

**DISTANCE EDUCATION IN THE RESTRUCTURED UWI: policy and problems***E.P. Brandon*<sup>1</sup>*Caribbean Curriculum*, 6, 35-53 (1996)

---

This paper is intended to give the broad outlines of the recent policy thrust in distance education at the University of the West Indies (UWI), originating in the University Academic Committee (UAC) decision of July 1992 that the UWI should become a comprehensively dual mode institution, that is, one in which students are enrolled off-campus as well as on, and that has "systematic teaching arrangements for both categories of student" (Renwick, Shale, & Rao, 1992, p. 5). It will also focus on some of the major problematic aspects of this policy and its implementation in the context of the restructuring subsequent upon the endorsement of the Chancellor's Report on Governance (Nicholls & Head, 1994).

**I — Background to 1992**

While we cannot here recount the earlier history of distance education at the UWI (for which perhaps the most accessible but brief source is Sherlock and Nettleford, 1990, pp. 228-233),<sup>2</sup> it is necessary to sketch a little of this background in order to appreciate the present position, opportunities, and problems.

Taking distance education to be a matter of people studying for university qualifications without having to attend any of the three campuses, the UWI's activity can be seen under two major headings: the Challenge Examination programme, started in 1978, whereby students could register to sit some UWI examinations (mainly first year courses in Social Sciences and Law) without any support beyond the syllabus and list of recommended reading; and the UWIDITE programmes that began in 1982 (the acronym originally stood for 'UWI Distance Teaching Experiment', later the last word was changed to 'Enterprise'). Although in theory the Challenge programmes offered virtually nothing to the student, in fact in most cases University Centres did provide local teaching support for the courses, and the departments responsible for particular courses were involved in various sorts of additional back-up (often sending lecturers around the sites). The UWIDITE teleconferencing facility offered a further opportunity for providing campus teaching support for Challenge students, so that several Challenge programmes became indistinguishable, in terms of campus teaching support, from the University programmes originally intended for delivery through UWIDITE. Those programmes were mainly some of the Certificate in Education options offered at Mona. In their UWIDITE form these education courses typically comprised a written manual, several teleconferencing sessions on UWIDITE, and some local support (mainly for teaching practice and the project report based upon it). The UWIDITE project also included a special Certificate in Energy Management, and various outreach activities, such as medical consultations, short courses, and training in laboratory safety techniques for secondary schools.

It should be noted that one idea behind the original Challenge scheme was that it would foster the development of educational resources locally, as University Centres or the students themselves found people to assist them in studying for their examinations. What happened, and what was significantly strengthened by the advent of UWIDITE, is continuing University/campus control of all aspects of the teaching and learning involved in Challenge. One might see here a facet of the continuing and rather one-sided dialectic of empowerment and control that characterizes the University's relations with its partners and clients in the educational systems of the region, but it must also be recognized that there has been a continuing demand for centralized provision on the part of Challenge students. Even when other institutions have been franchised to offer UWI programmes, their students often welcome signs of campus endorsement and involvement. Such attitudes have played their part in the sluggish development of locally dispersed resources throughout the region.

The overlapping UWIDITE/Challenge operation developed through the 1980s with a significant increase in regional coverage. When Sherlock and Nettleford wrote, there were sites in the campus countries but only four in non-campus countries (Antigua, Dominica, Grenada, and St Lucia). Additional sites were set up in non-campus countries as well as in Jamaica and Trinidad; funding came from various sources, Lomé III, CIDA, and most recently the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) loan. On completion of the Caribbean Development Bank project, at least one teleconferencing room should exist in every non-campus country (a total of 27 sites in 16 countries).

The CDB loan was premised on the University's endorsement of an immediate shift to "dual mode" status and consequently envisaged a restructuring of the University's dealings in distance education, a restructuring that

would attempt to resolve some of the main problems associated with the original Challenge/UWIDITE operation.

These problems may be characterized as follows:

- *(a) Distance education as a peripheral "add on"*

The distance education operation was a voluntary extra for the departments or individuals that undertook it. It was not regarded as part of one's contractual obligation to the University. It did not count in calculations of work-load or staff-student ratios. Individual enthusiasm can, of course, achieve a great deal, but this situation also allowed sloppiness to continue without redress. It also put distance education on the periphery; a department was unlikely to focus on the potential of distance education in planning its own development, and programmes such as the various Certificates were not planned with an eye to articulation with other programmes.

- *(b) Difficulties of articulation with the full programme*

This is mainly a problem for those distance education activities that are not complete in themselves (unlike the Certificates in Education<sup>3</sup>). Students could successfully challenge the University at home, only to find that there was no room for them to continue at a campus. This has been particularly difficult for students taking Law courses, since there is a very strict quota for entry to the degree programme, which has precluded expansion in numbers for many years. The Faculty of Social Sciences has meanwhile expanded very swiftly, but still finds it impossible to guarantee a place for all qualified Challenge applicants.

- *(c) Avoiding specifically distance education*

The point here is an unfortunate consequence of the centrality of UWIDITE to the University's distance education activity so far. UWIDITE is a teleconferencing device. This means that a person familiar with lecturing to students on campus can easily devote the time allotted on the system to the same sort of activity. The UWIDITE staff continually tried to offer training and to wean teachers away from the lecture-format, but with little success. Very few lecturers know how to use the technology effectively. Much more time on the system has been scheduled than is the norm for teleconferencing support elsewhere for distance education (thus Certificate in Education courses began with 12 hours on the system for 20 on-campus, and later used about 18 hours for courses that take 39 hours face-to-face). Comparatively little attention was paid to the quality of the print materials for UWIDITE courses, or to their timely distribution. Little has been done to provide audio or video supports. What was initially a matter of necessity for doing things quickly and cheaply to get the experiment started has become institutionalized as the UWIDITE norm — inadequate written materials, and inappropriate use of the teleconferencing facility. Distance education has also suffered from a general lack of attention to monitoring the quality of pedagogy and other academic responsibilities.

- *(d) Failure to cost and finance distance education*

The University has often entered upon new initiatives in the hope that costs can somehow be covered within existing resources. A USAID grant permitted UWIDITE to begin, but little was done to clarify its continuing costs or to decide how to apportion them. Governments were never asked to begin sponsoring their students, in part because of the awkwardness of appearing to increase charges to the non-campus countries which were intended to be major beneficiaries of more extensive distance education. Students were charged at the rate for part-time on-campus students, which meant that the University was finding the bulk of the costs from its own resources: in effect, letting payments for on-campus students subsidize those at a distance.

- *(e) Incoherent administrative arrangements*

Distance education activities at UWI grew somewhat like Topsy, in an environment in which there is frequent change but, perhaps, little enthusiasm for rationalization. The result was that responsibilities were distributed almost at random. To take an extreme example, by 1995 the staff of the UWIDITE facility answered to one Pro-Vice-Chancellor (PVC) regarding the technical side of the operation, another for the programming, while a third chaired the Board for Distance Education which, by then, had final responsibility for planning activity. Resident Tutors in the non-campus countries, upon whom falls a large part of the administration of distance work, might well have to relate to three different campus faculties for the "same" course — a Challenge programme version might be based at one campus, the UWIDITE alternative at another, and there was a possibility that the local National College might be offering yet another version of the course that was the responsibility of a third campus. The same Resident Tutors, answerable *de jure* to the Director of the School of Continuing Studies, were also

heavily involved in administrative work for UWIDITE and in local co-ordination of the work of the Offices of University Services, and so answerable in fact to two other persons. While some of these complications are the growing pains of any multi-faceted organization, and reflect desirable synergies, it is also true that they could render a difficult job even harder.

- (f) *Failure to exploit links*

As UWIDITE developed, it provided a full-time interconnected network across the campuses and the rest of the region.<sup>4</sup> At one point, computer links permitted file transfer between campuses. But, for whatever reasons (some were technical problems created by the complexity of the network), what might appear to have been an opportunity for electronic communication throughout the University and its wider constituency has not yet materialized. During a hurricane, UWIDITE can sometimes get news out; administrative meetings are held, including a few meetings of significant committees; but the regular message sessions are virtually all housing-keeping for the University Centres and UWIDITE rather than a way of getting information across the region quickly and at no apparent cost, and computer links were abandoned until the latest CDB project, which promises to provide inter-site e-mail and Internet access.

## II — Policy in the New Dispensation

Having sketched the situation and some of its problems before the dual mode decision, let us look briefly at the official policy position subsequent not only to the UAC endorsement of the general thrust of the Renwick Report (Renwick, Shale, & Rao, 1992), but to the reconfiguration of responsibilities brought about by the University's acceptance of the 1994 report on Governance (Nicholls & Head, 1994), and its implementation from 1 August 1996.

### *Organization of distance education*

Policy regarding provision of distance education is in the hands of the Board for Non-Campus Countries and Distance Education, chaired by a PVC. Statute 21C governing the Board has been approved. The fundamental commitment to dual mode status was made by UAC and remains the guiding light for the new Board, as it was for its predecessor Board for Distance Education (set up by the 1992 UAC decision). This commitment addresses the first problem discussed above by making distance education work central to the University's regular activity; as much part of a person's duties as traditional lecturing; as much part of a department's responsibilities as on-campus courses. It also gives it "visibility" within the overall University administration in a way lacking before the creation of the Board for Distance Education. The new Board also puts two other important aspects of the University's work in the spotlight consistently for the first time: Continuing Studies, and the University's support for development within the regional tertiary education sector. But while distance education has been formally baptized and adopted, there remains, as we shall note below, a problem of "ownership."

Under the Board, there is a Distance Education Centre (DEC) with a Director who is based at Cave Hill. The Centre is responsible for all aspects of mounting distance education programmes, and thus unites control of the telecommunications system (UWIDITE) with the work of materials production and marketing of programmes. The DEC has a presence at each campus; one of its members will serve as Campus Co-ordinator for distance education at Mona and St Augustine. Each campus unit of the DEC is staffed to provide support for curriculum development and materials production. The DEC is intended to bring together all the distance education activity at each campus and to call upon other campus resources in the pursuit of its objectives, in particular to work closely with the Faculty of Education with respect to staff training in curriculum development and materials production; the instructional development units on aspects of staff training; various printing facilities with respect to materials production; and the registries and bursaries with respect to student matters. We can see here an attempt to rationalize the administrative structures for distance education.

The academic content of distance education provision is in the hands of the faculties. Since the 1992 UAC decision, each faculty has had a Deputy Dean for Outreach and Distance Education who serves as a liaison between the faculty and the DEC.<sup>5</sup> While the aim is to make course preparation a shared, cross-campus matter as far as possible, each course and programme will be associated with a particular campus for each of various distinct activities, including:

- course writing;
- course delivery;

- admission into a course or programme;
- course assessment.

It is not required that the same campus be identified for each of these activities for any particular course or programme. It is hoped that the team-spirit so engendered will help to preserve regional equivalences in both campus-based programmes and in distance education, at a time when final responsibility for undergraduate courses and programmes has been devolved to the individual campuses. One responsibility consequent upon this division of labour is to coordinate admissions to distance education in such a way that students are able to complete programmes they start, and thus to address part of the articulation problem noted above.

The earlier Board for Distance Education set up two advisory committees — for training, and for technical guidance — and various working groups on financial questions. The new Board and the DEC will have to decide how best to obtain the assistance needed in these and other areas.

The DEC has budgeted for a research, training, and evaluation officer. It will institute procedures for the regular monitoring of its services, over and above whatever monitoring of teaching quality will be provided by the faculties.

#### *Status of distance education students and programmes*

Distance education students are full members of the University, as defined by the relevant statute. Entry requirements for distance education University programmes are the same as for on-campus students. There is no general requirement for residence for distance education students, although when there is an educational reason for requiring on-campus study a faculty may impose such a requirement.

Courses in distance education University programmes are parallel to those offered on one or more campuses. They will generally be developed by regular members of the University staff, although it is possible that materials developed elsewhere may be incorporated or adapted.

Faculty regulations governing programmes will be revised so that it is possible for students to transfer, without hindrance, between the same programme at different campuses or in distance education mode. This, obviously, is an attempt to deal with one aspect of the articulation problem discussed above.

Examination procedures in University distance education courses are, in general, parallel to the on-campus companion course. General examination regulations apply to University distance education courses.

#### *Course development system*

Workshops and informal networking with faculties have produced an initial set of courses and programmes for development. Approval of new courses and programmes parallels that for on-campus offerings.

The choice of media for courses has been constrained by budgetary limitations. Detailed decisions will be made on a course-by-course basis, but the emphasis, in general, is on print, with local tutorial support. Audio or video tapes, computer programs and other means may also be used, together with interactive sessions on UWIDITE. These policy decisions should go far to overcome the problem identified above of the University having dodged distance education methods and procedures through overemphasis on talking on UWIDITE. For some members of the University, however, they fail to take adequate account of the potentialities offered by the Internet.

#### *Student support system*

Registration of students is intended to be handled by Cave Hill, for Eastern Caribbean non-campus country distance education students, and by Mona for the rest. Distance education students residing in a campus country will be handled by the respective campus registry. A student advisor has been budgeted for.

Recommendations have been made concerning the role of Resident Tutors and others in supporting students and distance education more generally. Similar recommendations have been made concerning the role of local tutors and how to recruit them. It remains to be seen how faculties will eventually employ such local assistance - the intensive quasi-campus-lecturer role played in many Challenge contexts can hardly survive in the much more diversified world of distance education degrees in all the contributing countries, much less in the hoped-for incorporation of the Caribbean diaspora in North America and the United Kingdom.

*Staffing, staff development and training*

Staffing and budgets allocated to the Distance Education Centre, UWIDITE, and Challenge have been unified from 1996. This merger puts most University distance education under one roof, but it leaves out, for example, postgraduate programmes in Agriculture which are presently run completely by the Continuing Education Programme in Agricultural Technology (CEPAT).

A policy framework for training, in particular using CDB loan resources, has been agreed. Some fellowships have also been obtained from Cable and Wireless companies for this purpose. The Faculty of Education has considered how it can contribute to training in distance education. As programming develops, it is expected that training will become more directed, and less a matter of individual initiative, as indeed is expected more generally throughout the University.

It has been agreed that work in distance education will be recognized in the assessment of staff for tenure and promotion. The precise terms for this have still to be decided between the faculties and the University. One particular undecided issue is whether work on course materials should be seen as falling under pedagogy or under research, scholarship, and publication.

It has been urged by the Board that contracts for new teaching staff throughout the University should clearly indicate their responsibility for participating in the University's distance education activity.

*Finance*

The long-term funding of distance education has yet to be finally determined. Provisional decisions regarding student fees have been made for 1996/97. Work is progressing on an overall costing of distance education, to feed into longer-term policies on fees for distance education students.

**III — Remaining Problems**

While these various policies have attempted to present a coherent and feasible approach to distance education, and in doing so to deal with the problems examined earlier, there remain some important uncertainties and critical issues. The following are among those worthy of consideration:

*"Ownership" of distance education*

The initial UWIDITE phase dealt with people on a consultancy basis: producing materials and teaching on the system was a voluntary, but paid extra — really little different from undertaking some teaching for another institution on the side. Given that the payment was pretty meagre, activity was largely interest-driven. Another type of consequence was that work on UWIDITE was not counted for purposes of determining teaching load or staff-student ratios, although in some cases substantial numbers were involved (so, for example, Certificate in Education programmes at Mona were abandoned on-campus but retained via UWIDITE). In moving to formal dual mode status, distance education work becomes a potential part of anyone's regular teaching duties, but given that most have had no exposure to it in any form, and little conception of its potential value in achieving either their own or the University's objectives, there was, and remains, considerable inertia to be overcome.<sup>6</sup>

This lack of interest is aggravated by the University's continuing decentralization. Most UWIDITE programmes were based at Mona, thereby often creating resentment at other campuses where it was plausible to think that people had not been given a chance to participate. But at least this meant that some recognizable departmental grouping was responsible for the programme (admissions, content, delivery, assessment, etc.), even if the activity was somewhat peripheral to its regular work. The Governance Report of 1994 recommended formal recognition of the particularist practices of the preceding years, where programmes were becoming more and more a purely campus affair. As Dr. Perraton, the Educational Planner provided by the CDB grant, never tired of reminding the University, this structure is diametrically opposed to what is required for planning for distance education of the kind endorsed by the University. Distance education programmes are intended to be University programmes, not campus-specific, but the only groupings that work together are tied to a campus. We have already noted the problems of transfer that have at least been tackled in principle.

The DEC's approach to the planning aspect of this problem has been to convene cross-faculty meetings of Deans or Deputy Deans to encourage the development of shared programmes. It has, in effect, had to institute mechanisms for genuine cross-campus dialogue, just as Governance dispenses with the last vestiges of previous

structures. It is much too early to judge the extent to which such cross-campus planning will result in fully dispersed programmes, but a priori there are obvious grounds for suspecting that distance education programmes will continue to be mainly focussed at one or another campus.

One challenge for the new Board for Non-Campus Countries and Distance Education is to find ways of moving the culture of teaching at UWI away from the highly individualistic and proprietorial towards a collaborative team approach. The fact that more and more courses are being offered by staff in other tertiary level institutions may provide the opportunity for UWI staff to develop working relationships that facilitate this change. It would redound to the advantage of distance education where, at the moment, too many staff are inclined to think that they can only use material they have themselves written and controlled.

### *Budgeting for distance*

By insisting that distance education programmes are neither campus-specific nor, in effect, a fourth campus, the University has created another set of problems relating to ownership, in this case based on the financing of its activity. The basic idea behind its costings is that a campus' costs are charged to the students attending it (15%, moving to 20%), and through them to the governments that sponsor them (85%, moving to 80%). If a campus puts on a programme then charges can be made straightforwardly; the campus' administrative costs can likewise be apportioned among its students. But distance education students are not charged to governments; they are not simply attached to a campus (someone must of course admit them, but the resources used in teaching them are theoretically dispersed among the campuses). Where in all this is there a motivation for anyone to have distance education students, or spend money processing them? Funding schemes that embody campus country control may permit, but certainly do not underwrite, policies of wider coverage.

The Educational Planner envisaged one solution here, in terms of the DEC receiving at least a proportion of the fees paid, by or on behalf of, distance education students, and then itself paying for the services it uses from the various campuses. Given the regularization of distance education teaching entailed by dual mode, this payment would not be on a personal level, but rather a payment to the department or other entity concerned. But given that staff costs otherwise derive from campus (or Centre) budgets, this would seem to treat the DEC as financially a fourth (or fifth) campus. That might not matter, however, since it is not at the financial level that the University has rejected the extra campus idea but in terms of *academic* programming, rules, and responsibilities. But it also seems to conflict with the fundamental idea of dual mode that distance programmes should be fully integrated into on-campus work. Just as a department could not expect to be paid extra to offer a different course on campus, so it ought not to be paid for its distance work.

Instead of attempting to treat distance education students in the same way as on-campus students who are charged to their respective governments, we might be better advised to delink government subventions from student numbers more generally. In effect, the Vice-Chancellor's recent commitment to no real increase in costs to contributing countries, while seeking annual increases in enrollment, could be seen in this light. We do not need to charge for so many students at such and such an economic cost. We could say simply, "give us so much and we will process at least so many students." The tuition fees charged directly to students would then provide an incentive to process more than the number needed under the old calculation, and for distance education those fees could go directly towards further distance education development. A problem with this approach is that it does not obviously provide for changing numbers of students from different territories; but perhaps a rough formula could be worked out that would shift any country's contribution as the proportion of its nationals being processed shifted by an agreed amount.

However this is resolved, there would remain a tricky, but not insoluble problem of coordinating planning of programmes and resource allocation to take account of both central, DEC needs and campus-specific demands. A thought experiment that might prove enlightening (and even realistic when governments discover that distance education can prove cheaper) would be to imagine that the three campuses switched entirely to distance modality. The DEC would then have to find the resources to provide and offer programmes from among personnel arbitrarily scattered among three major sites (and why not further dispersed to other agreeable places?). It is very doubtful that it would find a need for all the full-time academics the University currently employs, although clearly the campus countries would need a lot of what is elsewhere regarded as local tutorial support. Campus faculty or academic boards would have no defensible role, beyond ad hoc sub-committees that represent those members of a University body that happen to be in one place rather than another. Such a diminution of campus significance can be found in some dispersed Australian universities that have taken dual mode seriously. Our predicament is, as usual, the resultant of the divisive political histories of the separate islands.

While solutions to these problems are hard to discern, it does seem that the funding formula for the University in general needs further refinement, and that despite greater campus autonomy it may be necessary to exert greater central control over the modalities to be used for its different programmes. What goes into "Intermediate Ecology," say, may be up to each campus department, but whether the course is offered in a particular year at each campus or instead by distance may have to be subject to central control.

### *Resources*

It is one thing to prepare and teach a course on campus, it is another to produce course guides and readers for distance education students studying the same content. The Educational Planner estimated that each regular one-semester course would cost about US\$15,000 to be developed for distance education. The earlier work on the CDB-funded expansion of distance education was premised on the availability of separate funds to cover these costs — basically funds for departments to find part-time replacements for their staff who would devote roughly two months' work to the preparation of course materials, in collaboration with an instructional designer and editor.<sup>7</sup> While there was evidence, in piloting programme budgeting, for instance, that many staff members were not even meeting the University's comparatively generous contact-hour norms, it was hoped that the availability of extra funds would allow the University to avoid what would seem a punitive approach to finding the resources needed to produce adequate distance education materials. Given the finite resources of the CDB loan, and the Vice-Chancellor's determination not to seek extra funds from the contributing governments, it now seems certain that virtually all new distance education work will have to be funded from existing resources, which is to say as either an additional use or a redeployment of existing resources. We have already adverted to the obstacles in the way of planning to redeploy by means of distance education, so it is likely that several people will find distance work thrust on them as an extra task. There is some recognition that this, among other developments, will require the University to pay much greater attention to spelling out what it regards as adequate levels of activity, but this is likely to be a highly contentious issue, especially for the staff unions. It is unfortunate, to say the least, that an expanded thrust in distance education should have to occur at the centre of such controversy.

### *Remaining administrative awkwardness*

While most campus resources for distance education have now been located under one roof, there is still an inelegant division of responsibilities for the Resident Tutors. On the one hand, they are formally members of the School of Continuing Studies, and thus answerable to its Director but, on the other, a large and ever increasing part of their work is concerned with servicing distance education in many respects (not only handling local students and their problems, but also helping to identify local tutors and, in some cases, participating in the course teams responsible for the actual courses). For these tasks they have to be answerable, in fact if not in administrative theory, to the Director of the Distance Education Centre. Both Directors are, of course, under the PVC who chairs the Board, and no doubt good working relations will be found. But the point remains that the situation is potentially awkward.

The writers of the Governance Report envisaged a different future, one in which the nature, and indeed the very existence, of the School of Continuing Studies would be radically rethought. Their vision, in which the emphasis lies firmly in how the University can contribute to the development of local institutions, rather than being the site for possibly competing offerings, would still result in a similar division of responsibilities for Resident Tutors (they would be formally incorporated into the unit cooperating with tertiary level institutions, but would still have to answer to the DEC for distance education work), unless one were to aim for some sort of coalescence of UWI distance education with courses divested to other tertiary institutions. These matters are perhaps too far in the future and too nebulous for us to see yet what might be desirable, though the middle-range goals of the School of Continuing Studies are certainly high on the agenda of the new Board.

### *Mismatch with regional priorities*

Various attempts have been made to estimate regional demand for education and training. For quite understandable reasons, the governments that fund the University have pressured it to relinquish lower-level teaching (the Natural Sciences "preliminary year," an *ersatz* 'A' level offering; remedial work in Use of English; even some level 1 courses). Some have foreseen a time when its major teaching activity would be postgraduate. One of the major reasons for this is the comparative cost of degree and sub-degree teaching at the University and at other national institutions. There is also an enormous demand for sub-degree training, particularly in less academic areas such as business and the use of computers (cf. World Bank, 1993, ch. VI, corroborated in a needs assessment undertaken in 1994/95 for the CDB loan). But what has happened is that the only region-wide system of distance education has been located at the University and has, without a great deal of reflection, adopted

typical University-level work as its major thrust. The earlier UWIDITE work was virtually all at Certificate level; the new thrust is primarily at degree level. But the largest pool of unsatisfied demand is almost certainly at, or below, rather than above Certificate level training, or in some cases incommensurable with it — mid-life upgrading, re-training, etc. for people with or without degrees. This sort of training has been mainly the preserve, to the extent that it has been offered by the University at all, of the School of Continuing Studies; but as such, it has been an autonomous exercise, not a reflection of the rest of the work of the University. It will be interesting to see whether an administrative structure that brings together the School of Continuing Studies with the Distance Education Centre and the unit for tertiary level institutions, can lead to greater symbiosis and a realization of the potential economies of scale that might result from region-wide collaborative lower-level training in a distance education modality.

### *Empowerment versus control*

Another even more speculative point connects with the empowerment versus control dialectic referred to earlier. The University could contribute to the region by facilitating the growth of tertiary level institutions (TLIs), encouraging them to teach its programmes to as high a level as possible. It could contribute to the region by providing as many of its programmes as possible in distance mode. The one course seeks to empower local institutions (in campus and non-campus countries alike); the other allows the University to retain control. The first is ultimately an auto-destruct mode for much of the present University, the second a potential retrenchment. It is of course logically possible to envisage some way of combining these thrusts--course teams already include UWI staff not in the department offering the course, so they could well include staff from TLIs; one faculty has suggested divesting its whole distance education operation to an affiliated institution (the Mona Institute of Business), so one might envisage franchizing distance education programmes to a TLI. But for all that, the tendency is for distance education to be conceptualized *within* the University, and its various administrative and authority structures are organically connected to the rest of the University. A question for future historians is whether the wisest allocation of the region's resources is to distance education, especially of the kind we are targetting, or to the more rapid expansion of other tertiary institutions.

### *The gap between policy and implementation*

A final cautionary remark concerns the pervasive gap between what the University has agreed and what its agents actually do. Decisions are overlooked, ignored, or obstructed. The tradition of collegial committees such as UAC is that unanimity appears to reign, but this often conceals diametrically opposed and unreconciled viewpoints. It will be interesting to see whether the new structures achieve any greater self-discipline. There is within the University much enthusiasm for the potential of greater use of distance education, and of more open and empowering relationships generally. Let us hope that the new structures can deliver at least some of these benefits.

---

## NOTES

1. The author wishes to thank Professor W.K. Marshall, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Non-Campus Countries and Distance Education, and Dr Claudia Harvey, Director of the Distance Education Centre, for extensive and helpful comments; neither should be attributed the opinions expressed here. A reader for this journal also made useful suggestions. [Return to text](#).
2. For UWIDITE, there are two internal UWI documents, Lalor & Marrett, 1986, 1994, which contain a wealth of data. [Return to text](#)
3. Here too there were problems of articulation with the B.Ed. degree, but these problems were not specific to the distance education programme; they affected on-campus Certificates in the same way. [Return to text](#)
4. With a few exceptions, such as Belize, where phone linkages have to be made as required. It is hoped that the CDB-funded and long-overdue upgrade of the audio facilities will take care of these anomalies. [Return to text](#)
5. With the introduction of full-time Deans it is possible that outreach and distance education responsibilities will be incorporated in the Dean's own portfolio. [Return to text](#)
6. It may be worth noting that this paper ignores the remarkably inefficient communication system within the University. A far-reaching and radical decision to become dual mode was made in 1992, but very few faculties ever discussed it, before or after it was made, so it is perhaps not surprising that individual staff members are often



ignorant of and hostile to what it means. [Return to text](#)

7. Assumptions about the time involved were presented in BDE P.4 (1993/94); costings for course development were given in BDE P.4 (1994/95). The former paper is a comprehensive overview of policy issues as conceived by the Planner at the beginning of his work, BDE P.7 (1995/96) sums up his recommendations on the way forward at the end. [Return to text](#)

## References

Lalor, G. C., & Marrett, C. (1986). *Report on the University of the West Indies Distance Teaching Experiment*. Mona: UWI. .

Lalor, G. C., & Marrett, C. (1994). *UWIDITE report 1986-1993*. Mona: UWIDITE.

Nicholls, N. V., & Head, I. L. (1994). *A new structure: The regional university in the 1990s and beyond*. Mona: UWI

Renwick, W., Shale, D., & Rao, C. (1992). *Distance education at the University of the West Indies*. Vancouver: Commonwealth of Learning.

Sherlock, P., & Nettleford, R. (1990). *The University of the West Indies*. London: Macmillan Caribbean.

World Bank. (1993). *Caribbean region: Access, quality, and efficiency in education*. Washington D.C.: World Bank.

---

Return to [publications](#); return to [Home Page](#).

HTML prepared 6th January, 2000.

URL <http://www.uwichill.edu.bb/bnccde/epb/ccdepoldoc.html>