inquiry will add to the emerging body of scholarly

work on the impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education and the opportunities for further investigations into using innovative and creative 21st-century online learning strategies in the Caribbean.

“An Innovation in Student Learning and Assessment – Exploring Concept Mapping During the Research Process and Beyond” is research done by **Dannielle Davis et al.** Their work examines concept maps as a tool in teaching and assessing student learning. They utilise collaborative auto-ethnography in exploring students’ learning experiences, while applying concept maps to individual research processes. The findings reveal that concept maps assisted students in planning research projects, offered faculty an innovative method to assess student understanding of course content, and served as study aids during students’ doctoral qualifying examinations. Concept mapping as a learning and assessment tool (via examinations) was ultimately adopted across courses within the featured academic programme.

The article “Developing a New Corporate Model to Govern UWI Subsidiaries” by **Indrani Bachan-Persad** and **Tashfeen Ahmad** examines how some non-profit universities are incorporating new strategic management structures, to improve organisational performance and profitability. Corporate governance models are being adapted for improved academic efficiencies and effectiveness. These models focus primarily on innovation, entrepreneurship, and wealth generation while enabling more stakeholder participation in the university’s management. Against a backdrop of declining student enrolment, rising cost of education, and inadequate government subventions, universities are forced to develop innovative ideas, systems, structures, and policies to better govern their companies. With data derived from case studies of corporate models of select international universities and a situational analysis of the core functions and organisational structures of all The University of the West Indies’ (UWI) subsidiaries, the authors designed a novel, two-tiered corporate governance model, to better structure and align the increasing number of university subsidiaries.

“Neoliberal Influences and Academic Writing Student Support Systems in Higher Education” by **Vivette Milson-Whyte** and **Annife Campbell** is an insightful essay that relies on four neoliberal-influenced concepts: privatisation, marketisation, profit, and competition – to address the entrepreneurial and income-generating activities sometimes adopted or recommended by writing course administrators, upper university administrators and other collaborators/stakeholders involved in designing, conceptualising, and revising academic-writing

student support systems. It draws on the archival work documented over many years in course review documents and departmental reports, coupled with the works of other local academic-writing practitioners and the current researchers' experiences and insights.

The essay, "I Support U and U Support We at UWI: Examining the Symbiotic Staff-Student Support Services of the Academic Literacies Programme at The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine" by **Tyrone Ali** explores the physiological and sociological ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic; it became necessary for the Academic Literacies Programme (ALP), at The UWI St. Augustine Campus (The UWISTA), to recalibrate its student support mechanisms. The existing pre-pandemic system was recalibrated to maximise the highest probability for student success and simultaneous staff development through an eight-prong support system. This encompassed the enhanced utilisation of the exciting capabilities of the e-Learning portal; the transformation of the services of The Writing Centre into an energised virtual forum; continuous academic advising; small-group grammar and writing workshops; increased opportunities for non-credit practice writing; additional consultations; special one-on-one tutorials for academically at-risk students; and the amplification of the student voice. In so doing, the ALP's staff grew in related competencies as well, encouraged by the positive synergies of an appreciative student body, resulting in a newfound symbiotic relationship between staff development and student learning.

In a very enthusiastically written article entitled, "The 'Corporatisation' of Higher Education at the University of the West Indies: The Case of Phillip Sherlock and Walter Rodney", **Dave Gosse** debates the merits and demerits of the "corporatisation of higher education". He argues that "the economic survival of most universities and colleges is largely dependent on state/government or private sponsors, and as such, they are obligated to them socially and politically." The current trend to corporatise higher education institutions is a reminder to universities and colleges that they are dependent institutions, and that the academic freedom which they traditionally enjoy, is primarily based on the consent of their sponsors, who at any time can threaten, or demand fundamental changes to their polity and charter. Gosse's focus on this dependence of Higher Education institutions on state/government and corporate sponsors, is amply demonstrated through a case study in 1968 at the University of the West Indies.

Andrea Garbutt, Melissa Walker, and Russell Pierre, in "The Faculty of Medical Sciences, Mona, Board Sub-Committee on Student Progression: Development

and Outcomes” write about a Board Sub-Committee on Student Progression which was approved by the FMS Faculty Board Mona in October 2017 (the 2017/18 academic year). This Sub-Committee was convened out of the need to create a confidential forum to consider student requests for (i) waiver of Requirement to Withdraw (RTW) and (ii) Academic Progression in the FMS Programmes. Evaluation of requests included referral of students or academic advice/counselling, psychological counselling/intervention according to the individual issues, in addition to academic recommendations. Faculty decisions were submitted for ruling to The UWI Board for Undergraduate Studies. The paper aims to characterise student requests during academic years 2017/18 to 2020/21 and describes outcomes (waiver granted, subsequent course outcome, progression, graduation). The essay concludes that the Sub-Committee “has established an effective, confidential forum to address at-risk failing students’ concerns – the majority successfully passed re-sit courses, progressed in the programme, or graduated. Quality assurance mechanisms must, however, be instituted to identify early warning signs for these at-risk students before the cycle of failures and to mitigate the psychological consequences.”

“Student Support Services Enhancing the Success of Students with Disabilities in Jamaica Through Modern Assistive Technology” combines theoretical understanding with experience by *Floyd Morris*. It examines how technological support for students with disabilities at tertiary institutions in Jamaica can contribute to the immense success of these individuals. Through the use of a collective case study, the author examines an initiative by The UWI Centre for Disability Studies to assist students with disabilities to access modern technologies. Students with disabilities have reported that these assistive technologies have helped them. The essay underlines the ways in which global understanding of effective student support systems promote the intellectual, personal and academic development of students from diverse socioeconomic, cultural and abilities/disabilities.

“‘eTailored to Fit’: The Development of a Virtual Self-Access Learning Centre (VSALC) to Support Learners at a Jamaican University” by *Michelle Stewart-McKoy* et al discusses a student support system, its Self-Access Learning Centre (SALC), a physical space with language resources, complementing traditional face-to-face language classes. However, the writers claim that the ubiquity of digital technologies in education, the resultant shift in student profiles, students’ continued language challenges, among other factors, have led to the design, development, and implementation of a virtual self-access learning centre (VSALC), an

online self-directed tool aimed at further assisting HPU students in improving their communicative competence. Using a learner profile and accompanying personas that resulted from a cross-sectional survey of undergraduate students, as well as best practices in online and language education, this paper details the key features of the VSALC.

“Virtual Community Outreach and Its Impact on Students during the COVID-19 Pandemic at the University of the West Indies, Mona” by *Shinique Walters* and *Roger Bent* explores how the COVID-19 pandemic forced The UWI, Mona to re-examine its operations and the role of student engagement in community-based activities. Co-curricular activities served as a progressive tool for student development and retention. Through an exploratory qualitative approach, they assessed student services using virtual outreach programmes. The population sample consisted of seven students and five administrative staff. Focus group discussions and interviews were conducted and thematically coded. Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory of change was used to show the result of experience, reflection, conceptualisation, and experimentation. The findings showed that online engagement had an impact on interaction and the social aspect of learning because of the isolated virtual environment.

The essays provide a wide range of ideas and findings that are instructive and worth applying.