



The UWI
Quality
Education Forum

Number 11

January 2005

| Surveying Our Stakeholders |

Published by
The Office of the Board for
Undergraduate Studies
(OBUS)

Published by the Office of the Board for Undergraduate Studies
The University of the West Indies, Mona
Kingston 7 Jamaica

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The University of the West Indies

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ISSN: 0799-1487

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UWI Quality Education Forum, formerly published as
YouWeQ, is published three times a year.

Set in Adobe Garamond 12/16 x 30
Cover and journal design by Robert Harris
Printed by Scrip-J Printers, Trinidad & Tobago

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Preface

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Chair, Board for Undergraduate Studies, UWI

This issue of the *UWI Quality Education Forum* reflects a change in the title of the journal from *YouWeQ*. This is in keeping with the plans for developing the journal into a refereed publication inviting subscriptions and also for making the publication more available regionally and internationally. The unambiguous identification of the journal with the University of the West Indies (UWI), and its branding as such, was considered to be an important step in this process.

The 2002–2007 Strategic Plan of the UWI sets out a number of key strategies designed to assist the institution in meeting its vision of being transformed into “a truly twenty-first century higher education academy with a global reputation for excellence”.

Nine strategic focus areas were identified, the first two being student centredness and quality. Core performance indicators in these areas include assessment of levels of satisfaction of students and graduates with their university experience, including academic and administrative support, as well as feedback from graduates and employers. All who see quality as the central

focus of all activity in the university environment must be vitally concerned with the process and the output of higher education, and higher education quality is increasingly being assessed using the feedback of major stakeholders as important indicators.

Surveys are valuable tools for use in obtaining data, through tapping into the perceptions of those who use the system, and these data can be analysed and interpreted to inform on the strengths and weaknesses of the system, and used to design targeted interventions to improve its performance. During the 2003–2004 academic year, the Office of the Board for Undergraduate Studies undertook four surveys designed to obtain information on the UWI from its stakeholders.

This issue of the *UWI Quality Education Forum* presents summaries of three of these surveys so that the results can be shared with a wider audience than has already been addressed on these matters. The surveys reflect the views of UWI's major stakeholders, students at the entry and exit points of their undergraduate academic experience, as well as employers of our graduates. The coverage of the three surveys has been regional and so gives both a comprehensive and comparative view of experiences on the three campuses and in the campus countries. A report on Student Assessment of Teaching on the Mona campus reveals the usefulness of this activity as a developmental tool.

The survey findings serve as an indicator of the UWI's effectiveness in creating a facilitating environment for learning, knowledge creation and the development of the valuable human resource needed for the region's advancement. The demand that academic institutions be more relevant and demonstrate greater flexibility and increased responsiveness to the requirements of national, regional and international needs is real. This demand must be satisfied in an environment in which there is a change in the demographic profile of persons accessing higher education, a heightened demand for this education from several sectors of the society and increasing competition to supply

The demand that academic institutions be more relevant and demonstrate greater flexibility and increased responsiveness to the requirements of national, regional and international needs is real.

the education required. The UWI must be responsive to these demands, in creative and innovative ways.

The survey findings have highlighted those areas that need attention and underline the importance of an inclusive view of quality which not only takes seriously the assurance of standards of academic quality that equip UWI graduates to meet the challenges and problems of a globalized world, but also addresses the significance of effective administrative systems and administrative practices in contributing to the positive learning experiences of its students and their identification with the UWI when they become alumni. The quality imperative means that the perceived “unfriendliness” of the university – the lack of adequate facilities and services for students, the unsatisfactory interactions which they share with some academic and administrative staff, the frustrations with some of the processes and systems – must be dealt with so that the UWI will be a community where all members are engaged in building a quality-driven institution, and where students will develop a sense of belonging, pride and loyalty.

Survey of the Perceptions of Employers of Graduates of the University of the West Indies

Commissioned by the Board for Undergraduate Studies

Conducted by

MONICA M. BROWN *and* MARCIA STEWART

Excerpted and summarized by

CAMILLE BELL-HUTCHINSON

Introduction

A continuing challenge for many universities is the need to offer a kind of education that will equip graduates with the appropriate knowledge, skills, attitudes and competences which will allow them to function adequately in the workplace. Indeed, many employers assess the value of a graduate's education based on how well he or she can apply his or her knowledge in the workplace with minimum supervision.

At the University of the West Indies (UWI) one of the aims of the quality assurance process is to provide assurance to all stakeholders of the educational standards established by the university. It is therefore important that the institution determines how its graduates are perceived by the wider community, and, in particular, those corporate stakeholders who may be looking for a "work ready" graduate. In response to this, a survey of employers' perceptions

of UWI graduates was commissioned by the Office of the Board for Undergraduate Studies (OBUS) and conducted in three campus countries – Barbados, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago – in February 2004. The purpose of the survey was to tap the perceptions of employers concerning the on-the-job performance of graduates of the UWI. The expectation was that the outcomes of the survey would inform decision making and planning within the university and would ultimately aid the UWI in its quest to become a quality-driven institution offering undergraduate programmes that are relevant to labour market requirements.

Methodology

The design of this study was a survey. A review undertaken by OBUS in 1998 in non-campus countries to determine the readiness of UWI graduates for the labour market was used as the basis for the survey.

The Research Instruments

Questionnaires and interviews were the main instruments used to obtain data. These instruments were developed using the Likert scale (in the case of the questionnaire) and the interview schedule used in the 1998 survey of non-campus countries, as well as research on employer satisfaction carried out by Harvey and Green (1994).

Items fell into nine categories, seven of which addressed graduate competences, while two focused on the employers' perceptions of the quality of the UWI education and their ratings of UWI graduates in comparison to graduates from other universities. The nine categories were as follows:

1. Theoretical understanding and application of knowledge
2. Analytical and problem-solving abilities
3. Communicative competence
4. Leadership and teamwork capabilities
5. Adaptability and innovativeness

6. Attitude to work
7. Self-management
8. Quality of UWI education
9. Overall employer preference

The questionnaire had three sections:

Section A sought to gather demographic information on the company and respondents, for example, the sector in which the company operated (private or public), the type of company/organization (health, manufacturing), company size, and the respondent's gender and place of study (whether at UWI or at a university outside the region).

Section B was a forty-item Likert scale in which respondents were asked to indicate their views using a five-point scale: strongly agree (5), agree (4), undecided (3), disagree (2) or strongly disagree (1).

Section C was an open-ended section in which employers were invited to briefly describe their expectations of UWI graduates.

The interview schedule was structured to explore the nine areas listed above. It was intended to probe the opinions of the respondents and to elicit concrete examples of instances that had influenced their views. The interviews also sought to identify perceived strengths and limitations of UWI programmes, as well as to get a sense of those skills required by organizations that a UWI education did not seem to provide.

The instruments were scrutinized by a panel of judges, which included the staff of the Quality Assurance Units of the three campuses, human resource managers and lecturers in management. Revisions were subsequently made based on the recommendations of the panel members.

The Sample

The sample was randomly selected within certain parameters, the sample being stratified by employment sector, company size and company type, with company type being tied to UWI programme offerings. The sample size was

determined on the basis of country size and population, with the assumption that a rough proportionate relationship existed between country size and employer and UWI graduate populations.

While an initial sample for Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago was selected by the principal investigators, the country investigators were instructed to use their local knowledge to refine the sample composition and ensure that it did in fact reflect the employer population of their country.

The source of potential companies included:

- lists provided by the Placement Units of Mona and St Augustine campuses of companies that employ UWI students/graduates either through the summer employment programme or in full-time employment;
- the list of companies that participated in a focus group study carried out in 2002 by the Quality Assurance Unit, Cave Hill; and
- membership lists of the private sector organizations and manufacturing associations of the respective countries.

The sample comprised 213 companies which were selected in order to obtain a representative mix of company/organizational size and type in each survey country, relative to the disciplines covered by UWI's academic programmes.

Of the 213 companies to which questionnaires were distributed, a total of 165 managers responded. Table 1 provides the breakdown of the questionnaire respondents by country.

Table 1: Distribution of Questionnaire Respondents by Country

Country	Number of Questionnaires Distributed	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Total Respondents
Barbados	50	43	26.0
Jamaica	93	64	38.8
Trinidad & Tobago	70	58	35.2
Total	213	165	

In Tables 2 and 3, the total number of questionnaire respondents by sector and the number and percentage of questionnaire respondents by company type, respectively, are highlighted.

Table 2: Distribution of Questionnaire Respondents by Sector

Sector	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Total Respondents
Private	82	50.0
Public	59	36.0
Quasi-Public	23	14.0
Not Stated	1	
Total	165	

Table 3: Number and Percentage of Questionnaire Respondents by Company Type

Company Type	Frequency	Percentage of Total Respondents
Education	27	16.5
Financial	25	15.2
Legal	16	9.8
Tourism	16	9.8
Health	14	8.5
Manufacturing	13	7.9
Marketing	8	4.9
Insurance	8	4.9
Industrial	7	4.3
Technical/Professional	7	4.3
Energy	4	2.4
Utility	4	2.4
Agriculture	3	1.8
Information Systems	2	1.2
Government	2	1.2
Media	2	1.2
Social Sciences	2	1.2
Construction	1	0.6
Military	1	0.6
Shipping	1	0.6
Other	1	0.6
Subtotal	164	100.0
Not Stated	1	
Total	165	

Interview Sample

A subset of 25 per cent of the sample was targeted for follow-up interviews. In order to choose those employers who would participate in these interviews, an item in the questionnaire asked respondents to indicate if they were willing to be interviewed. Additionally, in the follow-up telephone conversations to monitor completion and collection of questionnaires, persons willing to be interviewed were identified.

Of the 213 managers who responded to the questionnaires, 54 of these (32.7 per cent) consented to be interviewed. The breakdown of the interview sample by country is provided in Table 4.

Table 4: Size of Interview Sample by Country

Country	Questionnaire Sample	Number Interviewed	Percentage of Sample
Barbados	43	12	27.9
Jamaica	64	22	34.4
Trinidad & Tobago	58	20	34.5
Total	165	54	32.7

The purpose of the interviews was to ensure evaluation of the employability of UWI graduates by a representative group of managers whose perceptions had been formed through regular on-the-job contact. Respondents were asked, therefore, to focus on past and present employees who had graduated from UWI with first degrees and had been supervised by them directly or indirectly. Graduates with first degrees from other universities within or outside the region were to be taken into consideration only where comparisons were being specifically drawn.

Data Collection

Data collection was managed in Jamaica by the principal investigators with the help of research assistants, while country investigators were employed in

the case of Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago. In order to ensure a standardized and consistent approach to the conduct of the interviews across countries, each country investigator was provided with a manual describing the expected procedures of this exercise. The manual for interviewers was adapted from that developed by Severin (1998) and used in the 1998 survey of non-campus countries.

Data Analysis

Questionnaire Data

All questionnaires were sorted by country, and each case given a unit case number according to country. A database was created using Section A of the returned questionnaires in order to elicit information about the number of respondents, the types and number of companies, and the size of companies. The data obtained from Section B of the returned questionnaires were analysed by partitioning the items into two main categories. Category 1, labelled “non-comparatives”, contained twenty-seven items on which only UWI graduates were assessed. The remaining thirteen items, grouped as Category 2 and labelled “comparatives”, invited comparisons between UWI graduates and graduates of other universities.

To further reduce the number of items, logical composites or “theme variables” were created resulting in nine composites in Category 1 and ten in Category 2. Composites that consisted of only one item were retained as a “theme variable” and not grouped with any others.

The “theme variables” for the non-comparative items were as follows:

1. Theoretical understanding and application to practice
2. Communicative competence
3. UWI's education on wider issues
4. Adaptability, flexibility, creativity, innovativeness
5. Leadership and management skills
6. Work ethic and attitude

7. Self-management
8. Analytical and problem-solving skills
9. Computer skills

The comparative items were grouped according to the following themes:

1. Technical competence
2. Current trends in the field
3. Innovativeness
4. Relevance to needs of English-speaking Caribbean
5. Response to crisis
6. Commitment to work
7. Analytical skills
8. Self-management
9. Skills relevant to the workplace
10. Preference to hire UWI graduates

As stated earlier, a single item in Section C of the questionnaire focused on the respondents' expectations of UWI graduates. Ten themes emerged which related coincidentally to the nine categories that were used to generate the instruments:

1. Application of theory to practice
2. Flexibility/adaptability
3. Communicative skills
4. Analytical skills/problem solving
5. Leadership/management
6. Work ethic/commitment
7. Professionalism
8. Innovativeness/creativity
9. Competence – knowledge in the field and technical skills
10. Interpersonal skills/team player

Cross-tabulations were done to summarize employers' expectations by sector, by country, by different types of organizations and by company size.

Interview Data

The interview data were handled in the same manner as the returned questionnaires. Responses to the questions posed were reviewed and tabulated to establish, among other things, the frequency, perceptual similarities and variations of the views of the employers, as well as the recommendations expressed.

Summary of Overall Results

The full survey report provides analyses by country, compares the overall results with the views of 110 respondents in six company types selected for special focus and compares the findings of this survey with earlier UWI studies. This summary focuses on the overall results based on the non-comparative and comparative variables (with respect to the questionnaire data), the expectations of employers, and the main strengths and weaknesses in UWI graduates as perceived by the employers, and it provides some actual comments of employers.

Questionnaire Data

Non-Comparative Variables

The region, as a whole, held similar sentiments on both the strengths and weaknesses of UWI graduates. In sum, while the areas of specialization by students were considered to be somewhat narrow, employers were of the view that the UWI graduate demonstrated good theoretical knowledge and computer skills attended by a demonstrable level of positive work ethic (see Table 5). In all three countries, there was, too, a relatively high level of affirmation for UWI graduates' analytical and problem-solving capabilities.

A fair level of dissatisfaction was revealed concerning graduates' ability to apply theory to practical situations, with a higher level of dissatisfaction being expressed concerning their communicative competence. As seen in Table 5,

38.9 per cent of the respondents were undecided, with 20.4 per cent expressing dissatisfaction with the level of communicative competence demonstrated by graduates. The level of satisfaction with graduates' writing skills, in particular, showed the greatest variation across the region, scoring the lowest of all ratings, and mostly (negatively) so in Barbados.

Table 5 summarizes employers' perceptions regarding each "non-comparative" theme.

Table 5: Employers' Perceptions on Non-Comparative Variables (N = 165)

	Dissatisfied (Strongly Disagree + Disagree) (%)	Uncertain (%)	Satisfied (Strongly Agree + Agree)(%)
Theoretical understanding & application to practice	10.5	32.7	56.8
Communicative competence	20.4	38.9	40.7
UWI educates on wider issues	18.0	38.5	43.5
Adaptability, flexibility etc.	10.1	34.0	56.0
Leadership & management	5.7	30.4	63.9
Work ethic & attitude	6.8	30.4	62.7
Self-management	9.1	32.3	58.5
Analytical & problem solving	8.1	23.8	68.1
Computer skills	21.0	11.0	76.2

In addition to the above, graduates' knowledge was not seen to be at the frontier of new developments, and some employers were dissatisfied at the graduates' entry knowledge, expressing the view that graduates should be able to "hit the ground running".

While the reasons for the relatively high number of “uncertain” scores are not clear, it could be construed that this could have been as a result of either unwillingness on the part of the employers to express dissatisfaction, or a lack of sufficient knowledge on the specific issue.

Comparative Variables

As stated earlier, employers were asked to compare UWI graduates with graduates from other universities on specific items. Some thirteen comparative items were used to establish cross-institutional rankings and were grouped according to the ten themes cited earlier.

In comparing UWI graduates to other college/university graduates, the majority of employers were, at best, undecided and, at worst, in agreement that UWI graduates were under-performing in all categories, with only Jamaica presenting a slight indication, at times, of better ratings. In those instances, it was in the areas of familiarity with current trends, innovativeness, responsiveness to crisis and self-motivation.

Table 6 provides a summary of the ratings given to seven of the nine comparative variables.

Table 6: Employers’ Perceptions on Comparative Variables (N = 165)

	Non-UWI Graduates Better (Strongly Disagree + Disagree) (%)	Uncertain (%)	UWI Graduates Better (Strongly Agree + Agree)(%)
Technical competence	50.3	36.6	13.1
Familiarity with current trends	20.7	31.1	48.2
Innovativeness	22.6	60.9	16.5
Response to crisis	14.6	34.8	50.6
Analytical skills	43.2	48.8	8.0
Commitment to work	52.8	36.2	11.0
Ability to grasp workplace skills quickly	46.3	42.1	11.6

In responding to the issue of relevance, 31.7 per cent of respondents held the view that the offerings of the UWI were more relevant to the needs of the English-speaking Caribbean than the education received from other universities. However, 28.1 per cent were uncertain. With respect to the respondents' preferences, employers were generally wary, or largely undecided, about whether they would hire a UWI graduate, if given the choice. Respondents from Jamaica, in particular, indicated greater preference for the employment of graduates from universities outside the region than did Barbados and Trinidad. As with the non-comparative variables, a disturbingly high percentage of responses were "uncertain".

Employers' Expectations

In an attempt to tap the expectations that employers had of the UWI graduate, an open-ended question invited them to list these. This question evoked a wide range of statements from 115 of the total sample. Data reduction was imperative, and it was possible to group the essence of these remarks under ten themes:

1. Communication skills
2. Analytical and problem-solving skills
3. Team-playing skills
4. Flexibility
5. Leadership skills
6. Commitment to work and good work attitude generally
7. Professionalism
8. Innovativeness
9. Ability to apply theory to practice
10. Technical competence

The ability to display flexibility, apply theory to practice and demonstrate technical competence were the expectations most frequently mentioned.

Interview Data

One important aim of the interviews was to determine the main strengths and weaknesses of UWI graduates as perceived by their employers. Table 7 highlights some of the recurrent responses across the region.

Table 7: Main Strengths and Weaknesses Observed in UWI Graduates

Main Strengths/Positive Attributes	
Theoretical knowledge in their particular fields	Good presentation skills in interviews
Positive attitude about developing in new areas; grasp concepts/task instructions easily	Familiarity with local environment, cultural issues
Technical competence	Trainable
Interpersonal relations	Ambitious
Self-confidence	Good computation skills
Adaptability	IT skills are very good
Reason well	Leadership capabilities
Main Limitations/Weaknesses	
Feel they are owed something and sometimes seek quick recognition without being able to produce work of a high standard	“Snotty” attitude restricts degree of needed support given by colleagues; people skills are not always evident
Critical-thinking/problem-solving skills; not pro-active; they expect answers instead of providing recommendations/solutions	Afraid to take risks/challenge processes and “orthodoxies”; immature and not mentally tough
Application of theory to practice	Low levels of adaptability
Communication competence; report writing	Not widely read
Competitiveness/lack of teamwork spirit; inability to adjust to organization culture	Supervisory skills; “They are better technical people than managers”
Not living up to employer’s expectation of being a degree holder	Inflexible

Caribbean Consciousness

In the interview schedule, two questions probed for employers' perceptions concerning the degree of "Caribbean consciousness" displayed by UWI graduates *vis-à-vis* graduates of universities outside the region and the ways in which the UWI experience was perceived as having contributed to this "consciousness".

In Jamaica, one employer responded that the question was irrelevant for the fields of auditing, accounting, taxation and management consulting, while four respondents (18.1 per cent) felt that UWI graduates displayed a greater Caribbean consciousness than others. Those agreeing pointed to graduates from economics and public administration, as well as graduates' Caribbean background as helping to provide an edge in awareness. Those who disagreed that UWI graduates demonstrated greater Caribbean consciousness than graduates of other universities argued that the UWI graduate was insular. In Trinidad and Tobago, thirteen respondents (55 per cent) argued that UWI graduates displayed no higher degree of Caribbean consciousness than their counterparts elsewhere, and in Barbados, five respondents (42 per cent) indicated that UWI graduates displayed a greater degree of Caribbean consciousness than graduates of universities outside the region. Five persons had a contrary view.

Some of the reasons put forward by employers concerning ways in which the UWI experience could have contributed positively or negatively were as follows:

Positive contribution

- Exposure to the similarities and differences of Caribbean cultures through interaction with the multiple Caribbean nationalities on campus
- Exposure to the political-economic issues both in theory and practice
- Multi-campus and regional structure of UWI enabled formation of relationships with others in the Caribbean
- Implementation of local/regional curricula
- Caribbean studies is a critical component of foundation courses
- Integration facilitated through association, bonding and inter-marriage

Negative contribution

- Given that there are so many Caribbean people coming together to go to school, there is still a lot of segregation and conflict between the islands, so there isn't a sense of one Caribbean consciousness
- UWI undergraduate experience is too focused on field of major study; students are not encouraged to explore other disciplines beside their own
- Some programmes are not attuned to the West Indian heritage and should seek to develop those linkages
- UWI does not provide sufficient opportunities for inter-regional integration and cultural events that would bring people together

One respondent felt that the development of Caribbean consciousness depended more on individual personality, values and interest in the socio-political environment than on any training an institution could inculcate.

As far as the relevance of UWI education to Caribbean issues was concerned, 40.3 per cent overall agreed on its pertinence but 48 per cent of the financial institutions disagreed.

Some Employer Comments by Country

Barbados

UWI graduates' understanding of core principles:

"They usually have a good grasp of their discipline."

Technical skills relevant to the workplace/ability to apply theoretical knowledge:

"They don't have sufficient practical skills [but] are trainable"

"I think they know their work and they know the theory that they have studied, but in terms of relevance to a particular workplace they may be challenged there In our particular situation . . . it's a food plant . . . if I deal with a Food Science graduate, [that person] would better understand what their

everyday tasks were – as opposed to someone who just did Natural Sciences. They have done chemistry or biology, but to apply it to the food situation, I see some challenges there.”

Attitude to work:

“It may be the climate and attitude of the employment force of Barbados . . . they seem reluctant to be at work and . . . if a task falls outside of their written job description, then they have to consult with the union first, and it doesn’t matter if they are graduates or non-graduates. I must say that I have not experienced this with graduates from overseas.” [Manufacturing company manager]

“Natural Science grads are the most difficult to mould in terms of appropriate approach/attitude to interactions with others; may be due to way in which those courses are taught – that is, project work in the labs pretty much on their own.”

Communicative competence:

“I find . . . in a lot of instances – not in all, but in a significant amount of cases – the writing skills of many UWI graduates are poor – surprisingly poor”

“I don’t see a big difference between a graduate from UWI and a non-graduate However, I have supervised graduates from overseas and you can see the difference. You see the quality of presentation, the development of their points and conclusions We have well-educated people who cannot represent themselves.”

Jamaica

Teamwork:

“They are pretty good team players.”

Analytical skills:

“Against other graduates, the UWI graduates are analytically very acute. I am quite impressed with their ability to assess situations.”

Practical application:

“It’s like they are not in the world of reality, they are in some dreamland totally disconnected from the reality of life in Jamaica and the work world, because they think they have arrived.”

Attitude:

“Very often they have an attitudinal problem rather than a ‘skill’ or ‘competence’ problem.”

Education on wider issues:

“Invariably the graduates don’t have that broad perspective”

Trinidad

Communicative competence:

“Engineering students cannot write! They should be taught.”

“Generally, they [graduates] cannot write.”

Critical and analytical ability:

“Problem-solving skills [are] problematic.”

“This is an area for development of graduates. However, it is a problem that is inherent in Caribbean education.”

Conclusion and Recommendations

There are clearly some very positive perceptions of UWI graduates among several employers across the region. Yet there are, similarly, many negative perceptions held by employers concerning some of the skills and attitudes of UWI graduates, and a disconcerting number of “uncertain” ratings in most categories points to a need to address many of the variables identified in the data. Indeed, when the Exit Survey of Finalizing Students is taken into

consideration, many of the comments by the students bear some resonance with the views held by the employers. For example, the disconnect between the graduates' theoretical knowledge and their ability to apply this knowledge was cited by both students and employers.

The UWI is indeed challenged to address its programmes in order to ensure stakeholder satisfaction. Its *Strategic Plan II, 2002–2007* articulates its commitment to quality and has identified several key initiatives to assist its students in developing in many of the areas raised by the employers. For example, three major quality initiatives identified in the strategic plan are to

- assist students to develop entrepreneurial attitudes and skills;
- add new and innovative programmes in disciplinary areas related to the leading-edge sectors; and
- allow students greater flexibility in the combination of majors and minors, and experiment with the repackaging of courses to align degree options more closely with emerging career opportunities. (UWI 2003)

In order to address the shortcomings identified in the survey, the following nine recommendations were made:

1. There could be included in the curriculum authentic types of assessment that are reflective of assessment for learning rather than simply assessment of learning. This would address the perceived inability of graduates to apply theory to practice. Such strategies could include the use of case studies and projects that are mutually conceptualized by faculty, students and employers and could place greater emphasis on analytical skills, while at the same time making use of a wider range of problem-solving methodologies.
2. Faculty could be provided with opportunities to have institutional attachments for short periods. This could enable them to be in a better position to orient their students to workplace realities.
3. Resource persons from various organizations could be invited to participate in seminars/workshops, thus giving students and faculty the opportunity to interact with those on the ground.
4. As much as possible, opportunities should be sought for job attachments/internships for students.

5. To address the workplace demands for adaptability, academic and administrative arrangements should facilitate and encourage students to pursue cross-disciplinary studies.
6. In light of the basic skills identified by employers across the region as essential for the workplace, there should be a compulsory core of courses that address these skills. Of special importance are communicative skills. Activities should provide opportunities for report writing and for extended oral presentations appropriate for a variety of situations. Courses could also address conflict resolution, supervisory skills and other interpersonal skills valued by employers. The Office of Student Services could assist with this.
7. Curriculum activities should include opportunities for collaborative teamwork.
8. Given the suggestion that leadership skills need to be strengthened and the view that such graduates should provide a pool of leaders from which employers can draw, it is recommended that the Office of Student Services and faculties devise collaborative ways of providing out-of-class experiences that foster such skills.
9. Many of the recommendations made by the employers point to a need for a change in the pedagogical approach currently utilized by academic staff to one that would facilitate the development of intellectual curiosity, a proclivity for research and discovery, and emphasis on analytical skills. In light of this, it may be necessary that the Instructional Development Unit be expanded to reach a wider cross-section of the academic staff.

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Survey of the Perceptions of Final Year Students of the University of the West Indies on Their Experiences at the University

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Background

Increasingly, in the debate on higher education quality, student feedback is being viewed as a significant component in the assessment of quality. The literature proposes that, since higher education is primarily about the enhancement and empowerment of students and is more about learning than about teaching, students should be recognized as significant stakeholders in the assessment of quality. As active participants in the learning process, they should be concerned about both the process and the output of higher education.

The quality assurance policy of the University of the West Indies (UWI) espouses similar sentiments. It sees student-centredness and student-friendli-

ness as hallmarks of good quality which create an environment in which activities and programmes are viewed from the student standpoint, and it deems it the student's right to criticize the learning experience meaningfully (Beckles, Perry and Whiteley, 2002). The Governance Commission of the University of the West Indies (1994, 30) also identifies, among the university's responsibilities to students, the need "to establish a mechanism which gives assurance to them, their parents, their future employers, and the universities to which they may proceed for graduate work, that the degree they have achieved meets international standards".

In 2003, therefore, the Board for Undergraduate Studies commissioned a survey of the views of finalizing students in the 2003–2004 academic year across the three campuses – Cave Hill, Mona and St Augustine – regarding their experiences at UWI. To conduct the study, Dr Monica Brown was retained as principal consultant and Mrs Marcia Stewart as co-principal investigator.

Purpose of the Study

The study was designed to provide an opportunity for UWI finalizing students in undergraduate programmes to comment on their experiences at the university with a view to providing information to guide the university in improving the student experience. The objective was to develop and administer a survey on the three campuses, that is, Cave Hill, Mona and St Augustine, and prepare a report of the findings for the Board for Undergraduate Studies.

This report is intended, therefore, to present an analytic summary of the views of students across the three campuses. The data are reviewed by region and by campus, and comparisons are drawn between the data from campuses and faculties in order to establish trends or identify noteworthy exceptions.

The literature proposes that, since higher education is primarily about the enhancement and empowerment of students and is more about learning than about teaching, students should be recognized as significant stakeholders in the assessment of quality.

Methodology

The design of the study was a survey with research data gathered through a questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed based on the student satisfaction approach developed by Harvey et al. (2000) which is intended to gather the views of students (deemed by Harvey et al. to be the principal stakeholder group) for integration into management's strategic decision-making. The questionnaire had four sections:

Section I sought to gather demographic information on the students, for example, sex, age, campus of study (that is, Cave Hill, Mona or St Augustine), faculty in which registered.

Section II consisted of a number of items constructed using a Likert five-point scale response format. Respondents were asked to use this scale to rate their experiences as UWI students. Three aspects of student experiences were explored in this section:

1. The learning experience, that is, the knowledge, skills and attitudes developed both inside and outside the classroom. In this section students were asked to indicate
 - a. the contribution that the specific experiences had made to the development of identified knowledge, skills and attitudes, where 1 denoted "very little" and 5 denoted "a great deal"; and
 - b. how important these experiences had been to their performance as students, where 1 denoted "not at all important" and 5 denoted "very important".
2. Student support received from academic and administrative staff.
3. Services and facilities, for example, library, computing services, and student services such as health care and bookshop.

In sub-sections 2 and 3, students were asked to rate

- a. the extent to which they had been satisfied with listed aspects of their programme using a satisfaction scale in which 1 represented "very dissatisfied" and 5 "very satisfied"; and
- b. how important those areas had been to their experiences as students, using the same "importance" scale above.

Section III asked respondents to rate their overall satisfaction with various aspects of their UWI experience, such as the intellectual stimulation received during their programme of study, their potential career prospects, and services from areas of the university such as their department and the UWI Registry. The satisfaction scale described above was also used in this section.

Section IV was open-ended and invited students to provide additional comments on their undergraduate experiences at UWI and how, in their view, those experiences could have been improved. They were asked to do so under the headings (1) academic and (2) services and facilities.

The instrument was piloted on a sample of twenty-three finalizing students on the Mona campus. Where student responses suggested that certain questions lacked clarity or precision, revisions were subsequently made.

The Sample

The original design of the study targeted a 20 per cent sample of the finalizing class (a total of approximately 918 persons). Consequently, a stratified random sample reflecting campus, faculty and departments was selected by the principal investigators (PIs) in the case of Mona and St Augustine and by the country investigator (CI) at Cave Hill from the list of finalizing students obtained from the Student Records section of each campus.

Two exceptions were made. In the case of Medical Sciences at Cave Hill, the number of students in that programme was so small that it was decided to target the entire class. At St Augustine, the country investigator (CI) was advised that students in the Pharmaceutical programme were not located at the main campus but at the Mount Hope campus and, as their schedule was irregular, it would be difficult to contact them in any systematic way. It was agreed, therefore, that students in that programme would be asked to complete the questionnaire as and when they became available.

While 20 per cent was the target, the original sample selected was approximately 26 per cent – the extra 6 per cent intended to offset the possibility that

not all students contacted would have made themselves available for completing the questionnaire. In fact, the response from the selected 26 per cent was so poor that, after various attempts to reach the original sample failed to get responses from more than a very small number, the original list had to be abandoned. Instead, a purposive sample of lecturers was contacted and asked to have their students complete the questionnaire at the end of one of their classes.

Two factors are thought to be the main reasons for the poor response in relation to the original sample:

1. Students were contacted two to three weeks prior to the end of lectures for the second semester when apparently they had already stopped attending lectures in preparation for examinations.
2. There seemed to be general disinterest on the part of students in participating in surveys and questionnaires. This was vigorously stated by the contact person in one faculty when she was requested to make one last effort at increasing the number of respondents from her faculty, and seems to be borne out by the low response rate to repeated efforts to get students to participate in the survey.

The result of all efforts made was a final sample of 484 students: Cave Hill, 79; Mona, 229; and St Augustine, 176 (Table 1).

Table 1: Exit Survey Sample by Campus and Faculty

Campus	Faculty							Total
	Med. Sci.	Hum./Edu.	Law	Soc. Sci.	P/A Sci.	Sci./Agri.	Eng.	
Cave Hill	4	6	6	39	24	–	–	79
Mona	30	115	–	44	40	–	–	229
St Augustine	62	20	–	53	–	15	26	176
Total	96	141	6	136	64	15	26	484

Legend: Med. Sci. = Medical Sciences; Soc. Sci. = Social Sciences; Hum./Edu. = Humanities and Education; P/A. Sci. = Pure and Applied Sciences; Sci./Agri. = Science and Agriculture; Eng. = Engineering

As a consequence of the difficulties already described, the overall sample represented 11.1 per cent of the total student population across the three campuses instead of the desired sample size of 20 per cent. It should be noted, however, that the total number of responses received from students in the Faculties of Humanities and Education, Social Sciences, and Medicine represented a gratifying percentage of their total enrolment (29.1 per cent, 28.1 per cent and 19.8 per cent, respectively) across all campuses. The lowest overall response rates applied to students in the Faculties of Law (1.2 per cent), Science and Agriculture (3.1 per cent), and Engineering (5.4 per cent). The overall response rate for students in the Faculty of Pure and Applied Sciences was 13.2 per cent of total enrolment.

Data Collection

Arrangements were made with faculties to administer the questionnaires between 8 and 30 April 2004, and deans were asked to identify a contact person within each faculty with whom the investigators could interact.

Despite the efforts made initially, disappointing numbers of respondents were obtained, and at that stage a decision was taken to ask lecturers to have their students complete the questionnaires at the end of their classes. A purposive sample of lecturers was selected to ensure reasonable representation of departments within faculties. While this proved a more successful approach, the response still fell below target, as lecturers reported that there was a high level of absenteeism from classes as examinations neared.

The result of the combined strategies was the realized sample of 484 students, distributed across the campuses and faculties as shown in Table 1.

Data Analysis

The focus of the data analysis is primarily on the frequency counts/ratings for the satisfaction/contribution/importance variables listed in Sections II–III of the questionnaire. The full report from the researchers analyses overall

responses to Section II and III items in relation to data captured for other variables (that is, faculty, accommodation, age, registration status) in Section I of the questionnaire, to determine whether there were variations in satisfaction levels or perceptions about the importance of particular items. That segment highlights responses that differ from the total sample sentiments, and focuses on the level of contribution or satisfaction which students experienced, with comments on importance ratings being restricted to instances really worthy of note. In this article, only highly significant differences related to these variables are noted. Finally, the comments and recommendations made by students in Section IV, which allowed for open-ended responses, are examined.

In the discussion that follows, score levels of 1 to 5 are associated with qualitative comparative terms such as those indicated by the scheme in Table 2.

Table 2: Explanation of Score Levels

Where the Scale Measures . . .				
Score Levels	Means Ranges	Contribution	Importance	Satisfaction
Level 1	1.00–1.49	Offers very little/ no contribution	Not at all important	Very or highly dissatisfied
Level 2	1.50–2.49	Marginally contributory	Marginally important	Dissatisfied
Level 3	2.50–3.49	Moderately contributory	Moderately important	Moderately satisfied
Level 4	3.50–4.49	Generally contributory	Generally important	Generally satisfied
Level 5	4.50–5.00	A great deal/highly contributory	Very or highly important	Very or highly satisfied

Gap Scores

In an attempt to assess the difference between students' views on the importance of each variable and the contribution made by that variable or the satis-

faction they experienced in terms of that item, gap scores were computed. The gap score can be defined as the perceptual difference between the importance of specific items as assessed by the students and the extent to which each of these items either contributed to various aspects of their learning experience or generated satisfaction with the services and facilities provided.

The gap scores were computed by subtracting the mean contribution scores and mean satisfaction scores from the mean importance scores for each variable. The larger the gap score, the greater the dissatisfaction experienced by students.

Summary of Overall Results

The Learning Experience

In Section II-1 treating with issues pertaining to the learning/developmental experience, students were asked to score eighteen items in terms of their contribution and importance to that experience. Means and a gap score for these items are shown in Table 3.

For thirteen of the items, students from across the region felt that these were generally contributory to their learning experience. The strongest response averages were indicated for the role of “a sound knowledge in subject area” (3.97), “communication skills” (3.97), “analytical skills” (3.95) and “critical thinking skills” (3.91). The remaining five items were regarded as making a moderate contribution, with the lowest average responses being for “awareness of students’ rights and responsibilities” (2.97) and “awareness of regional political issues” (2.97). In general, awareness of rights and responsibilities (whether as student or citizen) and of the broader regional and political environment scored the lowest averages.

In reviewing the scores by campus, the following observations were made. More Cave Hill students regarded “a good balance between theory and practice” and “application of theoretical knowledge to practical situations” as contributing only moderately to their learning experience – 42.9 per cent and 44.7 per cent, respectively. This differed from the regional perspective, where

Table 3: Learning Experience – Mean Contribution, Importance and Gap Scores on Key Variables

Key Variables	Mean Contribution Score	Mean Importance Score	Gap
1. A sound knowledge of your subject area	3.97	4.23	0.26
2. A good balance between theory and practice	3.62	4.16	0.54
3. Learning what you had hoped to learn	3.55	3.97	0.42
4. Skills and abilities required for your future employment	3.80	4.18	0.38
5. Problem-solving skills	3.79	4.19	0.40
6. Team-working skills	3.75	4.07	0.32
7. Interpersonal skills	3.87	4.14	0.27
8. Communication skills	3.97	4.34	0.37
9. Application of theoretical knowledge to practical situations	3.68	4.19	0.51
10. Analytical skills	3.95	4.33	0.38
11. Critical-thinking skills	3.91	4.29	0.38
12. Research skills	3.86	4.24	0.38
13. Leadership skills	3.46	3.94	0.48
14. Awareness of regional political issues	2.97	3.40	0.43
15. Awareness of current world affairs	3.06	3.58	0.52
16. Awareness of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship	3.01	3.52	0.51
17. Awareness of the rights and responsibilities of students	2.97	3.58	0.61
18. The development of a desire for further education	3.77	4.17	0.40

overall the modal proportions of students – 32.5 per cent and 34 per cent, respectively – felt these contributed generally to their learning development. Additionally, the modal proportion of responses from Cave Hill (31.9 per cent) indicated that leadership skills provided only moderate contribution, as opposed to the overall regional view (modal proportion of 31.3 per cent) that these skills had made a general contribution. A comparison of the corresponding mean scores also corroborates these differences.

All items pertaining to the learning/developmental experience exhibited means in the range of “generally important” (that is, 3.50 to 4.45) for the region overall, with the exception of “awareness of regional political issues”, which fell to the level of moderate importance with a mean rating of 3.40. The strongest importance mean related to communication skills (4.34) followed very closely by analytical skills (4.33). Notable gaps between importance and contribution scores were observed for both items exploring views on the relationship between theory and practice, as well as on awareness of current world affairs and the rights and responsibilities of students and citizenship.

At the campus levels, the average assessment of “generally to highly important” followed very much the same pattern, with only “awareness of political issues” (Cave Hill, 3.44; St Augustine, 3.19), “awareness of current world affairs” (St Augustine, 3.42), and “awareness of rights and responsibilities of citizenship (St Augustine, 3.35) being rated on average as moderately important”.

There were, however, significant proportions of responses assessing various items as very important, notably communication skills (51.6 per cent), analytical skills (48.5 per cent), critical thinking skills (49.0 per cent) and research skills (48.9 per cent).

Student Support

Section II-2 dealt with twelve items that sought to determine students’ satisfaction level and importance rating of the indicated areas of student support. The responses received overall are summarized in Table 4.

An examination of the means for these variables shows that most were below the level of 3.5, thereby indicating an average response of “moderate satisfaction”, with the exception of responses to “opportunity for class participation” where generally satisfactory rates were recorded (3.56–3.99). This item was viewed on average, both regionally (3.81) and campus-wise (4.00 at Cave Hill), as the most satisfactory of all items. “Promptness of feedback on assignments” and “arrangements for students with disabilities” were consid-

Table 4: Student Support – Mean Satisfaction and Importance Scores of Key Variables

Key Variables	Mean Satisfaction Scores	Mean Importance Scores	Gap
1. Lecturers’ interest in student learning	3.42	4.30	0.88
2. Lecturers’ accessibility outside of classes	3.38	4.22	0.84
3. Lecturers’ attitude towards students	3.33	4.35	1.02
4. The extent that staff treat students as mature individuals	3.03	4.19	1.16
5. Opportunity for class participation	3.81	4.18	0.37
6. Ability to register for desired courses	3.24	4.30	1.06
7. Helpfulness of administrative staff	2.90	4.18	1.28
8. Arrangements for students with disabilities	2.85	4.08	1.23
9. Amount of lecturer feedback	3.17	4.33	1.16
10. Usefulness of lecturer feedback	3.41	4.38	0.97
11. Promptness of feedback on assignments	2.81	4.27	1.46
12. Fairness of assessment methods	3.00	4.37	1.37

ered the least satisfactory, both regionally (2.81 and 2.85, respectively) and campus-wise (showing 2.67 and 2.38 at Cave Hill, respectively). The last item also received moderate ratings at St Augustine (2.57) and Mona (2.90).

On average, moderate satisfaction was indicated with “lecturers’ interest in student learning” (3.42) and “usefulness of lecturer feedback” (3.41). Of note, too, are the moderate levels of satisfaction with the following items: “helpfulness of administrative staff” (2.90), with Cave Hill leading the averages with 3.21; “amount of lecturer feedback” (3.17), with Cave Hill leading with 3.28; and “fairness of assessment methods” (3.00), with Cave Hill leading with 3.25.

Gap scores in excess of one rating point emerged for several items, indicating dissatisfaction with these variables. Greatest congruence between importance and satisfaction was observed for “opportunity for class participation”.

Both regionally and by campus, all of the twelve items under “Student Support” were, on average, regarded by respondents as being generally important, with the modal responses consistently reflecting high importance overall. In terms of regional mean scores, the top three items were “usefulness of lecturer feedback” (4.38); “fairness of assessment methods” (4.37); and “lecturers’ attitude towards students” (4.35). Similarly regarded as generally important was “the ability to register for desired courses” (4.30). The lowest average in this range was for “arrangements for students with disabilities” (4.08). Campus-wise, the means ranged from 4.46 at St Augustine for fairness of assessment methods, to 3.62 at Cave Hill for helpfulness of administrative staff.

Services and Facilities

Respondents were asked to allocate scores on a 1 to 5 scale indicating their level of satisfaction and importance ranking of items listed under the headings of Library, Computing Services, Practical Sessions and Services Offered to Students. The regional results are set out in Tables 5A–D.

Table 5A: Services and Facilities (Library) – Mean Satisfaction and Importance Scores on Key Variables

Library: Key Variables	Mean Satisfaction Score	Mean Importance Score	Gap
1. Range of books for loan	2.80	4.48	1.68
2. Up-to-date books	2.77	4.49	1.72
3. Availability of recommended course material	2.71	4.50	1.79
4. Multiple copies of core books	2.25	4.51	2.26
5. Range of journals/ periodicals	3.22	4.24	1.02
6. Helpfulness of library staff	3.34	4.31	0.97
7. Opening hours	3.53	4.46	0.93
8. Availability of copying facilities	2.90	4.45	1.55

Library

Satisfaction

The responses show moderate satisfaction, with one item bordering on general satisfaction (3.53), namely: “opening hours”, led by Mona with 3.36. The next highest mean score overall was 3.34 for “the helpfulness of library staff”, with St Augustine leading with 3.49.

Dissatisfaction was evident in the low rating given to the “availability of multiple copies of core books” (2.25), with Cave Hill averaging 2.16. Low to moderate satisfaction was recorded overall in rating “availability of recommended course material” (2.71). However, Cave Hill’s average score (2.47) definitely indicated dissatisfaction. The gap scores reflect the degree of dissatisfaction related to these variables, exceeding one rating point in a number of cases.

Importance

Regionally, all items in this section were assessed as either “important” or “very important” on average, with mean scores ranging from 4.24 to 4.51. The highest average score was for the importance of “multiple copies of core books” (4.51), indicating the great significance of that variable. The second leading item, “the availability of recommended course material”, ranked similarly (4.50). “Range of periodicals and journals” attracted an average score overall of 4.24, indicating high importance. Campus-wide, “availability of copying facilities” received the highest importance rating – 4.53 at St Augustine. The lowest campus rating given for “helpfulness of library staff” was at Cave Hill (4.11), and this showed that this attribute was considered to be generally important.

Computer Services

Table 5B: Services and Facilities (Computing) – Mean Satisfaction, Importance and Gap Scores on Key Variables

Computing Services: Key Variables	Mean Satisfaction Score	Mean Importance Score	Gap
1. Opening hours	3.27	4.34	1.07
2. Availability of computers	2.90	4.36	1.46
3. Maintenance of computers	3.31	4.32	1.01
4. Currency of software	3.45	4.28	0.83
5. Age of computers	3.44	4.24	0.80
6. Availability of support staff/technicians	3.23	4.16	0.93
7. Access to Internet/e-mail	3.83	4.37	0.54
8. Availability of printers	2.78	4.40	1.62

Satisfaction

Of the eight items scored under this heading, five were rated by the total sample as being, on average, moderately satisfactory (“opening hours”, “availability of computers”, “availability of support staff”, “access to Internet/e-mail” and “availability of printers”). The remaining three (“maintenance of computers”, “currency of software” and “age of computers”) were generally satisfactory. The highest mean response was for “access to Internet/email” (3.83) led by Mona with 4.02. The lowest mean response was for “availability of printers” (2.78), with St Augustine recording the lowest mean of 2.47, which indicated dissatisfaction. Both Cave Hill and St Augustine students were only moderately satisfied with “currency of software”, with mean ratings of 3.42 and 3.22, respectively. However, for Mona the mean was 3.65, indicating general satisfaction. The gap scores reinforce these ratings.

Importance

For all eight components under the “Computing Services” heading, the overall group consistently ranked all items as generally important, with means ranging from 4.40 for “availability of printers” led by St Augustine (4.45) to 4.16 for “availability of support staff/technicians” – with Cave Hill recording the lowest mean of 3.92.

All eight components also had modal assessments of “very important”, with percentages ranging from 41.0 per cent to 56.4 per cent. Campus-wide, the modal proportions were consistent with the overall assessment in five instances. Since satisfaction with the status quo was only at a moderate level, this finding suggests that printer availability is an area that needs to be addressed on all three campuses – but mostly at St Augustine.

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Practical Sessions

Table 5C: Services and Facilities (Practical Sessions) – Mean Satisfaction, Importance and Gap Scores on Key Variables

Practical Sessions: Key Variables	Mean Satisfaction Score	Mean Importance Score	Gap
1. The number of practical sessions in your courses	3.07	4.39	1.32
2. The usefulness of practical sessions	3.48	4.39	0.98
3. Helpfulness of technical and support staff	3.30	4.19	0.89
4. Availability of equipment	3.08	4.27	1.19
5. Maintenance level of equipment	3.10	4.21	1.11

Satisfaction

Students were asked to give responses to five items under this heading. The means ranging from 3.07 to 3.48 suggest that respondents had experienced moderate satisfaction with these items. For “number of practical sessions”, Cave Hill had the lowest mean campus-wise of 2.85, which suggests low moderate satisfaction. On “the usefulness of practical sessions” the mean for the overall group was 3.48, with Mona accounting for the highest score of 3.59.

Importance

Students felt that all the items were generally important, with “amount of practical sessions in courses” and “usefulness of practical sessions” carrying the highest average responses of 4.39. The lowest mean response (4.19) was indicated for “helpfulness of technical and support staff”, with Cave Hill recording the lowest mean score of 4.08.

Regionally, all five variables were popularly considered as very important, with modal proportions ranging from 41.4 per cent to 53.8 per cent. In the case of “availability of equipment and maintenance level of equipment”, Cave Hill was the exception, indicating “moderately satisfied”, with modal proportions being 39.7 per cent and 35.0 per cent, respectively.

It should be noted that on four of the five items that were rated as being very important across the campuses, St Augustine respondents were responsible for the highest proportion of those scores. With respect to “availability of equipment”, 51 per cent of Mona respondents contributed to its overall “highly important” rating. The gap scores highlight the distance between importance and satisfaction as perceived by the students.

Services Offered to Students

Table 5D: Services and Facilities (General) – Mean Satisfaction, Importance and Gap Scores on Key Variables

Services Offered to Students: Key Variables	Mean Satisfaction Score	Mean Importance Score	Gap
1. Placement and Careers	2.59	4.40	1.81
2. Counselling (Health Centre)	3.01	4.24	1.23
3. Health Centre	3.01	4.36	1.35
4. Range of clubs/societies	3.30	4.05	0.75
5. Services provided by the bookshop	3.12	4.23	1.11
6. Cost of items at the bookshop	2.15	4.40	2.25
7. Availability of information about services	2.51	4.19	1.68
8. Accessibility of services	2.73	4.19	1.46
9. Variety of sports activities	3.15	3.99	0.84

Satisfaction

On eight of the nine items, the average scores indicated that students were moderately satisfied with the services offered, the exception being “cost of items at the bookshop” with the lowest mean of 2.15, suggesting dissatisfaction with this variable. “Availability of information about services” was given a low moderate satisfaction rating. The highest mean was 3.30 and this was related to “range of clubs and societies”, with Cave Hill recording an average of 3.63. Generally, the averages bordered on dissatisfaction/moderate satisfaction.

The modal proportions varied somewhat in the assessment of these services, from dissatisfied to moderately satisfied. The highest proportions in terms of moderate satisfaction were for “counselling at the Health Centre” with 38.7 per cent, led by Mona with 41.6 per cent.

It is interesting to note the results for the variable “Placement and Career Services”. Regionally, the modal proportion was 32.5 per cent assessing this item as moderately satisfactory. However, only Mona assessed this similarly (40.1 per cent) while both Cave Hill (40.0 per cent) and St Augustine (40.4 per cent) indicated dissatisfaction by assigning a level 1 rating.

On the matter of the “availability of information about services”, there was some regional variation in that the modal proportions indicated moderate satisfaction (36.3 per cent). However, the modal proportion for Cave Hill was 35.3 per cent, indicating dissatisfaction. Overall, in assessing “accessibility of services”, there was moderate satisfaction regionally (43.1 per cent) and campus-wide, with Cave Hill leading with 50.0 per cent.

Importance

The highest averages were for “placement and careers” and “cost of items in the bookshop” (4.40), indicating these items to be very important. The lowest mean (3.99) was for “variety of sport activities”, with 3.77 for Cave Hill seeing it as moderately important, followed by 4.05 for “range of clubs and activities”, with 37.3 per cent of Cave Hill respondents indicating similarly. These low mean responses are noteworthy and they were generated by differ-

ences in the perspectives of students at Cave Hill and Mona, with students from the latter campus ranking these items as very important. There was little congruence between the scores on importance and satisfaction, these means being separated by more than one rating point on all but one variable.

Overall Satisfaction

In Section III of the questionnaire, students were asked to indicate their overall level of satisfaction concerning the seven variables listed in Table 6. As the table indicates, respondents, on average, recorded the greatest levels of dissatisfaction for the Registry and its attendant services (2.77) and the Bursary's delivery of financial services (2.78). Moderate satisfaction was indicated for the level of intellectual stimulation provided by their programmes of study (3.60) and, second, for experiences within their own departments (3.44).

Table 6: Campus Ratings for Overall Satisfaction Variables

	Cave Hill	Mona	St Augustine	Overall Mean
1. Overall intellectual stimulation during programme of study	3.62	3.68	3.56	3.60
2. Your department	3.43	3.56	3.29	3.44
3. Your faculty	3.58	3.46	3.24	3.37
4. Your potential career prospects	3.42	3.46	3.29	3.39
5. The image of the UWI as your <i>alma mater</i>	3.32	3.56	3.05	3.30
6. Registry: registration, etc.	2.77	2.83	2.62	2.77
7. Bursary: financial services	2.99	2.54	2.99	2.78

On all seven items, responses by campus indicated satisfaction to be either moderate or general. On the issue of satisfaction with their departments, the regional modal proportion of 36.1 per cent indicated moderate satisfaction, but Mona recorded general satisfaction (38.9 per cent). For responses regarding their faculties, the modal proportions of 38.7 per cent showed general satisfaction regionally, but 38.5 per cent for St Augustine indicated moderate satisfaction. On the matter of their potential career prospects, 41.2 per cent overall were generally satisfied.

There was some variation regarding the image of the UWI as their alma mater as, overall, the modal proportions showed moderate satisfaction (3.30), although the mean rating for Mona respondents indicated general satisfaction (3.56). Of particular note is the fact that Mona respondents were dissatisfied with the Bursary/financial services (2.54 mean score). When the modal proportions are examined, however, overall, 41.5 per cent regarded this service as moderately satisfactory – Cave Hill leading with 55.9 per cent. The modal proportions for the item “Registry – registration, etc.” show general satisfaction overall (2.77), led by Mona (2.83). A sizeable proportion (22.04 per cent) of St Augustine respondents was very dissatisfied and 22.5 per cent were dissatisfied, and this is reflected in the mean rating of 2.62.

Analysis by Sex of Respondents

Male/female satisfaction with “intellectual stimulation experienced during programme of study” mirrored the whole group response rate of 44.4 per cent, giving a rating of “generally satisfactory”. However, a larger proportion of males (48.9 per cent) than females (42.5 per cent) held this view. Both males and females recorded general satisfaction with their career prospects; however, this was the modal response of a larger proportion of males than females – that is, males, 48.9 per cent and females, 38.9 per cent. Males also had a much more positive image of UWI as their alma mater, with 38.4 per cent recording moderate satisfaction and a similar proportion giving a general satisfaction rating. This was against 34.9 per cent of females expressing moderate satisfaction and 30.6 per cent general satisfaction. Similarly, 48.9 per cent of males

were generally satisfied with “potential career prospects”, while 38.9 per cent of females expressed matching sentiments.

Analysis by Accommodation

No notable differences in responses were related to accommodation status, that is, resident on-campus (19.4 per cent of sample) or off-campus (76.9 per cent of sample). The students who did not indicate their accommodation status constituted 3.7 per cent of the sample.

Analysis by Registration Status

Part-time students were more conservative than their full-time counterparts in their assessment of the intellectual stimulation they had experienced. Their modal response was 42.3 per cent giving a rating of “moderately satisfied”, as against the 44.4 per cent of full-time students who gave a rating of “highly satisfied”. In other areas, however, part-time students tended to give more positive ratings. For instance, 50.0 per cent of part-time students were highly satisfied with their job prospects, and 48.0 per cent with the image of UWI as their alma mater, as against 40.5 per cent and 32.0 per cent of full-time students who recorded similar sentiments.

Students’ Additional Comments and Recommendations

Section IV of the questionnaire invited respondents to make additional comments on their undergraduate experiences at UWI, and to offer suggestions on how those experiences could have been improved. Instructions were to provide their comments under two headings: (1) academic, and (2) services and facilities.

Comments were submitted by 324 of the 484 students in the sample (66.9 per cent), as shown in Table 7 below. It should be noted that no student from the Faculty of Pure and Applied Sciences, Mona, chose to respond. A review and discussion of the students’ additional comments and improvement suggestions follows.

Table 7: Number Responding to Section IV, by Campus and Faculty

Campus	Faculties							Total
	Med. Sci.	Hum./Edu.	Law	Soc. Sci.	P/A Sci.	Sci./Agri.	Eng.	
Cave Hill	2	6	5	36	18	–	–	67
Mona	20	65	–	30	0	–	–	115
St Aug.	44	19	–	45	–	14	20	142
Total	66	90	5	111	18	14	20	324

Legend: Med. Sci. = Medical Sciences; Soc. Sci. = Social Sciences; Hum./Edu. = Humanities and Education; P/A. Sci. = Pure and Applied Sciences; Sci./Agri. = Science and Agriculture; Eng. = Engineering

Academic Issues

In reviewing the case counts of categories of comments made (see Table 8), it was observed that the comments most frequently made about academic issues were clustered around two main themes, *viz.*, the quality of courses and programme, and the relationship between students and faculty.

Quality of Course and Programmes

Across the three campuses, 10 of the 19 respondents expressed satisfaction with the delivery and support structures of courses and programmes were at the Mona campus. Typical comments were as follows:

- “Good; much better than Canada.”
- “Fairly good though sometimes I feel as if too much is taught in too short a time period.”
- “Most of the lecturers are very helpful and caring.”
- “All in all, my experience has taught me a lot.”
- “Course structures were clearly defined for most of the courses and lecturers were also very helpful.”
- “My undergraduate experiences were satisfactory.”

Table 8: Students' Comments and Recommendations – Academic Issues

Student Comments and Recommendations	Case Count by Campus			Total
	Cave Hill	Mona	St Augustine	
<i>Comments:</i>				
1. Course/programme satisfactorily delivered	4	10	5	19
2. Course/programme not well designed/managed	19	14	18	51
3. Student/faculty relationships were unsatisfactory	8	14	33	55
4. Inadequate support/materials for courses	1	–	2	3
5. Restrictive admission/registration process	1	–	2	3
<i>Recommendations:</i>				
1. Improve design/delivery/support structure of courses	34	48	48	130
2. Provide opportunities for internship, work experience and mentorship	8	5	14	27
3. Expand course and major options	5	15	18	38
4. Provide system for monitoring/evaluating lecturers	5	4	9	18
5. Provide better system for student-faculty interaction	2	3	8	13
6. Revise semester system	1	2	5	8

On the other hand, 51 respondents were of the view that aspects of their programmes were either not well designed or not well managed, this number being fairly evenly spread across the three campuses – Cave Hill, 19; Mona, 14; and St Augustine, 18. Typical comments were as follows:

- “In my experience some individual and group projects were too extensive for the period of time given and the resources available.”
- “There needs to be a proper match between prerequisite courses and follow-up courses.”
- “The subject matter in some courses needs to be restructured to be more interesting.”
- “In terms of tutorials, an adequate number of tutorials must be provided for the number of persons registered for the course.”

Recommendations for improvement referred, for the most part, to the design of courses or programmes, the delivery of courses and the support mechanism given to facilitate the successful completion of students’ programme of study. One hundred and thirty such comments were made, of which respondents from Cave Hill made 26 per cent and respondents from Mona and St Augustine campuses 37 per cent each. Of these comments, 44 per cent came from the Faculty of Social Sciences and were spread relatively evenly across the three campuses (20:15:22), while 19 per cent were from the Faculty of Humanities and Education, Mona.

Typical recommendations included the following:

- “The academic aspect can be improved by providing mentorship programmes for students. More staff is needed to help students with research projects.”
- “Have material put on-line before lectures.”
- “More assistance from advisors when preparing research papers.”
- “There needs to be greater stimulation of students to think outside the box, to see themselves at a global level and to push further than a first degree.”

Recommendations were also made for increasing opportunities for practical experiences, work experience, internships and mentoring. Typical recommendations in this regard were as follows:

- “University students need just as much practical skills as they do theoretical knowledge to survive in a dynamic environment.”
- “There needs to be a greater blend between theoretical concepts and practical aspects of each course offered.”
- “The academic aspect can be improved by providing a more practical outlook to the theory taught. In the world of work, one needs practical experience which I find UWI, or certain degrees, are not catering for.”
- “A more in-depth integration of practical sessions would have been appreciated as some courses, despite what is touted, were mainly theoretical and still too conventional.”
- “Management Studies should have an internship programme.”
- “There should be a great deal more practical work in Computer Science. The programme should cater for what is required in the job market and students should be able to have at least a three-month attachment.”
- “There needs to be a better connection between what is being taught and what is needed in the workforce.”

There were 27 such recommendations, 52 per cent of which were made by St Augustine respondents. Regionally, this is consistent with the ratings respondents placed on a good balance between theory and practice and application of theoretical knowledge to practical situations. While cumulatively attracting a 4.17 rating of importance on the Likert scale, these two variables were deemed by different campuses to have contributed moderately at best to their UWI learning experience, and at worst to have contributed only marginally to that experience. (Note gap scores in Table 3.)

A further recommendation made was for the expansion of the range of course options available to students. A sizeable percentage of the 38 recommendations that fell in this group came from the Mona and St Augustine campuses, which had 39 per cent and 47 per cent, respectively, of the case counts. In the Likert section of the questionnaire, 50.1 per cent of respondents had rated this dimension of their experience, “ability to register for desired courses”, as highly important. In the satisfaction rating, however, the combined case counts of level 4 and 5 scores accounted for only 33 per cent, with an almost equivalent proportion (35 per cent) indicating that they had

been very dissatisfied with this component of their undergraduate experience. The gap score for this item was just over one full rating point (1.06).

Typical recommendations included the following:

- “Cave Hill should seek to diversify courses offered.”
- “A wider selection of courses would be helpful.”
- “If there is an insufficient number of students for a course, try to make it an intercampus course, for example Computational Linguistics was only offered once at St Augustine, but it is a regular offering at Mona.”
- “There should be more opportunity for students to dabble in a range of courses. As it is, the focus is on the major or minor alone.”
- “More electives. Range is limited.”

Relationship between Students and Faculty

In describing the quality of the relationship between students and lecturers, 55 respondents were of the view that their relationships with lecturers could have been improved. Respondents from the St Augustine campus offered 60 per cent of these comments. Further, 55 per cent of the St Augustine responses were from students of the Faculty of Medical Sciences. The recommendations for improvements fell into two categories, namely:

1. The need for a systematic mechanism for the training, monitoring and evaluation of lecturers (18 recommendations). The following were typical of this type of comment/recommendation:
 - “Tutorial leaders should be screened to ensure that they have adequate knowledge.”
 - “There should be proper screening of course lecturers and monitoring of their presentations, so as to judge their ability to deliver and achieve results.”
 - “Lectures tended to be poorly delivered and tutorials were futile ceremonial procedures.”
 - “The teaching methods in the Law Faculty need to be improved immediately. An investigation needs to be carried out in order to improve the method.”

- “Some courses were not taught properly at all. Teaching methods/workshops need to be introduced.”
 - “Laboratory demonstrators should be better screened and trained.”
2. The need for design and implementation of a better system for the interaction of students and faculty (13 recommendations). The following were typical of this type of comment/recommendation:
- “Lecturers have failed to recognize the importance of student-centred learning.”
 - “Lecturers should be more concerned about students’ development.”
 - “Sometimes it is difficult to approach a lecturer with questions. I felt uncomfortable sometimes because some of them were intimidating. One could get the sense that they had better things to do.”
 - “Some lecturers are very dismissive and not helpful. Tutors do not treat students like adults and say very disrespectful things to students.”

Services and Facilities

An examination of the description of the quality of the university’s services and facilities, which students had experienced while undertaking their studies, revealed that the comments largely related to the quality and adequacy of the institution’s facilities and services and to the treatment they had received from the staff within the administrative sector of the university. As Table 9 shows, case counts were, for the most part, fairly evenly distributed across the three campuses.

Quality/Adequacy Concerns

In 22 instances, respondents described satisfactory experiences with the university’s physical facilities and the arrangements in place for student services. There were, however, 29 instances where the evaluation of this university

Table 9: Students' Comments and Recommendations – Services and Facilities

Student Comments and Recommendations	Case Count by Campus			
	Cave Hill	Mona	St Augustine	Total
<i>Comments:</i>				
1. Satisfactory services/facilities	6	9	7	22
2. High access costs for services (printing/photo-copying/books etc.)	6	–	4	10
3. Poor quality treatment from staff	9	12	7	28
4. Inferior technology/physical structure	8	2	6	16
5. Inadequate/ineffective communication of information	5	1	1	7
6. Variety/quality of services offered too narrow	16	5	8	29
<i>Recommendations</i>				
1. Improve the quantity/quality of the technological/physical infrastructure	29	31	36	96
2. Improve delivery/access to services/facilities	21	45	71	137
3. Improve and diversify cultural infrastructure	6	7	27	40
4. Improve staff professionalism and programmes for staff training	9	33	21	63
5. More effective communication of relevant student information needed	3	10	15	28
6. Make campus more student-centred	2	14	19	35
7. Expand career/job placement services	5	8	6	19

dimension was negative. In addition, 29 of the evaluative comments expressed dissatisfaction with the way respondents had been treated by members of the administrative staff and more than 50 per cent of those comments came from respondents enrolled at the Cave Hill campus. Some typical comments/recommendations were as follows:

- “The services were quite satisfactory along with most facilities.”
- “Support staff continue to be helpful despite their increased workload.”
- “Based on the services and facilities I have used in my time here, I am satisfied and have no complaints.”
- “Registration process needs a great deal of improvement.”
- “My experience is that UWI is not student-friendly and, quite frankly, [although] I am glad I studied here, I am just as happy to leave.”

Recommendations

The most frequent recommendation had to do with improvements in the quality and quantity of services and facilities, with a total of 273 such recommendations noted and categorized as follows:

- 96 case counts, fairly evenly spread across campuses, of respondents recommending that the quantity and quality of technological and physical infrastructure be improved
- 137 recommendations for improved service delivery and increased access to such services, 33 per cent of which were made by respondents from Mona and 51 per cent from St Augustine
- 40 recommendations that cultural infrastructure be improved and diversified, with those from St Augustine accounting for 67 per cent of the total

The following are typical examples of the recommendations received in this regard:

- “Increase number of computer labs available to students.”
- “The library needs more current material.”
- “More could be done in providing essential texts in the library as well as selling texts at subsidized rates.”

- “There is need for more water fountains and eating areas.”
- “There is too much ‘red tape’ for the use of the West Indian section in the Main Library.”
- “Cheaper copying/printing.”
- “There needs to be more than one copy of the recommended textbooks in the library.”
- “Prices of books in the bookshop are *extremely* expensive and most times unavailable.”
- “Chemical Engineering facilities and classrooms need refurbishing.”
- “Equipment – for example scales, test tubes, thermometers – not available in labs.”
- “Equipment for Medical Sciences needs to be improved.”
- “There needs to be more activities that reflect the different social backgrounds of the student populace.”

Another area of concern related to students’ interaction with the providers of university services. Recommendations were for campuses to be made more student-centred (35 case counts) and additional training to be provided for administrative staff, so that an improved level of professionalism could be displayed (63 case counts).

The comments made in support of these recommendations were consistent with the way that students had rated the services provided by, in particular, the Registry and the Bursary. Both departments received the lowest scores in the section of the questionnaire where students were asked to provide an overall rating of seven service aspects of their UWI experience. Some typical comments were as follows:

- “Registration services should be made more efficient.”
- “Academic staff need to be friendlier.”
- “The administrative staff could be friendlier.
- “‘Service with a smile’ should be the policy adopted by all offices around campus.”
- “Clerks at the faculty offices are mostly imperious.”

The final category of recommendation to be highlighted pertains to the need for more effective procedures for communicating relevant information to stu-

dents. Of the 28 students making recommendations of this nature, 36 per cent were from Mona and 53 per cent from St Augustine. Their focus on this service area is consistent with the marginal to moderate satisfaction levels, noted earlier in this report, for “availability of information about [student] services”. Some of the reasons given for recommending improved information dissemination methods included the following:

- “More advertisements [are necessary] about services and facilities available to students.”
- “Please do not take for granted that, because we are university students, we understand everything about the systems, procedures and rules. We need information on services and procedures.”
- “Administration should take the standpoint that every student entering the university knows absolutely nothing about the system, and should ensure that students access the proper knowledge.”

Generally, the areas that respondents chose to comment on in this open-ended section were areas that in earlier sections also received average importance ratings of 4 and above (that is, “generally important” or “very important”). However, not all the areas identified as needing improvement had received negative ratings in the Likert-type scale evaluations. Some had received moderate to high ratings of satisfaction/contribution. The fact that more criticisms than commendations were made by students in this open-ended section could have been due to the request that students suggest how their experiences *might be improved*. It is likely, therefore, that students gave special consideration to those areas in which they perceived that further improvements would make the undergraduate experience even more beneficial and worthwhile.

Conclusions and Recommendations¹

While some areas of UWI’s programmes and services and facilities received negative ratings from the 2003–2004 finalizing students, the greater tendency, by far, was commendable ratings ranging from moderate to high satisfaction.

Administration and faculty should be gratified at the high ratings given to certain crucial areas of the university's programme offerings. However, there are areas that students regarded as being of high importance to their university performance that also received ratings of "less than satisfactory". If the UWI is to retain its dominant position in a sector that is becoming increasingly competitive, it will need to address those concerns in meaningful ways.

The contemporary student body has become non-traditional in nature, with diversity in age, gender and mode of registration, that is part-time study while holding down full-time jobs. As more individuals invest valuable time and money in acquiring university qualifications, there will be a commensurate tendency to measure actual service performance of educational products. It is important, therefore, that the university is seen by students to respond to their comments and recommendations and to give feedback on action taken as a result of this survey. Unless action is transparent, reluctance and scepticism on the part of students to engage in this process of quality assurance will persist.

Learning Experiences

Both regionally and within individual campuses there was consensus with the positive assessment made of the soundness of subject area knowledge resulting from students' university experience. Respondents were generally of the view that this had made a strong contribution to their performance. This concurred with the views of employers who were of the opinion that UWI graduates demonstrate good theoretical knowledge.

Favourable assessment was also given by students to their communication, analytical and critical skills. This seems to contradict the views of potential

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employers who rated these skills in graduates as average/below average, especially in relation to communication skills. This mismatch of views raises the question of the extent to which students perceive themselves accurately or whether they are simply projecting what they would like to be.

The lowest average satisfaction rating was for the items related to awareness of regional issues, awareness of rights and responsibilities of students, and rights and responsibilities of citizenship. This was particularly low among students from the Faculties of Pure and Applied Sciences and Medical Sciences. This begs the question as to whether, especially in the faculties with a more technical focus, in the thrust to ground students in the knowledge and skills relevant to their area of specialization, the more rounded individual has been sacrificed. It was also surprising, given the nature of the subjects in Social Sciences, that students from that faculty gave the lowest score, that of little or no contribution, to the issue of awareness of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. It is also notable that these were the only areas in the study which were given a rank below 4, “generally important”, by students overall.

The findings suggest that this is an area of omission in the UWI curriculum that bears some examination, especially against the background of the growing importance being placed on citizenship education and the responsibility of educational institutions in this regard. The answer may be dual tracked, (1) through implementation of recommendations made by some students in the open-ended section of the questionnaire, that there needs to be a wider range of electives to allow students to experience more courses outside of their major, and (2) the expansion of opportunities for out-of-class experiences with a community-service orientation, possibly through the collaborative efforts of faculties and the Office of Student Services.

The results of the Likert scale evaluations indicated that overall balance between theory and practice was thought to be moderately satisfactory. Students, however, did take the opportunity given them to indicate ways in which this dimension of their university education could have been improved, stressing the need for a close connection between what is being taught at UWI and what is needed in the workplace. Certainly, employers identified this as a major weakness of the UWI education.

Generally, but especially by females, there was a positive response to the

development of a desire for further education. It would seem that the learning experiences have been positive enough to stimulate a desire for continuing their higher education beyond that of a first degree.

Student Support

The feature that got the highest satisfaction rating from among the student support areas identified in the questionnaire was opportunity for class participation, earning a high average as well as high modal proportion regionally. This suggests that there exists across the three campuses a classroom environment that encourages student/lecturer interaction.

The other side of the coin, however, was the moderate satisfaction which students expressed with attitude of lecturers towards students and lecturers' interest in student learning. Student comments gave specificity to the aspects of this relationship that they found unsatisfactory, citing experiences of unapproachable and intimidating staff demeanour. Related to this was the students' sentiment that there needed to be prompter feedback on assignments. Student comments also spoke to the need for a stronger mechanism for student advising. The establishment of a personal tutor/faculty advisor system through which each student has a faculty member who gives guidance and facilitation through the system would do much to strengthen student satisfaction.

While the ability to register for desired courses gave moderate satisfaction to students, consideration should be given by the administration to some comments made by students, not least among them the recommendation that courses could be opened up to students across campuses through on-line facilities. Such an arrangement should have a number of advantages, among them the widening of the range of courses available to students; this would also give a new dimension to the regional character of the university. As the technology to allow this becomes increasingly available, this recommendation seems quite feasible.

Finally, in this section, the low rating consistently given across the campuses on the arrangements in place for students with disabilities seems to suggest that a review of these provisions is appropriate.

Services and Facilities

Certain key areas of services and facilities need to be highlighted:

- A number of facilities related to the library generally elicited sentiments of dissatisfaction. While students were complimentary about opening hours, areas such as range of books on loan, availability of recommended course material and multiple copies of core books all received moderate to low satisfaction ratings. The more extensive survey of library services provides more detailed information in this area.
- Availability of computing services earned ratings of fair to high satisfaction across the region. Cave Hill and St Augustine did not come off as well as Mona with regard to the currency of computer software, and St Augustine fared quite poorly with respect to availability of printing services, the rating suggesting that this service was inadequate. The provisions in this area need to be examined against the background of the expectations of a technological environment and the competing facilities of extra-regional educational providers, which seem to enable student access to cutting edge technology.
- Students are the primary focus of the activities of educational institutions. The UWI 2002–2007 Strategic Plan lists student-centredness as one of its key strategic objectives and thus a major indicator of quality. In this context, the moderate to low ratings that the 2003–2004 finalizing students of UWI gave to helpfulness of staff must be highlighted. In the overall ratings of the university experience, the Bursary and the Registry and their attendant services elicited the greatest level of dissatisfaction. Students also gave low ratings to the availability of information on services and processes. Their comments highlight the need for units and departments in the university not to assume that students have the information but, rather, they should assume that students do not and so make the information as accessible as possible.
- Notwithstanding the weaknesses in certain aspects of their university experiences that students identified, there should be gratification at the strong response to the overall student ratings of areas such as intellectual

stimulation, satisfaction with their department/faculty, their potential career prospects and their image of UWI as their alma mater. The responses ranged from moderate to high satisfaction, although some variations are evident among campuses. Notable, though, is the fact that students across the three campuses were consistently satisfied with their potential career prospects.

Note

1. In this section reference is made to the companion Survey of Employers where relevant.

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Summary of the Report of the Survey of the Provisions for Admission, Registration and Orientation Services at the University of the West Indies, 2003

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Introduction

The report of the pilot survey of the Provisions for Admission, Registration and Orientation at the University of the West Indies (UWI), conducted by the Office of the Board for Undergraduate Studies (OBUS) in 2003, presented the findings on the perceptions of the university's performance in the provision of these services among students on the three main campuses. The survey focused on new admissions to the university and sought to assess the level of satisfaction with the information provided, the process and the personnel who were engaged in each stage of the exercise. The objective of the survey was to determine the progress of the three campuses in meeting students' needs through the admission, registration and orientation process. The findings were quite unequivocal in regard to the major differences in satisfaction

levels across this regional university. These were underscored by the consistency between responses to questions on similar dimensions of service on each campus. The findings point to the need for urgent attention to the improvement of quality in all three phases of service provision: admission, registration and orientation.

Methodology

The survey utilized a structured questionnaire which was completed by 1,817 students across the three campuses. This included

- 307 students from Cave Hill (16.9 per cent of the sample)
- 1,055 students from Mona (58.1 per cent)
- 455 students from St Augustine (25 per cent)

It was conducted using both an on-line medium as well as a manual (paper-based) medium. The questionnaire focused on the information, procedural and personnel aspects of the application, admission and registration processes; on-line registration; and the level of satisfaction with orientation activities. Responses were also sought on the elements of the registration process that were considered most or least convenient and the orientation activities which students found most or least beneficial. These responses were analysed utilizing cross-tabulations and summary statistical measures.

Some of the limitations of the survey related to the sample of students selected, as it was not possible to confirm that only new admissions within each campus and faculty responded to the questionnaire. Questions that asked the year and level of the student were not included in the survey. In addition, some of the areas that the students wanted to address did not fit into any of the main categories outlined in the survey.

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Findings

Applying to UWI

The first point of formal contact between students and the UWI is the application stage, and here the process was found to be generally satisfactory. The majority of students at each campus were satisfied with the information provided on the application process, considering that it was adequate, timely and clear. Information was considered adequate by 75 per cent of students at Cave Hill, 83 per cent of Mona students and 71 per cent of those at St Augustine. However, it was observed that students at the St Augustine campus were less satisfied with the timeliness with which information on the application process was supplied, as nearly a half (46.6 per cent) did not consider that it was provided in a timely manner.

In regard to the application process, assessments were also good, with students agreeing in general that the application process was straightforward and easy to follow. This positive picture was also reflected in the students' assessments of the interpersonal aspects of the application process. Scores were generally above 60 per cent for all of the seven specific areas in which they were asked to rate the personnel with whom they interacted at the application stage. These included the extent to which personnel were knowledgeable, informative, helpful, competent, professional, customer-friendly and available. At each campus, the lowest level of satisfaction was related to whether staff was readily available to assist, with this ranging from 64.1 per cent at Cave Hill to 56.2 per cent at St Augustine.

Admission to UWI

The survey found that students were generally satisfied with the adequacy of information provided in regard to the admission process, although there was less satisfaction with the timeliness of this information. Roughly a half of the Cave Hill and Mona samples considered that the admission information was timely, and this declined to 41 per cent for the St Augustine respondents.

The UWI admission process seems to present some hurdles for students, as not more than two-thirds of any campus sample rated the process as straightforward or easy to follow. Those who considered the process to be straightforward accounted for 56.7 per cent of the Cave Hill respondents, 65.5 per cent of those at Mona and 55.2 per cent of the St Augustine sample. Similarly, those who considered that the admission process was easy to follow ranged from a low of 53.5 per cent at St Augustine to a high of 66.9 per cent at Mona.

In regard to the service delivery for admissions, roughly three out of every five students at Cave Hill and at Mona agreed that the process was professionally handled and that it was student-centred. Somewhat lower ratings were obtained from the St Augustine students, as only a half felt that the admission process was handled professionally, while 46 per cent considered that the system was student-centred.

When asked to assess the personnel who were involved in the admission process, the students at each campus gave quite positive ratings. The major area of dissatisfaction from the perspective of the students again surfaced in regard to the availability of staff to assist with the admission process. The percentage of each sample expressing satisfaction with the availability of Admissions staff was 57.1 per cent for Cave Hill, 55.9 per cent for Mona and 50 per cent for St Augustine.

Registering at UWI

From the perspective of the students, the journey of entering the UWI went rapidly downhill once the registration system was encountered. This was most pronounced at Cave Hill and at St Augustine where the on-line registration system was not in place. It was mainly in regard to the staff who assisted with registration that positive assessments were given, but even in this area, many shortcomings were noted.

In assessing the information provided for the registration process, considerable dissatisfaction was expressed by students. At Cave Hill, only 40 per cent rated the information as adequate, 39 per cent said that it was timely and only

32 per cent said that the information was clear. The situation was only slightly better at St Augustine, where 45 per cent considered the registration information to be adequate, 37 per cent said it was timely and 41 per cent said the information was clear. The ratings given by the Mona sample on the adequacy, timeliness and clarity of registration information were much higher, and these ratings may be appreciated in light of the fact that all registration was conducted on-line.

The major advance that has been made possible by the implementation of the on-line registration system stands out clearly from the comparative data on students' assessments of the registration process. The responses from both Cave Hill and St Augustine reflected the difficulties that faced these students as they went through the manual registration process. Among these students, there was wide agreement that the system was neither straightforward nor easy, that registration was not handled professionally and that the process could not be considered to be student-centred.

In regard to whether the registration system was straightforward, only 29 per cent of students at Cave Hill and 33 per cent of those at St Augustine gave the system a positive rating. This may be compared with 53 per cent of the Mona sample, who agreed that it was straightforward. In the same vein, only 28 per cent of Cave Hill students and 36 per cent of St Augustine students said that the registration process was easy, as against 53 per cent of the students at Mona.

Assessments of the personnel who interfaced with students in the process of registration showed considerable variations by campus. In general, the personnel received much higher ratings than the registration process. Surprisingly low ratings were given by the Cave Hill sample to the personnel who were engaged in the registration exercise, and this was interpreted to also include the faculty who were in the front line for the academic aspects. While Cave Hill students rated the personnel as generally knowledgeable (55 per cent) and informative (52 per cent), only 44 per cent of these students considered that they were customer-friendly. There was more evenness in the assessments of registration personnel at the St Augustine campus, where most assessments ranged between 50 and 60 per cent in the positive category. In the case of Mona, there was considerable satisfaction expressed with the qualities shown

by the registration personnel, as these ranged between 60 and 70 per cent. For all three campuses, there was the desire for greater availability of persons to assist with the registration exercise, as the dimension of staff availability received the lowest ratings across the university. The satisfaction level was 38 per cent at Cave Hill, 49 per cent at St Augustine and 56 per cent at Mona.

Registration: What Helps and What Hinders?

Since it was not expected that the structured questionnaire would capture all of the aspects of the registration exercise which students considered to be important, students were also invited to indicate what they considered to be the three most convenient elements and the three least convenient elements in the registration process.

The analysis of the open-ended questions served to reinforce the findings in regard to the importance attached by students to having reliable information, a quick efficient process and friendly, helpful personnel. All of these received high ratings by students in terms of the frequency with which they were mentioned as being among the most convenient elements. In addition, specific features were highlighted, such as the flexibility to pay fees outside of the Bursary, the convenient opening hours of the relevant offices and the availability of academic counselling.

The responses from students to the question of the least convenient elements in the registration exercise were more revealing. Students at Cave Hill and at St Augustine complained about the registration process being too long and dispersed, and this can be understood in relation to the absence of on-line registration. Even where on-line registration was available, as at Mona, there were reported difficulties with the long wait for access to a computer, with registering on-line when off-campus and with the Internet server being slow.

Poor customer service and inadequate information were sore points across the three campuses. On the academic side, students listed course-related problems. This was a significant problem at the Mona campus, where roughly one-third of all complaints centred on some aspect of this issue. The course-related problems across the campuses included the following:

- the early deadlines for the add/drop of courses
- the need to have multiple signatures to change a course
- the quotas for some courses and streams
- the absence of adequate course descriptions and course lists
- limited course options, lack of advice on course selection
- not having the necessary knowledge of the course codes in order to register
- timetable clashes

The Orientation Process at UWI

The level of satisfaction among students with the orientation activities was explored in the survey by asking respondents to indicate their degree of satisfaction with eight specific aspects of orientation, as follows:

- knowledge of the geography of the campus
- interaction of faculty and students
- the matriculation ceremony
- information regarding rights and responsibilities of students
- information about academic expectations at the university
- information about university life outside the classroom
- activities to assist in the adjustment to all aspects of university life
- the reflection of a student-centred environment

In this assessment, students were asked to locate their sentiments along a scale that included very satisfied, satisfied, somewhat satisfied, dissatisfied and very dissatisfied. As these responses were weighted from 1 to 5, with the highest satisfaction level being ranked as 5, it was possible to develop a mean score for each item.

When the mean level of satisfaction was examined for each specific item, it was apparent that at the Cave Hill campus the mean fell close to 3, which would be the value equivalent to “somewhat satisfied”. In the case of St Augustine, although the mean values did not differ greatly from those at Cave

Hill, there was more diversity in the responses from students. St Augustine students tended to express greater satisfaction with the introduction to the campus geography, the interaction of faculty and students, the matriculation ceremony, and with activities to assist with the adjustment to university life. The satisfaction levels expressed by students at Mona were significantly higher than those at the other two campuses. The percentage of Mona students who rated themselves as “very satisfied” did not fall below 40 per cent for any of the eight items. This may be regarded as an unusually high level, but one that can be understood in light of the consistent efforts made over recent years to improve the quality of the entry experience at Mona.

In order to probe which aspects of the orientation activities were considered to be the most beneficial and which the least beneficial, students were also invited to indicate three activities in each category. In identifying the aspects of the information that they found to be most beneficial, students listed specifically the following:

- the provision of booklets
- visits from professionals
- safety lectures
- talks on budgeting and the financing of their studies
- the time management seminar
- information on the health services
- general rap sessions

When listing the least beneficial orientation activities, there was considerable diversity among students at each campus. Some students dismissed the introduction to the campus geography, while others did not value the matriculation ceremony. At Mona, the hall-based orientation activities were considered to be among the least beneficial, with nearly a quarter of all responses listing this aspect. Students pointed to the burden of drills, early morning wake-ups, the enforced lack of sleep, “grubbing” and other aspects of ragging that the university has tried with little success to discourage. In discussing the social activities outside of the hall orientation, students noted that these were mostly for full-time students, and that the activities had usually ended by the time part-time students reached the campus.

Where students found fault with the information provided, this was often because they resented the style in which it was presented. They reported that the style of presenters was sometimes “preachy”, patronizing, boring or reprimanding.

The Registration Score Card: Pass or Fail?

The report also proposed a summary measure of student satisfaction, which was the design of a registration scorecard. The purpose of the scorecard is to combine into a single index the most important features of the registration process, from the perspective of the student. It combined these elements into a total score that ranged from zero to one hundred, being similar to the traditional grade sheet. In this proposal, the scorecard did not seek to include the response to every question asked in regard to the registration process, but pulled together what were viewed as the most important elements. These elements were assigned unequal weights in order to balance the relative importance of the main dimensions.

In designing the scorecard, the first prerequisite was to approach the registration exercise *from the perspective of the student*. This entailed asking oneself three important questions:

1. In order to complete this registration exercise, what do I need to know, in order to make the right choices, etc.? (Information)
2. How do I actually complete this process? (Method)
3. What will this cost me, in terms of time, energy and emotional distress? (Cost)

The decision was taken to allocate the percentage points according to the following weighting system:

Information	=	40 per cent
Method	=	30 per cent
Cost	=	30 per cent
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Total Score	=	100 per cent

It was readily seen that the overall performance of each campus, as summarized by the registration scorecard, fell short of what the university requires. The overall grade obtained by Cave Hill was a C/D, as this score was 39.7 per cent. St Augustine obtained a mid-level C, with an overall grade of 46 per cent, while Mona obtained a high B, with 58.8 per cent.

The individual components of the scorecard ranged from B to C for the information score for each campus, while the registration process received the lowest grades. This found Cave Hill and St Augustine receiving grades of D, while Mona earned a B grade. The score for the personal cost ranged from a B+ at Mona to a high C and a low C at St Augustine and Cave Hill, respectively.

Although it was possible to disagree with the weights assigned to each component of the registration scorecard, or with the specific items included under each component, the final outcome was entirely congruent with the survey findings in regard to students' perceptions of the registration process at each campus.

Summary and Recommendations

The report concluded that the findings of the 2003 OBUS survey of the provisions for admission, registration and orientation at the UWI served to establish a base from which this annual assessment exercise might be refined and strengthened. It was not recommended that the results from this first survey be used to benchmark the process, since there was room for improvement both in the design of the instrument and in the administration of the survey. However, these limitations might be regarded as fairly minor technical issues, given the unequivocal responses from the students at each campus. They were simply not satisfied with what we offered and how we offered it. The message

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was clear: we have made some progress in meeting the needs of students as they first engage with the university, but we have a long way to go.

The survey therefore served its major objective, which was to obtain feedback from students on their perceptions of each phase of the entry process, and it provided clear directions for improving performance. It remains to be seen whether each campus administration will give this the priority attention it deserves. The sanctions for failing to address these problems will be seen in the alienation and frustration of the internal customers, our students. Externally, their dissatisfaction contributes to the weakening of the competitive position of the UWI.

Report on Student Assessment of Teaching

JOSEPH PERIERA

Each semester, students are asked to complete an instrument designed to obtain their assessment of the courses they have pursued and the lecturers teaching those courses. This paper presents the summary of these assessments on the Mona campus, semesters 1 and 2, 2003/04. It highlights the value of the assessment instrument in the evaluation of the teaching/learning environment.

Semester 1, 2003/04

The assessment was conducted in the tenth teaching week of semester 1. Of all courses (including sub-groups) taught in the semester, 96 per cent were assessed. This represents a five percentage point improvement in coverage over semester 2, 2002/03.

Coverage

Highest coverage was in Humanities and Education as well as Law, and coverage in Social Sciences was much higher (97 per cent) than previously (90 per cent), which indicates a more streamlined administration and participation.

Lecturers

A clear distinction was made between levels of satisfaction with the lecturers and those with course material. Fully 78 per cent of lecturers received a rating of 4 and above out of the five-point scale, which is an improvement over semester 2, 2002/03, where 71 per cent attained this level. Overall, Social Sciences showed an 8 per cent increase in lecturers being rated over 4, the highest improvement across faculties, but Pure and Applied Sciences slipped 8 per cent in this category. Only nineteen persons (3 per cent) received ratings under 3; of these, only two lecturers fell below 2. The relevant department heads have been asked to take action on these. Looking across faculties, CARIMAC continued to have some weak responses (7 per cent); Mathematics and Computer Science continued to be cause for concern (24 per cent falling under 3); Physical Therapy is somewhat below desirable average; and some part-time lecturers in Hotel and Tourism Management (Bahamas) continue to need attention.

Courses

Rating of course material continued to be much lower than that for lecturers, with only 21 per cent obtaining a score of 4 or over and 70 per cent falling between 3 and 3.9. This essentially remained unchanged from the preceding semester, except that no course fell below a rating of 2 this time.

While we recognize that these are perceptions, and that not all students fill out the questionnaires, the response continues to indicate reasonably high levels of satisfaction with the lecturers, but we have much room for improvement in course and curriculum matters.

Semester 2, 2003/04

The assessment of semester 2 courses was carried out in the tenth week, using a slightly more streamlined form, in an attempt to increase the rate of student response in each course. Of all courses (including sub-groups) taught in the

semester, 93 per cent were assessed. This represents a two percentage point slip in coverage over semester 1, 2003/04.

Coverage

Highest coverage continued to be in Humanities and Education as well as Law, with lowest (66 per cent) in Basic Medical Sciences. Efforts are being focused on getting better participation from those students.

Lecturers

As indicated from the previous semester, there was a clear distinction between level of satisfaction with the lecturers and that with course material. Of lecturers, 72 per cent received a rating of 4 and above on the five-point scale, which is a marginal improvement over semester 2, 2002/03, where 71 per cent attained this level.

Only eighteen persons (2 per cent) received ratings under 3; of these, none fell below 2, and this, too, is an improvement. The relevant heads have been asked to take action on the eighteen. Looking across faculties, the following were relatively weaker areas: CARIMAC; History and Language, Linguistics, and Philosophy in Humanities; Biochemistry in Medical Sciences; Chemistry and Maths and Computer Science in Pure and Applied Sciences; and Economics and Management Studies in Social Sciences. While attention needs to be paid to the few weak areas, the overall assessment has been commendably positive for teaching at the campus. The departments with the highest ratings in each faculty were as follows: Literatures in English (courses), Modern Languages and Literatures (lecturers) for Humanities; Advanced Nursing (both courses and lecturers) in Medical Sciences; Life Sciences (both courses and lecturers) in Pure and Applied Sciences; Hotel and Tourism (courses) and Management Studies (lecturers) for Social Sciences. For the first time, no lecturer received a score average below 2.

Courses

Rating of course material, although lower than that for lecturers, showed marked improvement in every faculty over the previous two semesters, doubling from 21 per cent to 42 per cent rated 4 or over. No course fell below a rating of 2, but twenty-six (4 per cent, and down from the previous assessment) fell below 3, which was established as the minimum benchmark for a satisfactory rating.

Follow-up

Copies of the summary assessment obtained for each lecturer/course continue to be sent to heads, deans, Human Resources (Registry) and to the Library for student access. As needed, heads have given reports on what actions their departments have been taking to strengthen the quality of teaching, sometimes utilizing the Instructional Development Unit.

The Office of the Deputy Principal appreciates the excellent spirit of cooperation and support received from academic and departmental staff, student representatives and the general student body in the conduct of this exercise designed to ensure that appropriate standards of course delivery are established and maintained.