

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES

OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO ACCESS AND SUCCESS IN  
TERTIARY EDUCATION IN THE COMMONWEALTH CARIBBEAN

*Presented by:*

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# OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO ACCESS AND SUCCESS IN TERTIARY EDUCATION IN THE COMMONWEALTH CARIBBEAN

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## Introduction

Enrolment in tertiary education in the Commonwealth Caribbean has remained comparatively and consistently low over the years. Not surprisingly, the actual numbers of tertiary education graduates have also been well below the optimal level. On the other hand, indications are that there is increasing demand by potential students and private sector employers as well as by governments for tertiary education graduates. Additionally, educational leaders and policy makers continually express a need for and a desire to expand tertiary education opportunities to a wider range and greater number of its citizens in an attempt to promote national and regional development.

In spite of concerted effort by many stakeholders, the goal of increased access to tertiary education has been elusive to date. It seems reasonable to infer therefore that there are resistant barriers to the expansion of tertiary education access and that these may be related to persistent challenges which also place limits on the success of learners in the tertiary education system.

This paper attempts to identify some of those barriers to access and success and to highlight some of the initiatives which have been taken in an attempt to overcome these barriers. Before

proceeding to a discussion of the barriers themselves, it may be useful to define the terms tertiary education, access and success and to examine also what constitutes the Commonwealth Caribbean tertiary education context and to locate within this context some inherent barriers to access and success.

### Definition of Terms

Tertiary education is being used here to mean the third stage of education which builds on secondary education. It is seen as voluntary in nature, androgogical and student centred in orientation, and catering to the intellectual, social and occupational needs of young and older adult learners, preparing them to function as productive and adaptive citizens in a global environment.

Access to tertiary education can be viewed as the opportunity for enrolment as well as the facilitation of entry and the encouragement of sustained enrolment by learners in appropriate education programmes. Thus access includes features of openness to a heterogeneous population, supportiveness to a diverse clientele and relevance of diverse offerings.

Success in tertiary education is also a multi-faceted term which is a measure of the extent of achievement of personal, institutional or national tertiary educational goals. It is also indicated by efficiency and quality measures such as completion rates, levels of achievement and fitness for purpose.

The Commonwealth Caribbean context can be defined in terms of its geography, history, economic base, culture, educational structure and traditions. Geographically, the region is composed of ten independent island states: Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago.

There are two independent territories: Belize and Guyana and four British dependencies: Anguilla, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, and the Turks and Caicos Islands. This collection represents a relatively large group of politically independent entities with relatively small populations, geographically isolated from each other by bodies of water, and diverse in their stage of economic and educational development.

Historically, these states all experienced European colonisation with the first group gaining independence in the nineteen sixties. They all experienced continuous or intermittent British colonisation and as such, all have English as their official language. The spoken languages and dialects have however been influenced not only by the colonists but also by the introduction into the region of Africans as slaves. The economies were originally built primarily on mono-crop agriculture varying over time and from country to country embracing such crops as banana, sugarcane, coconut, coffee, tobacco and spices. Jamaica and Guyana have exploited the natural resource of bauxite and Trinidad and Tobago of oil and petroleum. Limited manufacturing has been undertaken from time to time. To different degrees, economic development has patterned, even if it has trailed behind, the trends of the developed world transitioning from mono-crop to diversified agriculture, then to manufacturing and on to services with the gradual emergence of knowledge based economies and the concomitant demand for a relatively large and highly trained workforce.

The tertiary education system is a loosely coupled network of diverse institutions which vary in type, size and mission. The majority are publicly funded and multi-disciplinary in scope. They include one large regional university, the University of the West Indies which caters to over 20,000 institutional based

students and about 2,663 who access its distance programmes. In addition to this regionally funded university, there are three national universities - University of Belize, University of Guyana and the University of Technology in Jamaica and an emerging University, the College of Bahamas. Private universities are also to be found in Jamaica, that is Northern Caribbean University and in Grenada at St. George's University. Barbados is host to an emerging university college. The region has over 100 other tertiary institutions with the pool made up of community colleges, national colleges, institutes, single discipline colleges including teachers' colleges, theological colleges and schools of nursing. There are in addition a growing number of overseas universities which have satellite centres within local colleges. Particularly in the Bahamas and Jamaica, there are overseas universities which deliver their programmes from local hotels and business places. There is as well a growing number of virtual colleges and universities which are linked through print or electronically to the homes and workplaces of interested learners.

Caribbean students continue to enrol in tertiary institutions locally, regionally and internationally as indicated in **Table 1:**

**OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO ACCESS AND SUCCESS IN TERTIARY EDUCATION  
IN THE COMMONWEALTH CARIBBEAN** *VIVIENNE ROBERTS, PHD*

5

**Table 1: Enrolment of Caribbean Students in Tertiary Education**

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	STUDYING IN THE CARIBBEAN		**STUDYING IN OECD COUNTRIES	TOTAL TERTIARY ENROLMENT	TOTAL POPULATION
	**NOT IN HOME COUNTRY	*IN HOME COUNTRY			
Anguilla	(12)	NA	NA	-	8103
Antigua and Barbuda	83	868	305	1256	66843
Bahamas	155	4788	2138	7081	296111
Barbados	251	9145	970	10,366	268,106
Belize	56	1377	444	1877	229796
British Virgin Islands	10	465	127	602	20263
Cayman Islands	3	196	287	486	35739
Dominica	56	658	269	983	70770
Grenada	64	1077	219	1360	93065
Guyana	57	8622	562	9241	849559
Jamaica	388	36474	3560	40422	2538284
Montserrat	(24)	NA	NA	-	10678
St Kitts and Nevis	82	437	143	662	39044
St Lucia	216	1484	379	2079	150232
St Vincent and the Grenadines	117	650	181	948	112374
Trinidad and Tobago	301	10317	3011	13629	1282897
Turks and Caicos Islands	20	430	48	498	15623
<b>Total</b>	<b>1859</b>	<b>76,988</b>	<b>12,643</b>	<b>91,490</b>	<b>6,087,487</b>

Sources: \*\*UNESCO Institute for Statistics Good Neighbours; Caribbean Students at the Tertiary Level of Education, 2001  
\* UWI/TLI Unit 2001  
NA = not available

**OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO ACCESS AND SUCCESS IN TERTIARY EDUCATION  
IN THE COMMONWEALTH CARIBBEAN *VIVIENNE ROBERTS, PHD***

6

It is important also to examine some of the educational traditions of the region which may have relevance to any discussion on barriers to access. Perhaps the tertiary education experience in the Caribbean may be conveniently divided into four discrete periods - prior to 1948, between 1948 and 1969, 1970 to 1995 and 1996 to the present . Prior to 1948 when the first university ( the University College of the West Indies) was established, broad-based higher education had an external focus in that expatriates would send their children to study in their homeland. A small number of indigenous people would also go overseas to study depending on their economic circumstances, connections or good fortune. There was also a third group of highly motivated persons who gained access to overseas study - not by going overseas but through the route of the external degree mainly from the University of London. Other locals made use of the opportunities to be trained as teachers, nurses, priests and craftsmen in the single-discipline tertiary education institutions of the day.

In the 1950s and sixties, broad-based university education was expanded in the region but it was targeted at a small number of highly qualified students. It was elitist and residential with a strong emphasis on pedagogy which demanded face to face interaction between the teacher and student. Additionally, the quality indicators related mainly to the quality of such inputs as students' qualifications, lecturer qualification, textbooks and libraries and the outputs of students' work produced mainly through examinations.

By the 1970s, independent nations were increasingly concerned with nation building and economic development, the demand for increased access became urgent and explicit and the economic conditions could not allow for replication of existing educational structures and services in all the countries of the



region. Adjustments had to be made for the size of the target audience. Early adjustments included the establishment of additional university campuses and extra-mural centres and the development by governments of more economical and responsive tertiary institutions other than universities. These changes were not sufficient however to cope with the barriers of time, space and cost and highlighted the need to make further adjustments in the mode of delivery, the use of technology, the diversification and rationalisation of offerings. The formal establishment of the UWI Distance Education Centre in 1996 from its 1978 antecedent challenge programmes was an attempt to surmount such barriers.

### **Barriers to Access**

The barriers to access and success in tertiary education are many and varied. In the Caribbean region, Primus (1998), Roberts (1999), Marrett (2000), Garcia (2000), O'Neal and Davies (2000) have identified or alluded to several barriers to tertiary education access. These include:

1. Space (geographical and accommodation)
2. Cost (development, delivery and travel)
3. Population size and economies of scale
4. Technology
5. Attitude of producers and consumers
6. The structure of opportunity
7. Administrative leadership
8. Gender

The **space** barrier can be viewed from three perspectives. The first relates to geographical separation of the institution-based teacher from the learner. This is of special importance in island states which are striving to share a localised pool of

human resources to provide services for consumers who are widely dispersed in several islands or resident in isolated rural areas. The second relates to the adequacy and availability of accommodation for face to face instruction of potential learners. The magnitude of this challenge can be appreciated when one recognises that in the Caribbean, universal primary education has been fully achieved and universal secondary enrolment is a reality for some states such as Barbados, St. Kitts and Nevis and the British Virgin Islands. However, no state is able to provide for the full complement of qualified and interested applicants to tertiary education. Between 1993 and 1997, admission rates for qualified applicants ranged from 33 to 49 per cent for Sir Arthur Lewis Community College, St. Lucia and 32-45% for Barbados Community College. Admission rates in 1996 for qualified Barbadian students to the Cave Hill, St Augustine and Mona campuses were 62%, 72% and 23% respectively. For St. Lucians, the respective rates were 21%, 38% and 14%.

A third consideration about space and access is the limited provision for physically challenged persons including wheel chair bound potential students who are unable to gain access to the majority of educational institutions in the Caribbean.

Tertiary education as it is presently organised and delivered is very expensive. The high unit **cost** relates to the small numbers of students which are being served and the inherent social and political equity challenges in implementing cost- recovery and cost- sharing initiatives in poor societies. Across the region, the high demand for and relatively low availability of student loans and publicly as well as privately funded scholarships are also indicators of the magnitude of the problem. In Barbados where approximately 20% of the total budget is spent on education, about 10% of the education allocation is spent on

**OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO ACCESS AND SUCCESS IN TERTIARY EDUCATION  
IN THE COMMONWEALTH CARIBBEAN** *VIVIENNE ROBERTS, PHD*

the colleges and 23% on UWI. Barbados and the Bahamas continue to fund the full economic cost of tuition at the regional university but even so, living and incidental costs are still high. The extent of the problem of cost of tertiary education can even be better appreciated if this is stacked up against the per capita GDP of the countries in question as is done in **Table 2:**

**Table 2: Unit Cost in selected Institutions and Programmes (2001) and Per Capita GDP (1998/9)**

INSTITUTION	PROGRAMME	ANNUAL ECONOMIC COST AND INCIDENTAL FEES (UNIT COST)	PER CAPITA GDP 1998/1999 IN \$US
UWI, Cave Hill Campus	Bachelor's degree Humanities, Natural and Social Sciences	Bds 18,208 US\$9,104	Barbados (1998) \$8,952
Sir Arthur Lewis Community College	UWI Franchise	EC\$12,170 US\$4,507	St Lucia (1999) \$2,659
Institute of Management Sciences for FIU	Bachelor of Business Administration in Jamaica	US\$15,000 for 2 yrs	Jamaica (1999)\$2,600
Barbados Community College	Associate Degree	BDS\$5,000 US\$2500	Barbados (1999) \$ 8,952

Several countries attempt to enhance access through the use of different media - print, radio, television, telephones and computers. Although these media have excellent potential for improving access, their effectiveness can be severely hampered by the extent of penetration of the technology and the quality of the support service offered and maintained in the country. Primus(1998) identified the penetration of computer technology as an important issue for distance education and Marrett (2000) has pointed to the postal service and quality of computers as barriers to the efficient operation of distance education.

**Small population size** and the related difficulty of the achievement of economies of scale is self-evident. The pool of lecturers and administrators is small and the pool of potential students is very limited. This is particularly so in some disciplines where the perception or the reality is that employment prospects are low, as in the case of the Humanities or where institutions require expensive outlay as in the Science and Technology fields. Using traditional approaches, such programmes tend therefore to be unavailable or prohibitively costly.

An important and insidious, though less obvious, barrier is **attitudinal**. It relates to the attitudes of teachers and learners to mass education. Many teachers are resistant to changes which are thought to undermine the tradition of highly selective, residential, pedagogical oriented tertiary education. Many are uneasy with the required adjustment in curricula to allow for independent learning. Some are unable to deal with a paradigm shift where quality is as much about performance in examinations as it is about the quality of course materials, student supports and the setting and keeping of deadlines for materials production and dissemination, feedback to students and submission of reports. Many learners still lack the discipline, confidence and motivation to take responsibility for their own learning and function in a less controlled and more self directed learning environment.

Access is also very closely related to the prevailing **structure of educational opportunity** within a country. Roberts (1999) found that in St. Lucia and Barbados, the enabling elements in the system like socio-economic support of students in the primary system; support for increased secondary school enrolment, second chances for achievement examinations, the award of scholarships and facilitation of loans for tertiary education can be collectively viewed as the structure of

opportunity and that this contributed in a very critical way to the proportion and actual numbers that are facilitated to move on from one level of education to the next.

**Administrative arrangements** can present barriers for access to tertiary education. In Distance education programmes at UWI for example, it is felt that the resistance to the change from a single mode (face to face) to multi mode institution by faculty has been an important challenge to the successful implementation of distance education (Marrett,2000 and DEC,2002. It is argued that enabling policies would allow for the changes in curriculum design and in more student centred practices to facilitate enrolment and retention of off-campus and non-campus students.

**Gender** is an important barrier to access since proportionately the number of males registered in tertiary institutions has remained less than females in spite of parity in the gender balance in the general population. There is evidence in Barbados from enrolment in each of the tertiary institutions: University of the West Indies, Erdiston College, Samuel Jackman Polytechnic and Barbados Community College that there are more females in the system as indicated in **Table 3**:

**Table 3: Enrolment in Barbados TLIs by Gender: 1997 - 2000**

YEAR	ENROLMENT				
	MALE	PERCENTAGE	FEMALE	PERCENTAGE	TOTAL
1997	3840	43.7	4945	56.3	8785
1998	3976	40.4	5865	59.6	9841
1999	4180	41.3	5952	58.7	10132
2000	2905	43	3854	57	6759

**OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO ACCESS AND SUCCESS IN TERTIARY EDUCATION  
IN THE COMMONWEALTH CARIBBEAN *VIVIENNE ROBERTS, PHD***

12

*Source: UCB Paper (2002)*

**Initiatives which have been taken to facilitate Access and Success**

As was indicated earlier, several initiatives have been taken at the policy level by governments and by colleges and universities to broaden access to diversified tertiary education offerings. Some of the initiatives include the acquisition of external degrees in overseas institutions or by distance and the receipt of regional or local degrees by distance or face to face. The following matrix summarises the different approaches and the emerging pattern in recent times:

**Table 4: Patterns in Tertiary Education Access**

PERIODS	EXTERNAL DEGREES		REGIONAL DEGREES			
	FACE TO FACE	DISTANCE	FACE TO FACE	DISTANCE	FRANCHISE	ARTICULATION
prior to 1948	T	T	T	x	x	x
1948 - 1959	T	T	T	x	x	x
1960-1969	T	TT	TT	T	T	T
1970 - 1995	TT	TTT	TTT	T	TT	TT
1995-present	TT	TTT	TTT	TT	TTT	TTT

Key: *T* = limited  
*TT* = increasing  
*TTT* = widespread

From Table 4, it can be seen that study overseas has increased over the years but has been outstripped by the increasing number of overseas - owned but locally delivered programmes either directly to the learner or through a local institution. Regional and local face to face enrolment has also increased with modest growth in regional distance education programmes. The

franchising of UWI programmes has widened access and the articulation arrangements in the region have provided another route for advanced studies.

In order to consider the extent to which barriers to access and success are being overcome, this section looks at the achievements and limitations of the UWI Distance Education Centre, the UWI Franchise experience in the Eastern Caribbean, The UWI Articulation experience, Distance Education at a small Community College in the British Virgin Islands: H. Lavity Stoutt (HLSCC) Community College, and the activities of a private tertiary institution in Jamaica, the Institute of Management Sciences (IMS).

### **University of the West Indies (UWI)**

At UWI, the issue of widening access has been addressed over time in a number of different ways including the expansion of the regional university in terms of its overall student enrolment, its face to face and distance programme offerings, its number of campuses and centres across the region and its programmatic and other linkages with other tertiary institutions. It is useful to look at the achievements of the Distance Education Centre as the focal point of Distance Education at UWI. Additionally, it is instructive to point out some of the achievements and potential of franchising and programme articulation for improving access.

### **The Distance Education Centre**

The Distance Education Centre was launched in 1996 but had its beginnings in the Challenge Programmes which became operational in 1978 and offered the opportunity to off-campus and non-campus students to follow course syllabuses with or without local



tuition and write university examinations initially in certain Social Science Certificate programmes. The delivery of these programmes was augmented by a three year project, the UWI Distance Teaching Experiment (UWIDITE) in 1982. Subsequently, this experiment became institutionalised as UWIDEC and the technology has been incorporated into the teleconferencing component of the Distance Education programmes which use mainly print media as well as local tutorial supports. The annual enrolment is summarized below:

**Table 5: Enrolment through UWIDEC 1997 - 2000**

DATE	ENROLMENT	% INCREASE
1997-1998	1447	-
1998-1999	1888	30.48
1999-2000	2205	16.79
2000-2001	2663	20.77

*Source: Report of the Distance Education Centre, 2001, p 3*

Undoubtedly, DEC has improved access to UWI for non-campus and off-campus students and it has achieved the numerical targets that have been set. The Centre has identified, however, several unresolved matters that would augment its effectiveness. These include centralized organisational structure to give it the necessary authority and control over its resources, its processes, functions and quality. The Centre also identifies faculty control, access to technology, uneven and sometimes inefficient infra-structural support and cost as barriers to the efficiency of the DEC.

There is limited research on the contribution of Distance Education to the success of its students but this could be inferred from completion rates and student performance in relation to their peers on campus. In a study reported in DEC's

Annual Report 2001, when a comparison of pass rates in 12 Cave Hill Campus courses was done for campus based and distance students, the performance by distance students was better in 3 courses. The pass rates for 2000 - 2001 also indicate good completion rates at the Eastern Caribbean sites where for 16 of 34 courses, there was 100% passes.

### **Franchise Arrangements**

Another initiative which will be highlighted is that of Franchise arrangements between UWI and three colleges in the UWI non-campus countries in the Eastern Caribbean. These are Antigua State College (ASC), Sir Arthur Lewis Community College (SALCC), St. Lucia and the Clarence Fitzroy Bryant College (CFBC), St. Kitts. These colleges deliver UWI First Year Bachelor's degree courses in Arts, Natural Sciences and Social Sciences. Additionally, ASC and SALCC deliver Level 2 Social Sciences Courses and SALCC delivers a full Bachelor's degree in Education. This arrangement allows for completion of the bachelor's degree at a campus in one or two years. Although the enrolment numbers are small in absolute terms, they represent significant increase in the total tertiary enrolment for the country and at a much cheaper cost to the student and the governments. Additionally, the arrangement represents an important institutional capacity building exercise which has redounded to all aspects of the college's development. Enrolment numbers for the three colleges are listed below:

**Table 6: Enrolment in UWI Franchised Programmes in the Eastern Caribbean**

YEAR	INSTITUTION		
	SALCC	ASC	CFBC
1998	123	54	21
1999	100	49	9
2000	90	60	7

It may be interesting also to look at the success of the exercise in terms of student completion rates and performance relative to campus based students. For the 1988-1993 cohorts, the throughput rate over 5 years was relatively good and for ASC, was 65% and for SALCC, was 60%. The class of degree earned also compared favorably with the achievement of the campus based students. (TLIU, 1997).

### **Programme Articulation**

UWI became involved in programme validation and inter-institutional collaboration very soon after its establishment as an independent university. Affiliation arrangements were established with the Theological Colleges (United Theological College and Codrington College) as early as 1965. Validation of Teachers' Certificate through the Joint Board of Teacher Education in Jamaica was also instituted in 1965. Recognition was also given between 1965 and 1969 to various diplomas which were issued by the then College of Arts, Science and Technology, Jamaica (CAST). The first UWI de jure articulation arrangements were with CAST since in that case, the programmes which were being linked were independently developed, delivered and certified. CAST's programmes were subsequently assessed,

validated and recognised by UWI so that graduates could use those credentials to matriculate into UWI's Bachelor's degree programmes.

Inter-institutional co-operation continued between UWI and other regional Tertiary Level Institutions (TLIs) in the 1970s evidenced by an articulation arrangement in 1978 between UWI and Caribbean Union College in Trinidad and Tobago and an affiliation arrangement in 1974 between UWI and the Caribbean Meteorological Institute. These relationships were few in number perhaps because the demands were few and the processing was done in a somewhat ad hoc manner by matriculation committees. As the number of tertiary institutions expanded in the region and as they sought to design and deliver their own programmes, the requests for UWI programme articulation increased. During the 1980s, both the College of the Bahamas and the Barbados Community College sought and negotiated articulation arrangements which enabled many of their high performing Associate Degree graduates from a number of disciplines to use that qualification for matriculation and entry to several faculties at UWI.

During the 1970s and 1980s, several other countries gained their independence and established national colleges which delivered, among their offerings, their own certificates, diplomas and associate degrees. Additionally, Caribbean students were going out of the region to study or were accessing foreign programmes at home and were presenting these new credentials for entry to the university. Requests for UWI articulation continued to increase not only in their numbers but in the nature of the requests which sought the use of these non-traditional qualifications not only for normal matriculation but also for advanced placement and course exemptions with credit.

It was against this background that the Tertiary Level Institutions Unit of the UWI, immediately after it was established in 1996, produced a set of procedures to guide the articulation process. These focused not only on the important quantitative issues but also on instruments to examine scope and depth of offerings, and the achievement of competencies and critical skills by the learners. In the assessment process for example, there are requirements for the examination of comprehensive course outlines which would offer information on content and critical skills to be achieved. They would also document reading lists, other required resources, assessment plans, actual or model examination papers and scripts. A required visit to institutions also allows for assessment of resources, and also for professional discourse with faculty to give an indication of level of operation.

Since the adoption of these procedures in 1997, the TLI Unit has applied these procedures and the following 19 articulation arrangements have been concluded over a five year period as indicated in Table 7:

**Table 7: Articulation Arrangements Facilitated by the Tertiary Level Institutions Unit 1997 - 2001**

YEAR	INSTITUTION	PROGRAMME	AGREEMENT
1998	Bahamas Baptist Community College (BCC)	Associate Degree in Social and Natural Sciences	Normal Matriculation
1998	Community College of the Cayman Islands	Associate Degree in Science	Normal Matriculation
1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Barbados Community College</li> <li>•College of Bahamas</li> <li>•College of Agriculture, Science and Education, Jamaica</li> <li>•College of Agriculture (Belize)</li> <li>•Eastern Caribbean Institute of Agriculture and Forestry, Trinidad</li> </ul>	Associate Degree in Agriculture	Advanced Placement
1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Clifton Dupigny Community College, Technical Division, Dominica</li> <li>•REPAHA</li> </ul>	Diploma in Agriculture	Normal Matriculation
1999	Council of Community Colleges of Jamaica	Associate Degree in Business Studies	Advanced Placement
2000	Institute of Management and Productivity, Jamaica	Associate Degree in Business Studies	Normal Matriculation
2000	Institute of Management Sciences, Jamaica	Associate Degree in Business Studies	Advanced Placement
2000	College of Agriculture, Science and Education, Jamaica	Associate Degree in Natural Sciences	Advanced Placement
2000	Sir Arthur Lewis Community College, St. Lucia	Associate Degrees in Natural and Social Sciences	Advanced Placement (yet to be implemented)
2000	UWI School of Continuing Studies, Trinidad and Tobago	Certificate in Human Resources Management	Normal Matriculation
2000	UWI School of Continuing Studies, Trinidad and Tobago	Certificate in Criminology	Normal Matriculation
2001	Life Underwriters of Jamaica	Certificate	Normal Matriculation
2001	Barbados Institute of Management and Production	Diploma in Management	Advanced Placement

2001	Bankers of Trinidad and Tobago	Certificate and Diploma Associateship	Normal Matriculation Advanced Placement
2002	School of Continuing Studies, Trinidad and Tobago	Certificate in Early Childhood Education	Normal Matriculation

### **The Off Shore Universities**

It is noticeable that in the Caribbean, there is quite a gap between the demand for and supply of tertiary education places. Not surprisingly, off-shore universities, private institutions, virtual colleges and universities and distance education programmes of various types are finding their niche in this open market. These overseas providers do not have a uniform modus operandi. Several deliver their programmes from local college or business sites using their own faculty members to give seminars, supported in some cases by local tuition and self instructional materials. Others use various distance modes of delivery including print and on-line delivery. The cost of the programmes is variable but in most instances, exceeds that of the subsidised cost charged by public institutions. The quality of the programmes is also variable since establishment in a host country may be predicated on overseas institutional and not programme accreditation and in some instances on no accreditation at all. UWI Office of the Board for Non-campus Countries and Distance Education (2001) identifies some 59 foreign providers in the region and the list is not exhaustive.

### **The Institute of Management Sciences Experience**

The Institute of Management Sciences (IMS) in Jamaica was established ten years ago as a private tertiary institution. It started with three certificate and diploma level programmes at a

single Kingston location. Currently, it offers to over 1,000 students in day, evening and Sunday programmes seven certificate and diploma level programmes, two Associate degree programmes, four Bachelors degree programmes and an Executive MBA, the latter offered on behalf of Florida International University (FIU) whose faculty travel to Jamaica on weekends to deliver seminars and lectures.

IMS is registered by the University Council of Jamaica (UCJ) and has articulation links with UWI. It also has official links with the University of New Orleans, University of Northern Florida, Monroe College - New York, Howard University, Penn State University and London College of Management. It is in partnership with FIU for the delivery of its Bachelors and Masters degrees and has also established several private sector links.

Three important initiatives which IMS has taken for improving access include the arrangement for overseas and local loans to help students finance their education, the delivery of Sunday classes and the distance arrangements with FIU.

### **The H. Lavity Stoutt Community College Experience**

The British Virgin Islands is an archipelago of about 36 islands of which 16 are inhabited. The principal islands are Tortola, Virgin Gorda, Anegada and Jost Van Dyke. It has a combined population of approximately 19,000. Its small and scattered population and high travel costs pose tertiary education access challenges particularly for those who are not resident on the main island, Tortola. There is significant investment by government in tertiary education, amounting in 2000 to 15% of the national budget. Even so, the College finds it necessary to use creative solutions to address its access problems. One such



solution is the use of distributive education (O'Neal and Davies, 2000).

The College enrolls over 700 students mainly in two year programmes but since 1994, Wright State University has delivered on-site Masters in Education and the University of the Virgin Islands has delivered a Bachelor's in Education for primary teachers. Additionally, the College in Tortola has established a small centre in Virgin Gorda for face to face delivery of a few of its programmes. The mode in all three instances has been by face to face seminars with independent study. More recently, the college has established a partnership with Educational Videoconferencing, Inc and has acquired "high speed internet video-conferencing technology capable of interfacing with microwave, laser and radio-wave technology, classroom media enrichment programs, video retrieval systems and electronic classrooms equipped with smart white boards." (O'Neal and Davies, 2000). The college has also outfitted itself with state of the art computer laboratories and an electronically catalogued library. In this way it is positioning itself to extend these services, for a fee, to students and the business community in the OECS, Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands.

### **Challenges for the Future**

Much progress has been made in the provision of expanded programmes in different modes to Caribbean citizens but there are still several unmet challenges. **Table 8** presents an assessment of some of these initiatives:

#### **Table 8: An Overall Assessment of the Initiatives in Overcoming Barriers**

Key: *T* = overcoming barrier  
*x* = persistent barrier

INITIATIVE	BARRIER					
	SPACE	TIME	COST	TECHNOLOGY	SMALL SIZE	ATTITUDE
External Degree by Distance	T	T	T	x	T	x
Overseas Study	x	x	x	T	T	T
Regional degrees Face to face	x	x	x	T	x	T
Regional degrees by Distance	T	T	T	x	T	x
Regional degrees by Franchise	T	x	T	T	x	x
Regional degrees & Articulation	T	T	T	T	x	x

For the external degree by distance, the challenges of geographical space, students' accommodation and on-site numbers have virtually disappeared. However, some unresolved issues relate to the cost of programmes, acquisition and use of high technology and supporting services and the attitude of the potential employer about the quality of some of these external programmes. Overseas studies continues to find a market among students in the higher socio-economic brackets, students who gain scholarships and those with relatives living abroad. Several Caribbean institutions now prepare students for the United States Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT). Geographical separation from home, the relative inflexibility in programme

schedules and the high cost of overseas travel, accommodation and tuition are attendant realities. Economic expediency may also compromise the quality of the institutions and programmes selected for overseas study. The pursuit of institutional based programmes in the region may be impaired by the same factors listed above for overseas study except that there would not normally be the issue of questionable quality since the institutions are known.

The franchise arrangements in the region involve mainly UWI and other TLIs. Advantages of these arrangements include their relatively low cost, their location in proximity to the students' residence, the lack of dependence on expensive technology, the potential for institutional capacity building and the opportunities for strengthening the tertiary education network. However, the small size of the target population, the limited available resources as well as the lure of competing overseas institutions constrain enrolment in these programmes. Also the tensions that arise in institutional partnerships, issues of distribution of materials, long distance communication and isolation of students from the central point of delivery all pose challenges.

Programme articulation is an indirect route for promoting access and like the franchise arrangement, it has good potential for strengthening the regional network. Its strong points include the fact that it is not limited by geography or synchronicity, high cost or high technology since in general, institutions deliver their programmes independently. Its main limitations are the absence of shared values across institutions, ambiguity in standards, lack of transparency in quality assurance standards and procedures and limited political will to establish and maintain effective linkages.

Finally, no initiative has proven to be perfect and in the future, many of them will need to co-exist to meet the diverse needs of an increasingly large and heterogeneous pool of learners. It is clear that creative ways need to be found to overcome the persistent challenges of small size, geographical separation, high cost and limited access to high technology. Perhaps the most difficult challenge however is that of creating in the tertiary education environment a new tradition of accommodating and respecting the value of diversity in the various forms of tertiary education delivery.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS	Page
Introduction	... ..
Definition of Terms	... ..
Barriers to Access	... ..
Initiatives which have been taken to facilitate Access and Success	... ..
University of the West Indies (UWI)	... ..
The Distance Education Centre	... ..
Franchise Arrangements	... ..
Programme Articulation	... ..
The Off Shore Universities	... ..
The Institute of Management Sciences Experience	... ..
The H Lavity Stoutt Community College Experience	... ..
Challenges for the Future	... ..
References	... ..
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b>	
Table 1: Enrolment of Caribbean Studies in Tertiary Education	... ..
Table 2: Unit Cost in selected institutions and programmes (2001) and per capita	... .. GDP (1
Table 3: Enrolment in Barbados TLIs by Gender: 1997 - 2000	... ..
Table 4: Patterns in Tertiary Education Access	... ..
Table 5: Enrolment through UWIDEC 1997 - 2000	... ..
Table 6: Enrolment in UWI Franchised Programmes in the Eastern Caribbean	... ..
Table 7: Articulation Arrangements facilitated by the Tertiary Level Institutions Unit	... ..

**OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO ACCESS AND SUCCESS IN TERTIARY EDUCATION  
IN THE COMMONWEALTH CARIBBEAN *VIVIENNE ROBERTS, PHD***

Table 8: An Overall Assessment of the Initiatives in Overcoming Barriers ...