



# Open Letter

The e-newsletter of the Open Campus, UWI

## Open Campus Developments

### **PVC & Principal Presents Updates on the Progress of the UWI Open Campus**



Professor Hazel Simmons-McDonald, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Principal Designate of the Open Campus, The University of the West Indies, has presented an implementation update for the establishment and operationalisation of the Open Campus to the recently held Finance and General Purposes Committee (F&GPC) meeting of the University, held at the Mona campus on January 25, 2008.

In summary, UWI Open is currently making decisions on all policy, financial, operational, academic and appointment matters in terms of its governance, its statutes and ordinances and the establishment of a UWI Open Campus Council. Sir K. Dwight Venner, the Governor of the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank (ECCB) has been appointed Chairman of the Council, which is scheduled to convene its inaugural meeting in St. Kitts & Nevis on March 3, 2008.

Ongoing implementation is also taking place with regard to the design of organizational and administrative structures and systems of UWI Open, especially within the context of a distributed environment. The proposed organizational charts have been presented to all sectors of UWI Open for discussion and comment and the refinements will be presented to the UWI Council, F&GPC and UWI Open Council for their consideration. A Registry and Student Services division and an Office of Finance and Administration for the UWI Open are currently in the progress of being established.

The PVC is also holding ongoing discussions and consulting with campus unions to ensure that all proper human resource needs are rationalized and training and re-training measures are ongoing within the UWI Open environment.

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## OAS & the UWI Open Campus Sign Memorandum of Understanding for Creation of Distance Course on Education for Democratic Citizenship

The Organization of American States (OAS) and The University of the West Indies Open Campus (UWIOC) signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the joint development of a sustainable distance education course aimed at preparing educators in the OAS member states of the English-speaking Caribbean to promote democratic values and practices in their classrooms, schools and communities. The course content will be informed by the principles embodied in the Inter-American Democratic Charter, to which Caribbean member states are signatories. The UWI Open Campus team of experts charged with developing the course and the OAS met at the Cave Hill Campus of the University of the West Indies from January 23-25, 2008 to discuss a range of issues of the course including, curriculum goals and objectives, course content and instructional strategies.

In July 2007, a number of Caribbean stakeholders, including representatives from Ministries of Education, educational institutions and affiliated organizations, civil society and international organizations, met in Barbados to provide feedback on the project as well as discuss the proposed content of the distance course and the key considerations that should inform its development. Initial seed funding for this three-year pilot project has been provided by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and it is expected that participating member states will identify supplemental funding and provide modest counterpart resources.

Professor Hazel Simmons-McDonald, the Pro-Vice Chancellor of The University of the West Indies Open Campus stated "This is a very valuable project for the region and we are pleased to partner with the OAS to enhance teacher skills and to help ensure that our future generations of Caribbean citizens continue to embrace democratic values and practices".



Members of the OAS and Open Campus team that met at Cave Hill from 23 to 25 January, 2008 to begin the curriculum planning process for the creation of a distance course on Education for Democratic Citizenship. Pictured from left to right are: Adam Seigel (OAS), Dr. Roger Powley (Open Campus), Dierdre Williams (OAS), Lenore Garcia (Director OAS), Dr. Michael Kallon (Open Campus), Bettyann Rohler (Open Campus), Jorge Baxter (OAS), Anthony Griffith (Open Campus), Dr. Tennyson Joseph (Open Campus), and Wendell Goodin (OAS Barbados).

## Prior Learning Assessment Structure Being Considered for the Open Campus

The entire Caribbean region is aiming to increase tertiary enrolment and there is increasing demand for tertiary education by a diverse pool of potential learners. Both public and private sector organizations agree on the need for more graduates as workers. They also perceive that their employees would be interested in opportunities which would facilitate education and training through cost effective and timely arrangements.

In 2004, Dr. Vivienne Roberts of the then Tertiary Level Institutions Unit (TLIU), which now forms part of the Open Campus of the University of the West Indies (UWI) presented a research paper entitled *Tertiary Education in a Learning Society - A Case for Prior Learning Assessment*. The paper reviewed UWI applications over the past several years and findings indicated a large pool of applicants over 25 years.

Dr. Roberts found that many of these applicants are referred to Matriculation Committees or Academic Quality Assurance Committees for assessment of non- traditional qualifications. However, the key finding was that the University provided no provision to conduct standardized assessment of the applicants' prior learning from relevant experiences.

With the establishment of an Open Campus at UWI, this limitation will have to be corrected, as the UWI is committed to widening access and adopting student centred approaches to learning. An Open Campus should embody ideals of accessibility, flexibility, responsiveness, diversity and inclusiveness. Therefore, the adoption of Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) as an alternative access route for entry and advanced placement at UWI is therefore logical and desirable.

Internationally, Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is a system for assessing and recognizing college level learning which takes place outside of formal classroom settings and enabling students and potential students to use this assessment for entry and/ or advancement in educational programmes in colleges and universities or for employment. It allows learners the opportunity to identify and use relevant informal and non-formal learning to advance their educational and career goals.

It also offers institutions a mechanism for enhancing the transparency and validity of their assessment processes as they seek to widen access and be responsive to the needs of their diverse clientele. Additionally, it provides an opportunity also for both potential learners and institution to see any gaps in skills or information that may need to be addressed.

In this context, the objectives of PLA are therefore:

- To increase diversity in the profile of the UWI Open Campus student population
- To reduce the size of the community of disenfranchised adults wanting to attend UWI
- To provide alternative access route
- To provide an alternative route for accelerating student progress through the system
- To point to educational gaps for remediation

A cross section of leaders at UWI and other regional TLIs endorse PLA as a legitimate and transparent means of promoting access without compromising quality. Therefore, it is recommended that a specific percentage of UWI Open Campus's annual intake should be admitted through the use of Prior Learning Assessment for a four year period in the first instance. At the end of this period, a tracer study should be done to evaluate the throughput and performance of the students admitted through this route.

### Open Campus at Research Day at Mona, 2008

The combined efforts of staff members of the Distance Education Centre, the Tertiary Levels Institutions Unit and the School of Continuing Studies, ensured that the Open Campus booth at Research Day at Mona on January 24 & 25, 2008 was well-managed and supported. Visitors to the 36' booth expressed deep interest in the academic offerings and services of the Open Campus.



### Students now being recruited online for the Open Campus

The UWI Distance Education Centre, as part of its metamorphosis into the new Open Campus, has completed the newly designed online application process for the 2008/2009 admissions for UWI undergraduate and graduate programmes and courses. Associate degree students may also apply on-line. The website is active and may be accessed at <http://dec.uwi.edu/admissions/>.

### New Open Campus Website under Construction

The Open Campus is currently preparing its main web pages for student applications and other main information sources about the services and offerings of the regional Open Campus. The website's main address will be located at <http://www.open.uwi.edu>, and the site should be accessible by March 2008.

### Open Campus Quick Facts

The University of the West Indies (UWI) is established to provide tertiary level education to the fifteen English speaking countries scattered throughout the Caribbean and Central America. The countries supported by UWI include:

1. Anguilla
2. Antigua and Barbuda
3. The Bahamas
4. Barbados
5. Belize
6. British Virgin Islands
7. Cayman Islands
8. Dominica
9. Grenada
10. Jamaica
11. Montserrat
12. St. Kitts and Nevis
13. St Lucia
14. St Vincent and the Grenadines
15. Trinidad and Tobago
16. Turks & Caicos (non-supporting country)

The University has an undergraduate and graduate population of 39,000 students scattered throughout the Caribbean, although the majority of the students are located on one of the three main campuses located in Mona in Jamaica, Cave Hill in Barbados, and St. Augustine in Trinidad & Tobago.

In addition, the UWI currently has 31 Distance Education Centres, 23 School of Continuing Studies Centres, five (5) specialised units and at least eight (8) satellite sites scattered throughout the fifteen (15) participating countries.

These regional centres support a current student population of about 6,800 undergraduate and graduate students and approximately 13,000 continuing studies students each year.

## FAQS

### When will the Open Campus officially begin?

In 2007, the Council of the University of the West Indies (UWI) approved the development of an Open Campus of the University. Currently, our efforts are being directed at launching the campus at the start of academic year 2008-2009 using the buoyancy of the UWI's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations.

### Why is the UWI expanding itself with an Open Campus?

The University of the West Indies (UWI) is implementing its 2007-2012 strategic plan and the vision of an Open Campus is a very important part of this plan. The UWI is consolidating and expanding its outreach sector under the organizational and administrative umbrella of UWI Open to better serve its regional communities and to further capitalize on UWI's key competitive advantages, which are:

- a regional spread,
- a generally committed & qualified staff,
- a high value set of researchers and teachers,
- a forward-thinking administration,
- a range of commercial expertise, and
- a capacity for flexibility and innovation.

This outreach sector currently is made up of:

- The Board for Non-Campus Countries & Distance Education (BNCCDE)
- The UWI Distance Education Centre (UWIDEC)
- The Tertiary Level Institutions Unit (TLIU) and
- The School of Continuing Studies (SCS) – which includes the Specialised Units of the Caribbean Child Development Centre (CCDC), the Hugh Lawson Shearer Trade Union Education Institute (HLSTUEI), the Human Resources Development Unit (HRDU), the Social Welfare Training Centre (SWTC) and the Women and Development Unit (WAND)

The former will all become part of UWI Open.

### What is the main mission of the Open Campus?

The Open Campus will expand the scope, enhance the appeal and improve the efficiency of UWI's service to the individuals, communities and countries which it serves (*UWI Strategic Plan 2007-2012*).

### Who will the Open Campus serve?

The main target clientele of the Open Campus will be persons whose circumstances or location do not allow them to benefit from the formal structures of existing campuses, as well as new collectivities in other Caribbean states and in other countries. These target countries,

include the UWI 12 countries, i.e. Anguilla, Antigua & Barbuda, the Bahamas, Belize, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Montserrat, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent & the Grenadines, as well as communities in Barbados, Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago, not currently served by a UWI campus (e.g. Mona).

### What programmes or courses will the Open Campus offer?

There are many areas of study that will be offered through the Open Campus through blended (face-to-face and online) and online learning delivery facilities. These range from pre-University education courses, certificate, diploma and undergraduate degree programmes and courses, post-graduate degree programmes, distance education courses, extension courses, technical and vocational course and other lifelong learning activities.

### What else will the Open Campus do?

In addition to its academic programmes and student services, the Open Campus will also offer other services like inter-institutional collaboration and social development and research services to communities throughout the region.

### Is there more information on the Open Campus available?

We are also in the process of building our web presence at <http://www.open.uwi.edu>. This should be ready by February 2008. However, **prospective students** may now apply for UWI undergraduate and graduate programmes and courses through our latest online application website at <http://dec.uwi.edu/admissions/>. Associate degree students may also apply on-line.

## About the Open Letter

This e-newsletter of the Open Campus of the University of the West Indies is intended to provide our colleagues and clients with an up-to-date source of news and information about the developments of the Open Campus. The page, which is maintained by the Office of the Deputy Principal of the Open Campus, will be updated regularly, as new developments occur.

## Your Feedback is Welcome

We welcome your comments on the Open Campus, UWI, and encourage you to send your thoughts to the Open Letter to us via e-mail at our temporary email address@ [lifelong@uwimona.edu.jm](mailto:lifelong@uwimona.edu.jm).