



# THE UWI QUALITY CIRCLE

Volume 14, January 2013



Quality, Quality Assurance  
& Quality Enhancement  
in Open & Distance Learning

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# Message from the Editor



**Pamela Dottin**

*Quality Assurance Officer • QAU, The UWI Open Campus*

## *The UWI Open Campus: A Campus for the Times, A Campus for the Future*

As the Quality Assurance Officer with responsibility for open and continuing education, I am pleased to extend a warm welcome to you the readers of this edition entitled 'Quality, Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement in Open and Distance Learning'. This theme was chosen as it was felt that it would stimulate discourse on the mechanisms used by The UWI Open Campus to ensure that it is providing high quality teaching and learning services to its students.

This newsletter provides readers with a cross section of interesting and thought provoking articles which should prompt further research and discussions. The first article provides a roadmap which starts with the quality monitoring which was provided by the University of London to the University College of the West Indies, to the establishment of the Quality Assurance Unit and end with the strategic repositioning that that Unit has undergone over its existence.

This article sets the scene for the articles that follow including the one written by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Principal Open Campus entitled 'Quality Distance Learning through The UWI Open Campus'. In this article she provides a more intimate discourse on the systems and processes used by the Campus to maintain and enhance quality. As is the norm for the Quality Circle, there is a Find-a-Word and Q-tip both of which are concentrated around the theme of the newsletter.

On behalf of the Quality Assurance Unit, I extend much thanks to all the contributors for readily accepting and submitting the articles in a timely manner. The Editor for the next edition of the Quality Circle will be Dr. Sandra Gift who is the Senior Programme Officer, Quality Assurance Unit assigned to the St. Augustine Campus.

In the meantime, happy reading, if you have comments, concerns or requests for additional information, kindly contact me.

Pamela Dottin  
Quality Assurance Officer  
Quality Assurance Unit



## *Prof. Yvette Jackson, PhD* *Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Graduate Studies*

Professor Yvette Jackson, BSc, PhD, The UWI, Mona, joined the staff of UWI in 1983 as an Assistant Lecturer and moved through the ranks, becoming Professor in 2004 and Pro-Vice-Chancellor Graduate Studies in 2012. Her work at the University of Alabama with Professor Michael Cava and Dr. M. V. Lakshmikantham, and with her research group at The UWI, has generated 50 publications in some of the best journals in the field, one which earned her the distinction of cover article and one of the top ten downloads of the publication year. Her participation in conferences and symposia, as an invited lecturer on various occasions, also contributes to her international presence.

Professor Jackson has guided many PhD students to completion over her tenure with The UWI. Her academic work has resulted in many awards, including Best Research Publication (Faculty of Pure and Applied Sciences (2003 and 2008)), and the Principal's Award for Outstanding Research Activity (2005), and grants from institutions including the Jamaica Agricultural Research Programme, Third World Organisation of Women Scientists (TWOWS), TWAS, DuPont de Nemours and Co., and UNESCO. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Chemistry, member of the Third World Organization for Women in Science, and the Caribbean Academy of Sciences. She is also a member of the Board of Governors, Hampton School.

The Quality Assurance Unit extends a warm welcome to Pro-Vice-Chancellor Jackson and we look forward to many years of productive and cordial relations.



## *Ms. Mariella Jones* *Secretary - Quality Assurance Unit • Graduate Studies & Research*

Ms. Mariella Jones joined The Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) office at the Cave Hill Campus in October 2011 as secretary to Dr Sandra Richards, Senior Programme Officer (Graduate Studies and Research). Ms Jones has been employed at The University of the West Indies for ten years. Prior to joining the QAU she worked in The School of Education, Cave Hill Campus.

Mariella has a B.A. in History and is currently pursuing a Masters in Student Personnel Administration. She enjoys meeting new challenges and is quite excited to have joined the QAU. For enjoyment she likes dancing, listening to music, flower arranging and spending time with family and friends.



## *Mr. Gregory Jones* *Administrative Assistant - Quality Assurance Unit • The UWI Open Campus*

Mr. Gregory Jones joined the Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) Open Campus in September 2012 as an Administrative Assistant to Ms. Pamela Dottin, Quality Assurance Officer (UWI, Open Campus). Mr. Jones has been in the administrative field for over three years before moving to the Quality Assurance Unit (QAU).

Gregory has a B.A in Public Sector Management from the University of the West Indies. He is the present Treasurer and member of Westside Toastmasters Club, Barbados. In his spare time, he enjoys watching sports, travelling and spending quality time with family and friends. He has a keen interest in personal fitness and is someone who is open to new experiences and challenges.

*The Quality Assurance Unit extends a warm welcome to Mariella and Gregory and wish them a long and productive career with the Unit and the University.*

# The Evolving Nature of Quality Assurance at The UWI



*Prof. Alvin Wint, PhD*  
*Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Undergraduate Studies*

The defining feature of UWI since its inception has been a concerted effort to assure the quality of its academic offerings. At its inception, in the form of The University College of The West Indies (UCWI), quality assurance was achieved through the quality monitoring of academic programmes by the University of London, whose academic degrees were conferred on the graduates of UCWI. Fifty years ago, it became clear that offering the degrees of the University of London was not a process that was “fit for purpose” of developing a University that could build the intellectual foundation of a maturing Caribbean region. Consequently, the University of the West Indies was formed to propel the development of West Indian society through its intellectual activities. The quality of these activities, however, continued to be assured through a broad collection of actions, including multiple assessors of student assessment, external examination, robust faculty appointment and promotion processes and collegial, multi-layered course and programme approval processes designed to ensure the careful scrutiny of the new courses and programmes, and the collective responsibility of the academy for their effective delivery.

The UWI’s quality assurance processes have, over time, been adapted to reflect changes in The UWI’s structures and areas of emphasis. As is well known, in 1996 one important adaptation was the development of a formal quality assurance function, operating within the Board for Undergraduate Studies. The development of this formal quality assurance function was in response to several years of increasing academic decentralisation at UWI, which had led to a reduction in levels of course and programme harmonisation across campuses. Additionally, the movement to a semester system, and an increase in the need for more formative student assessment, meant that the traditional system of full external examination of courses was no longer “fit

for purpose.” It is against this background that UWI moved to an academic quality assurance process built around periodic disciplinary reviews that would allow for external benchmarking and cross-campus input to bolster course and programme harmonisation and assurance of inter-campus quality standards.

More recently, there have been two other important shifts to The UWI’s internal system of quality assurance. Recognising the importance of quality assurance in graduate education, The UWI’s quality assurance function, although beginning with an emphasis on undergraduate programmes, has shifted to fully incorporate all academic activity within a discipline (undergraduate teaching, graduate teaching and supervision and research) in the periodic disciplinary reviews. This process of adjustment has been structurally recognised with a University decision that the Quality Assurance Unit would report programmatically to both UWI Academic Boards: the Board for Undergraduate Studies and the Board for Graduate Studies and Research.

The other important shift revolves around what many consider the new frontier for university education, on-line education. Dramatic changes in technology have altered the way in which information is acquired, stored and disseminated. These processes are changing the way in which universities engage students in learning processes and are accelerating the movement to blended and fully online learning. The UWI recognised this by establishing, in 2008, an Open Campus to bring coherence to its outreach sector and to champion the university wide movement to online and multimode learning. More recently, The UWI has established a cross-campus open education working group to ensure that there is maximal collaboration across all campuses in making all the University’s programmes more technologically, demographically and

geographically accessible.

The UWI's quality assurance function, in turn, has responded to The UWI's strategic and structural shifts by incorporating into its operation a specialisation in quality assurance for online education. This element of The UWI's quality assurance function is in the early stages of development, but already clear principles have been established. While quality assurance for online programmes will, perforce, require emphases related to the particular nature of online education, it is critical not to view online education in a silo that is separate from face-to-face education, or that is restricted to the online programmes coordinated by the Open Campus. It is for this reason that the quality assurance function for online education is fully integrated with all other elements of The UWI's quality assurance function.

Another principle is that the issue of The UWI-wide harmonisation takes on particular urgency with respect to

online education since it is critical that The UWI offer a single brand in its online operations given the extent to which on-line education knows no geographical boundaries. The integration that UWI is seeking to achieve with its cross-campus working group on on-line education has already been achieved in The UWI's quality assurance function since quality assurance specialists, whether focused on residential campus programmes, graduate policy or Open Campus programmes, work together as an integrated team.

It is this Team that will continue to collaborate to develop approaches to quality assurance for online and blended learning that will ensure, as has previously been the case, that The UWI's foray into new forms of academic activity enhance the quality of education that has been the hallmark of The UWI since its formation.



# Quality Distance Learning through The UWI Open Campus



*Prof. Hazel Simmons-McDonald, PhD*

*Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Principal • The UWI Open Campus*

When in 2007 the The UWI decided to establish the Open Campus, the goal was to increase access to its courses and programmes and provide opportunities for those in remote areas and underserved communities to access tertiary education. The decision was not only timely but essential as a means of dealing with governments' requirements for the University to make education accessible to much larger numbers, while ensuring a high quality for that education and providing it at reasonable cost. These requirements, referred to by Daniel et al. as "the iron triangle" (p.2) have constrained universities that offer classroom teaching because, as these authors have noted, "It is hard to change one side of the triangle for the better without making the others worse." (p.2). But The UWI tried over the years to address these needs first through the Extra Mural Centres across the region, then providing delivery through the UWIDITE experiment and upgrading that service in the 90s through the Distance Education Centre (UWIDEC) which offered improved remote classroom teaching primarily through teleconferencing. Despite its limitations, teleconferencing offered a solution at the time as it was the modality that was available in a context of limited telecommunication links in the region and it permitted classes to be taught remotely at The UWI sites with laboratories. The exponential development of telecommunications and technological industries in recent years presented the opportunity for expansion through the Internet.

The internet makes it possible to reach individuals wherever they may be located as long as there is connectivity to allow access to the Net. This presented the opportunity for The UWI Open Campus to expand the Distance learning capabilities of the University while retaining selected supplemental modalities that had been in use previously, including some limited videoconferencing capabilities. A recent development, Elluminate Live! (Blackboard Collaborate), has improved the potential for access by making synchronous delivery possible

with all the trimmings of a classroom environment that allows the instructor to demonstrate concepts using a whiteboard and other learning support instruments. These can be viewed by learners who can ask questions, and the instructor can organise breakout sessions and activities with groupings comprising learners who may be hundreds of miles apart. The Open Campus first piloted this software in its third year of operation and subsequently implemented it fully as a tool for delivery. A new, upgraded Blackboard Collaborate version has further improved delivery capabilities by allowing learners to (i) join live sessions from their phones or ipads; (ii) interact via text and 2-way audio; view the whiteboard content and shared applications; use emoticons, hand raising, and break out rooms; and connect from any learning management system.

The delivery modes that the Open Campus has implemented are ideal for older individuals and working parents who cannot leave their jobs to travel to a campus as well as learners who may be at a distance from Open Campus sites where the laboratories provide access for those without laptops. The apps that allow for access on phones and ipads to courses delivered on Blackboard Collaborate will facilitate more learners in remote locations as long as there is connectivity.

Quite apart from hardware considerations that are critical for delivery, there are certain requirements for good quality and successful distance learning. Daniel et al. refer to these as three ingredients that are like "three legs of a stool." One can imagine that stool as providing support for a learner at a distance. The legs of the stool are: (i) good study materials; (ii) good student support and (iii) good logistics (p.2).

Let us consider what the Open Campus has been doing in these areas to provide courses of quality and to create an environment for successful learning.

## Good Study Materials

One of the decisions the Campus took during the last year was to reorganise its programming operation to allow for focused attention to the design, planning, development and delivery of online courses as a means of assuring quality and adherence to standards and protocols for these courses and programmes. The system allows for better use of multimedia tools to promote interactivity and learner engagement and also provision of reading materials within the online course package. The latter constitutes an improvement on the former practice of mailing print materials or CDs which students would request to be downloaded and photocopied at sites for a cost. Although some older students have expressed preference for receiving print materials, incorporation of the course readings within the online courses is a method for enhancing and maintaining quality and it is more cost effective and in keeping with international practice for online delivery.

## Good Student Support

From its inception the Open Campus has upgraded former UWIDEC systems by improving the service given by its Learning Support Specialists who support the deployment of courses into The Learning Exchange, provide support for curriculum development teams, technical support for learners; and ensure that the learning Exchange environment conforms to the pedagogical approach supported by the Open Campus, among several other tasks. It has also introduced initiatives to further enhance its delivery and student support systems by introducing specific services provided by programme managers (PM) and course development assistants (CDA). The latter are responsible for ensuring that online programmes are delivered according to a high standard. They monitor and support the teaching and learning process, and address student problems that are not normally dealt with by an e-tutor. The Open Campus has also maintained a reasonable learner to e-tutor ratio to ensure that learners receive prompt and helpful support in relation to the content of courses, course work, tutorials and assignments.

## Good Logistics

This concerns administrative issues related to examinations, such as invigilation, marking of scripts, submission of grades and providing timely responses to students, particularly on the matter of scheduling of examinations and posting of grades. Providing a consistent and reliable service in this area has been a bit of a challenge. The Open Campus relies on the expertise of faculty from other campuses to coordinate its programmes. In some cases, tardy submission of course work and examination grades has an adverse effect on learners' progress with their programme of study. Effects of students' criticism of service can also have a negative impact on the Institution as prospective learners may be dissuaded from applying to the Open Campus (and The UWI). Related problems include careless recording of grades which result in inaccurate calculation and reporting of results. The Open Campus has implemented systems to minimise negative effects, such as introducing multiple checks of data submitted in hard copy and online; it has also considered not re-hiring coordinators who are persistently tardy; insisted on fixed deadlines for the submission of grades and it continues to explore use of varied forms of assessment in courses.

As enrolment increases, the Open Campus will have to implement innovative strategies to manage logistics to ensure a consistently high standard of service. However, the initiatives already taken by the Open Campus in the first four years of its establishment such as the innovations related to course and programme preparation, as well as improved strategies for student support have already produced positive results. Consistent attention in future to the three ingredients (the three legs of the stool) can only yield greater efficiencies and more satisfied customers.

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# Quality Assurance in Distance Online Education

*Pamela Dottin*

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Over the past decade or so, there has been a marked change in the characteristics of the typical university student from the 18/20 year olds to working individuals, with families and other forms of commitment (Glahn and Gen, 2002). This shift has resulted in an increase in the number of persons opting to pursue tertiary level education through the distance online modality. Against this changing educational background, I purport that the Open Campus has an important role to play in the future development of The UWI, as it is reflective of the current trend in higher education. Therefore, its success is vital not only for the Campus but for The UWI as a whole.

The first part of Open Campus's objective is to increase access to tertiary education, particularly for persons from non-campus Anglophone Caribbean islands. The notion of increased access not only refers to larger student numbers but to an escalation in the number of persons from underrepresented groups in tertiary education, for example, students with: learning disabilities, hearing disability, impaired vision, and little or no formal qualifications. One needs, however, to be mindful that access is only the starting point (Gumport and Sporn, 1999) and once accepted students must be exposed to a learning environment that is conducive, fosters retention, adds value and supports success. This may be facilitated through processes such as 'Access' courses, the term used in the United Kingdom; and 'Foundation' courses the American version. These courses are structured to support students who have entered without formal qualifications or who have not studied for a number of years. Similarly, the Open Campus offers 'Bridging' courses to facilitate the development of students. This is a good practice that should be commended and continued by the Campus.

If the Open Campus is to achieve acceptability and credibility in its own right it must ensure that its provisions are considered to be of quality. At the University, we define quality as fitness for purpose, that is, a programme's or institution's ability to meet its stated aims. The fitness for purpose concept is closely linked to fitness of purpose model which suggests that not only should the programme/institution meet its stated objectives but that the programme/institution is fit for its stated purpose. But can the same measure be used for the assessment of online learning? When considering the quality of distance online education, it is important to appreciate that unlike traditional forms of education, the teaching and learning process does not take place simultaneously. That is, there is a separation of the teacher and

learners and as such, the teacher is unable to use learner non-verbal forms of communication to identify difficulties and to adapt the learning to compensate. Therefore, the development of the courses and programmes is crucial and much thought and consideration must be put into the process as the results are not easily changeable.

The underpinning philosophy of the University of the West Indies, Open Campus is the delivery of high-quality university education, whilst ensuring that the research and services available at our institution are open and available to all people, inside and outside the Caribbean, who wish to reach their full potential. As such, the guiding principles of the Open Campus are: (a) the provision of high quality teaching and learning; (b) innovative pedagogic design; and (c) the establishment of relevant research and community partnerships to deliver face-to-face, blended and online learning. With this philosophy and the guiding principles, the Open Campus is well positioned to fulfil its mandate and to meet the requirements of an external evaluation. The Open Campus has presented the University of the West Indies, with a golden opportunity to capitalise on the increasing demand for tertiary education, not only in the region but globally. The Campus has accepted the challenge and the mantle of excellence and pledge to do its part to make the Open Campus a name which is synonymous with quality.

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# Quality Enhancement: Improving the Teaching and Learning Process in Distance Education



*Benita Thompson, PhD*

*Research Officer*

*Office of the Principal • The UWI Open Campus*

The term quality enhancement (QE) continues to be in the forefront of the quality assurance agenda and debate as distinguished authors purport their diverse definitions, perspectives and practices. However, in spite of the diversity of perspectives or definitions, there is one common theme which is 'improvement'. The Quality Assurance Agency (2006) describes quality enhancement as "the process of taking deliberate steps at the institutional level to improve the quality of learning opportunities..." Further, Gvaramadze (2008) argues that the main cornerstone of the QE framework is the student learning experience which refers to the following:

- Deliberate steps to bring continuous improvement for the effectiveness of learning experience;
- The ability of the institution's internal system to maintain quality at the programme and institutional level;
- Optimal use of resources for better student learning; and
- A continuous process consisting of reflection, planning and evaluation (p. 448)

It is within this context that QE practices in distance education are discussed as they relate to the improvement of the teaching learning process.

Distance education is fast becoming an integral part of the higher education landscape based on its inherent flexibility and accessibility, allowing anytime, anywhere study. More specifically, distance education provides flexibility for those with irregular work schedules and accessibility for those with restricted mobility and family responsibilities.

Commensurate with the increasing number of distance education students is the need to ensure, maintain and improve on standards of quality. In this regard, a number of quality enhancement practices are outlined, which are intended to improve the teaching and learning process in distance education. These include but are not limited to the following as suggested by Jara and Mellar (2006):

- Implementation and monitoring of measures to plan, create and produce high quality learning materials, which are delivered to students in a timely manner;
- The design and re-design of effective course delivery systems to meet the changing needs of students as based on their feedback;
- The promotion of independent learning through the development of well conceived teaching styles, teaching methods and student support services;
- Provision of numerous opportunities for learner interaction with others;
- Monitoring of key aspects of the operation on a regular basis using the data to assist evaluation and improvements;
- Evaluation and monitoring of student progress regularly and modifying teaching materials and the services offered in a systematic way; and
- Providing training and support to student support providers and to other staff (pp.286-287).

The literature also suggests that compared to face-to-face courses, the enhancement of online courses require more coordination, communication and planning strategies and clearly defined leadership. Moreover, quality enhancement strategies should include an increased amount of student feedback.

The enhancement of the teaching and learning process in distance education is paramount and every effort should be made to ensure that all aspects are continually undergoing improvement. In this regard, particular emphasis should be placed on the areas of curriculum and instruction, faculty and student support, student learning outcomes, institutional resources and organizational structure.

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# Looking in at Quality Assurance in Franchise Arrangements



## *Marcia Reid*

*Administrative Assistant*

*Marketing & Communications Unit • The UWI Open Campus*

Collaborative arrangements between The University of the West Indies (UWI) and other tertiary level institutions (TLIs) began as far back as 1965, with what was then called affiliation arrangements (TLIU: 2002, p. 1). Over the years, UWI has continued this type of collaboration, and has extended it to what is now called franchising. Through arrangements TLIs across the region have been offering part or full programmes under the guidance of UWI faculties/departments. In the UWI strategic plan 2007-2012, “STRIDE”, UWI indicated that

it plans to “continue to develop links with both TLIs and the private sector in order to build human capacity and foster development in the region” and that, “as part of this partnership with regional TLIs the University plans to assist in curriculum development, quality assurance and the building of staff capacity.” (p. 47). UWI as a regional institution has committed itself to contributing to the development of the tertiary education and human resource capacity of the region, to widen access and provide educational opportunities to the underserved communities of the region.

## Assessing for Quality

When a TLI makes a request to offer UWI programmes under franchise, the University undertakes an assessment of the institution’s facilities to ascertain its readiness to deliver the UWI programme. Readiness takes into consideration the state of the physical resources of the institution such as its library, laboratories, classrooms, student service facilities as well as proper scrutiny of the quality assurance mechanisms in use at the institution. The UWI Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) considers the latter significant, in the institutions’ readiness to deliver UWI programmes. The QAU ensures that the institution understands that “fitness for purpose” is important to UWI’s efforts to “enhance the quality of delivery both in academic programmes and administrative services.” (STRIDE, p.49). It should be noted that once UWI approves the request by the institution and delivery commences, the following applies:

1. The programme is a UWI programme developed by the UWI and offered by the TLI.
2. All students apply to UWI and are registered students of both UWI and the TLI.
3. Students receive a UWI certificate at the end of the programme.
- 4.

## Quality: A joint Venture Partnership

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor, BUS, notes that “quality assurance is a joint venture between the students, administrators and academics who are actual or potential stakeholders to whom we strive to be responsive” (<http://www.uwi.edu/qau>). Franchisees are “actual stakeholders” in the quality assurance process. The extent to which the UWI has been responsive to the needs of these particular stakeholders does leave a lot of room for improvement as highlighted at a workshop held in November 2011 with representatives of TLIs offering UWI franchise and affiliated programmes. The workshop was held as a precursor to the quality evaluation exercises that were being scheduled by the Unit with collaborating institutions. The workshop brought into sharp focus the level of UWI’s unresponsiveness to its TLI stakeholders. In attendance were some twenty-five TLI stakeholders, from nine institutions, offering four programmes under franchise and affiliated arrangements. These stakeholders expressed the view that the UWI has not been responsive to their needs, as many issues relating to admissions, registration and examination processes and course related matters that were integral to maintaining quality were not being addressed in a timely manner. They noted that the ongoing problems had impacted the level of service to students negatively. The institutions registered their

disappointment in the break-down in service delivery and felt that UWI needed to address the issues of quality before sharing with them its quality assurance mechanisms. It begs the question, therefore, whether we are lacking in quality customer care toward our stakeholders or whether we have forgotten our commitment to give quality service to our stakeholders.

## Monitoring for Quality

The monitoring process is important in the franchisor/franchisee arrangement. Monitoring ensures that the quality of the agreement is maintained. If this process is not carried out, how can we maintain quality? Yorke (1993) in looking at the franchisor/franchisee relationship opines that “quality assurance does not end with the completion of the validation process” (p. 174). He stated that “the franchisor/franchisee relationship needs to be kept under continuous review.” Therefore, without monitoring in the franchise arrangements, UWI will not be able to ensure proper delivery of its programmes by TLIs. There are questions then that we need to ask ourselves. How do we measure quality in relation to franchising and how do we ensure that quality is maintained in the franchising of UWI programmes?

### ‘Valuables’ in the quality process

What do we consider to be the ‘valuables’ in the quality assurance processes as they relate to franchising?

- Monitoring by faculty to ensure that the quality of the programme is maintained through effective admissions processes (TLI administrators being made aware of the

students who have been accepted by the UWI to attend their institutions)

- Effective student registration process that gives the TLI administrators knowledge of their student registration
- Examination arrangements that allow TLI administrators to monitor the performance of their students
- Effective communication and commitment to purpose
- Quality customer care

Is this then a call for action? As UWI continues to build relationships with TLIs it should bear in mind the need for monitoring as a way to maintaining quality. We cannot be complacent, as complacency puts our reputation into question. Maintaining quality is about being proactive, ensuring that there are no loopholes, covering all our bases and realizing that our stakeholders, actual or potential, are our greatest assets.

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# Quality FIND-A-WORD

## Open and Distance Education at The UWI

WORDS ARE TO BE FOUND ACROSS, UP, DOWN, REVERSED, DIAGONALLY.  
TWO WORDS APPEARS TWICE. CAN YOU FIND THEM?



OPEN  
DATA  
DELIVERY  
PEGAGOGY  
ENHANCE  
UNIQUE

VIDEO  
DISADVANTAGE  
RELEVANT  
ONLINE  
PHYSICAL  
CONTINUING

KNOWLEDGE  
FORTY-TWO  
ADULT  
SITES  
MULTI-MODE

VOICE  
TECHNOLOGY  
TIME  
SEPARATED  
INNOVATIVE

DISTANCE  
PRINT  
BLENDED  
QUALITY  
VIRTUAL

# Big Data Analytics and the Open Campus



*Ngoni Chipere, PhD*  
*Programme Coordinator*  
*Programme Planning Department*  
*APAD • The UWI Open Campus*

## Introduction

The electronic systems of the Open Campus generate an enormous amount of operational data every second. The systems automatically record in a database every student registration and graduation, every fee paid or not paid, every leave of absence granted or not granted, every login and logout of the learning management system, every learning resource created and viewed, every link that is clicked, every posting in every discussion forum, every chat session, every quiz carried out and every assignment submitted and graded. This vast amount of incidental data is an example of what is called 'big data' and it is a phenomenon of growing interest for many organisations.

The value of big data lies in its ability to expose operational patterns that elude human intuition by their sheer scope and complexity. A large family of analytical procedures called big data analytics can sift through vast quantities of electronic data and reveal patterns that are critical to the success or failure of an organisation – patterns that would otherwise be hidden from the unaided human mind.

According to a recent report by the McKinsey Institute, big data analytics represent the 'next frontier for innovation, competition and productivity' (Manyika et al, 2011). The report lists five sources of value that an organisation can derive from big data analytics. In this article, I briefly illustrate these sources of value in the context of the Open Campus. For ease of presentation, I use the same sub-headings as those found in the report.

## Creating Transparency

Big data analytics can provide useful operational information that would otherwise be confined to departmental silos. For example, an analysis of student data held by the Registry can yield patterns that are of value to Marketing, Course Delivery and Student Services. An analysis of data held by Course Delivery on student interactions with course materials can yield patterns of value to Course Development and Programme Planning. An analysis of student queries to the Help desk can provide useful insights for Learning Support and so on.

## Enabling Experimentation to Discover Needs, Expose Variability, and Improve Performance

Big data analytics can create profiles of teaching staff and course materials that are associated with either desirable or undesirable learning outcomes. Using this data, Course Development staff and Course Delivery staff can modify course materials or teaching styles in order to achieve the desired effect.

## Segmenting Populations to Customize Actions

Big data analytics can also reveal segments of the student population that require special interventions. For example, a sub-set of big data analytics called predictive analytics can detect at-risk students before they fail. This information can be used in order to customise the way such students are handled by different departments within the Open Campus.

## Replacing/supporting Human Decision Making with Automated Algorithms

Predictive analytics can also provide early warning of trouble ahead. For example, a software package driven by predictive analytics can detect students who do not log on to the learning environment at the required frequency or interact sufficiently with their peers. The software can then send email alerts to the teacher concerned and/or to Course Delivery staff, who can then intervene as appropriate.

## Innovating New Business Models, Products, and Services

Within the Open Campus, big data analytics can drive programme planning by building profiles of high and low performing programmes. Such profiles can facilitate the development of programmes that best satisfy student requirements and thus lead to higher enrollment and throughput.

## Conclusion

The value of big data analytics to quality assurance should be clear from the foregoing. Big data analytics can make it possible to see through the complexity of Open Campus operations. It can enable corrective interventions to be undertaken and it can facilitate the evaluation of such interventions.

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# Quality Assurance of Online Programmes: Special Considerations for Programme Approval and Review



*Prof. Vivienne Roberts, PhD*  
Deputy Principal • The UWI Open Campus

## Background

Over the years, The University of the West Indies Quality Assurance Unit (UWI QAU) has adopted a working definition of quality as “fitness for purpose”. Such a definition allows for ongoing adaptation to continual changes in the internal and external environment. In 2007, the UWI Open Campus was established and mandated to increase access, improve efficiency and enhance the public appeal of UWI’s offerings. This is being achieved through the inclusion of a wider and more diverse student body which can access UWI’s offering through distance education modalities - online and face to face.

The Quality Assurance Unit which has been in existence since 2001 has developed and maintained a rigorous quality assurance system. The processes include the approval of programmes against agreed criteria and the periodic formal review of undergraduate and graduate programmes. This monitoring ensures that students receive a high quality learning experience and that all stakeholders can be assured that high standards are being met across the institution.

Generally, QAU reviews have focused on such areas as curriculum, teaching and learning, student profile, resources for teaching and learning and quality assurance and enhancement. While these are also areas for consideration in assessing online programmes, there are several additional quality indicators which are pertinent and peculiar to distance education.

## Guidelines and Benchmarks

There is a small pool of literature on guidelines and benchmarks for distance education. This includes Merisotis and Phipps’ (2000) National Education Association which endorsed:

- institutional support benchmarks including documented technology plan, reliable technology delivery system and centralized support system;
- course development benchmarks including the establishment of minimum standards to guide course development, design and delivery;
- appropriate use of technology to achieve desired outcomes;
- Course design to engage students in analysis, synthesis and critical thinking;
- teaching and learning approaches incorporating student interaction with peers and teachers;
- course structure providing for pre-enrolment counseling and orientation, and
- informational support including online and other library resources.

Phipps, Wellman and Merisotis (1998) articulated some of these earlier but also pointed to the need for faculty to have technical assistance, appropriate orientation and training and procedures to deal with eventualities. In respect of evaluation,

they advocate a wide range of assessment tools and strategies for assessing learning outcomes as well as producing data on enrolment, throughput, cost and technology application. The Commonwealth of Learning has also produced guidelines which focus on curriculum and instruction considerations, staff support, student support and student outcomes.

The contribution of Mariasingam and Hanna (2006) is also useful in that it presents a comprehensive list of benchmarks but also adds some social dimensions including collaborative learning, learning communities, social integration, career training, job readiness, societal requirements, flexibility in allowing for asynchronous learning and lifelong learning. Inglis (2005) also agreed that the difference in assessing online programmes relate to their delivery and student support.

## Recommendations

Against this background, there are some special considerations that should be applied to the approval and review of Open Campus online programmes. It is true to say that all learning involves intellectual, technological, social, emotional, vocational and cultural dimensions. However, for online delivery, because of the physical separation of learner and facilitator, courseware and student support assume greater importance. Additionally, the criticality of technology hardware, software, support, accessibility and student technology competence is also enhanced in that context.

In the online programme approval and review processes in the Open Campus, it is being recommended that planners and assessors give special attention to:

- the nature and quality of the courseware,
- the nature and extent of student support,
- the balance between independence and coaching as well as between asynchronous and synchronous activity,
- quality and quantity of technology use and support,
- consideration of and responsiveness to cultural differences,
- facilitation and promotion of lifelong learning,
- organising and facilitating learning for understanding, application, analysis and creativity.

## Conclusion

Online delivery offers universities the opportunity to expand access without the need for additional physical space and requires proportionately less human resources; and all of this, at a more affordable cost and with no essential loss in quality. Online delivery offers the best opportunity for expanding the footprint of the University and responding to the competition. However, in order to ensure that its online offerings are fit for purpose, it is important that The UWI planners, educators and evaluators enhance and fine-tune the quality assurance processes by recognising and incorporating some of these identified distance education benchmarks.

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# Vision and Quality at the Open Campus

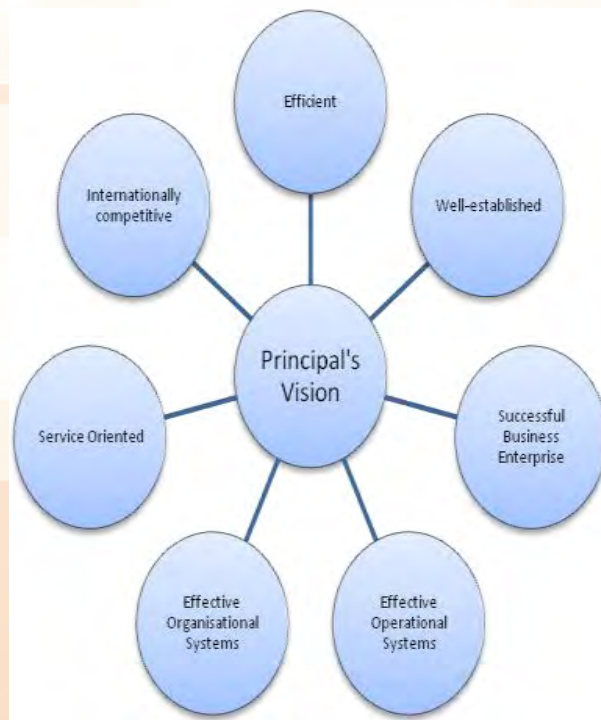


**Pamela Dottin**

*Quality Assurance Officer • QAU, The UWI Open Campus*

The Open Campus is the international wing of the University of the West Indies and as such must offer programmes and courses that are not only readily accessible but also meet international quality standards. However, to facilitate this process there must be effective and efficient leaders who understand and appreciate the importance of achieving and maintaining quality in all sectors of the Campus. The roles of the PVC, Principal and the Deputy Principal are vital in the achievement of this quality objective as it is from the 'leaders' of an organization that the vision and direction emanate.

This article was informed by interviews with the 'leaders' of the Open Campus, albeit, it is not seeking to "ignore[s] the invisible [and visible] leadership of lower-level staff members" (Murphy, 1988, p. 655) but is suggesting that the interviewees are the mantle bearers of the Campus and as such have an important role in the cultivation of its quality culture and vision. In discussion with the Principal she articulated her vision as the "... successful establishment of a Campus with organizational and operational systems which are fine tuned through nimble efficient service oriented behaviours" at all levels.



*Diagram 1: PVC and Principal's Vision*

Manasse (1986) suggests that effective leaders of change have an idea of the desired state of the organization and that they work to achieve same through the forging of a shared vision. Westley and Mintzberg (1989) agree with this analogy and further suggest that there are three stages to this process:

- Identifying an image/vision of the desired future of the organization;
- Communicating the vision to constituents; and
- Empowering internal stakeholder to “enact the vision” (p. 18).

The embodiment of quality in the Principal’s vision for the Campus is in keeping with Philip Crosby’s ideology which suggests that “quality is the result of a carefully constructed cultural environment. It has to be the fabric of the organization, not part of the fabric”. The concept of ‘constructed cultural environment’ is very important for this campus considering its beginning, an amalgamation of the former Schools of Continuing Studies, Distance Education Centres and Tertiary Level Institutions, with the former entities having several guises over the years including the ‘extramural departments’ and its staff compliment of 511 persons deployed over 15 countries.

This mosaic of cultures with its varied norms and practices, suggest that this new entity is undergoing an organizational change which is similar to that of a merger. As such, the Open Campus’ first priority, as highlighted by the Principal and the Deputy Principal, is forging of a shared organizational culture and vision. They both accept that there is no quick fix and are dedicated to the pursuit of quality and quality leadership.

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# Supervision: A Critical & Complex Role



*Sandra Richards, PhD*

*Senior Programme Officer • QAU Graduate Studies & Research*

It is safe to say that research studies include a mix of curiosity, investigation, data collection and analysis and reflection. It requires the ability to explain what was previously unexplained and offers the opportunity to shift paradigms by exploring and interrogating old ideas. It offers also, which is the exciting part, physical and conceptual space to propose new ideas based on systematic and rigorous endeavor is legitimised.

Given this rich and dynamic mix of investigation and analysis, it is critical that research students have unobstructed access to adequate supervision at every stage of their unique journey of enquiry.

## What is the role of a Supervisor?

Supervisors support students as they:

- Identify, shape and problematise their research
- Develop strategy for tackling the research journey
- Locate and navigate the relevant existing bodies of knowledge
- Enter and establish themselves in their respective research arena
- Conclude and defend their research findings, and
- Disseminate new knowledge

## Context

The University of the West Indies (UWI) is committed to cultivating a research ethos and environment. To this end, the UWI has established a School for Graduate Studies and Research (SGSR) on the three residential campuses to more adequately meet the needs of

the graduate and research student. These SGSRs perform an administrative role by supporting the requirements of graduate and research study. Campus Coordinators for Graduate Studies and Research are located in, and have oversight for, the SGSR. Although the Open Campus does not have a SGSR, it does have a Coordinator for Graduate Studies and Research. Their mandate includes quality assurance and they are available to advise both students and Supervisors. This arrangement is intended to provide a more appropriate graduate and research student experience.

There is more that can be done to support students using e-platforms and the Open Campus is leading the strategy for creating specialist teams and support processes to enhance flexible distance learning. Indeed, it could be said that research study lends itself to being accommodated in non-traditional blended and virtual environments as a considerable amount of reading and reflection is required in ways that are not required by undergraduate and taught programmes. This way there can be convenient asynchronous and synchronous learning episodes, shared presentations, meetings and other activities that bring the learning to the student at the convenience of the student. Notwithstanding the University requirement for Supervisors to submit regular progress reports, the student and Supervisor

should create and agree a framework to guide their interactions face to face and electronically. This is especially important for part-time working students who are often mature people with family and work commitments. Full time research students may have similar commitments as well as concerns about income generation, isolation and become demotivated. Technology supports the formation of virtual study groups, presentations that can be recorded and reviewed for analysis and progress charting.

## Whose Responsibility?

Doctoral study is, strictly speaking, the responsibility of the student however, the Supervisor has responsibilities too. To illustrate this, the University has produced guidelines governing the relationship between the Supervisor and the supervised (see 'Graduate Studies Guide for Students and Supervisors' available from the SGSRs and online). The relationship between student and Supervisor can be extremely stimulating to both parties when regarded as a joint expedition.

## Visit and Take a Look

The UWI has developed an interactive website called the 'Graduate Research Information Portal' ([www.GRIP.edu](http://www.GRIP.edu)). It has, among other things, useful Supervisor and student-

centred features including a thesis tracker. The SGSRs also have websites with document libraries that provide material to inform students and Supervisors about their shared and individual responsibilities.

The Quality Assurance Unit is working to ensure that the processes that pertain to graduate studies and research are integral to the operations of the UWI. This is done in partnership with the SGSR, Instructional Development Units, Student Services, IT Services, Campus Quality Assurance Office and Departments so that we can be a resource for graduate and research students and their Supervisors. Do visit us at [www.uwi.edu/qau](http://www.uwi.edu/qau) and let us have your input.

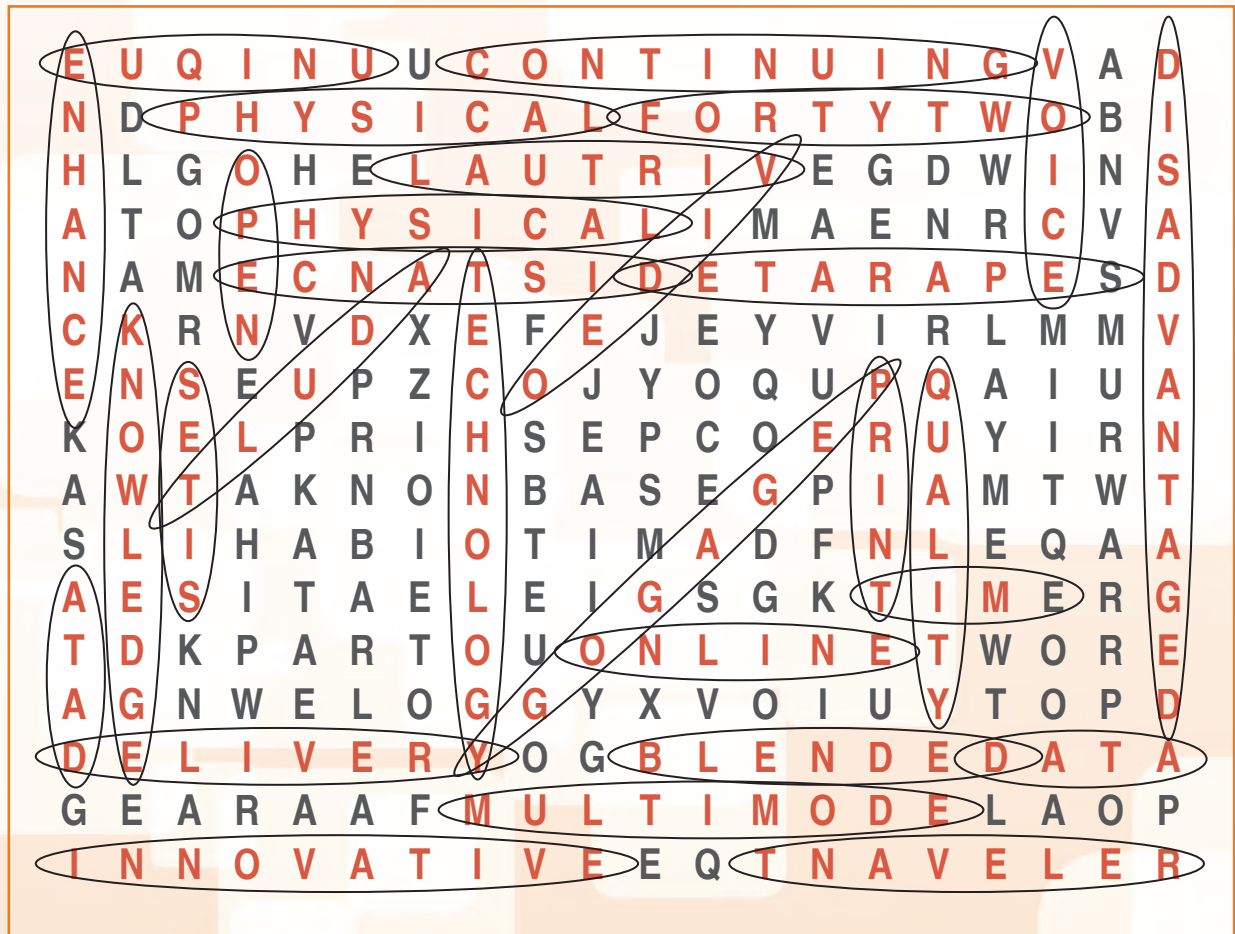
## Q-Tip

**When planning and developing distance programmes and courses time must be allocated to anticipating the needs of these students who you may never meet face to face...**

Q-Tip  
Designed by  
Kevin Bailey

# Quality FIND-A-WORD Solution

*DATA and PHYSICAL appear twice*



OPEN  
DATA  
DELIVERY  
PEGAGOGY  
ENHANCE  
UNIQUE

VIDEO  
DISADVANTAGE  
RELEVANT  
ONLINE  
PHYSICAL  
CONTINUING

KNOWLEDGE  
FORTY-TWO  
ADULT  
SITES  
MULTI-MODE

VOICE  
TECHNOLOGY  
TIME  
SEPARATED  
INNOVATIVE

DISTANCE  
PRINT  
BLENDED  
QUALITY  
VIRTUAL

NEWS OF REVIEWS, EVALUATIONS, ACCREDITATION & FORA

DISCIPLINES FOR REVIEW 2012 - 2013

**CAVE HILL**

- Theology
- Accounts
- Management Studies
- Computer Science

**MONA**

- Economics
- Physics
- Government
- History & Archaeology
- (Literatures in English Rescheduled)

**ST AUGUSTINE**

- Dept. of Economics
- Dept. of Geomatics & Land Management
- School of Education
- Dept. of Electrical & Computer Engineering
- Dept. of Chemistry
- Dept. of History
- School of Dentistry

**OPEN CAMPUS**

- Management Studies

**Graduate Studies and Research**

Institute for Gender and Development Studies

QUALITY ASSURANCE EVALUATIONS 2012 - 2013

**CAVE HILL**

- Law
- French
- Economics
- Psychology

**MONA**

- Management Institute for National Development
- Management (Public Sector Management)
- Knox Community College (Nursing)
- Brown's Town Community College (Public Sector Management)
- Jamaica Constabulary Staff College (Public Sector Management)

**ST AUGUSTINE**

- Clinical Surgical Sciences
- Pathology & Microbiology
- Chemical & Process Engineering
- Physics
- Computer Science
- Civil and Environmental Engineering
- Mathematics and Statistics

**OPEN CAMPUS**

- B.Ed Literacy

**Graduate Studies and Research**

- University evaluations of Institutes, Schools, Centres and Units continue to take place.

QUALITY ASSURANCE FORA

Co-evaluator training will take place involving graduate studies and research academics in collaboration with Cave Hill and St. Augustine. The Mona QAU will conduct quality fora with University administrative personnel.

INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION

CAVE HILL	MONA	ST AUGUSTINE	OPEN CAMPUS
2012 - 2013	2012 - 2019	2012 - 2018	2012 - 2013
Accreditation visit schedule for 25 Feb - 1 Mar	Granted initial accreditation for 7 years by the University Council of Jamaica (UCJ)	Accreditation expires in 2018	Awaiting decision from the Barbados Accreditation Council (BAC)

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