RE: Update on the OC Summer Programme and Improved Services to Students

Dear Students:

The period leading up to the start of this summer term has been a stressful one for many, if not all of us. For some students it has been a disappointing and painful experience to discover that the courses they wished to take this summer were not offered. For me, unfortunately I had to be the one to reject the requests for specific courses by these students. I assure you that this decision was not an easy one to make, and not one I wish to be forced to make again in the future.

In an attempt to avoid future occurrence of this summer the Department will be making some changes aimed at benefiting students in the new academic year. I take this opportunity therefore to: (a) explain the rationale for the selection of the summer courses; (b) outline implications for future practice by students; (c) present the Department’s strategy to assist those students who have one or two outstanding courses to complete their degree; and (d) steps by the Department to improve services to students.

Rationale for the selection of the summer courses:

1. The summer consists of only a six (6) week teaching period compared to a thirteen (13) week semester. It's conceivable therefore that (a) we cannot offer the full suite of semester courses during a summer period; and (b) not all courses designed for 13 weeks are best taught in 6 weeks, even if students could guarantee they would double their weekly hours of study.

2. Since we cannot offer all courses in the summer, the question to be answered is: "What should be the criterion used?" Students, regardless of the criterion used someone will be disappointed. In this case the criterion was: level 3 courses to facilitate completion and graduation of final year students. (NB: Final year students are persons at the stage of readiness to take level 3 courses). In addition the UWI foundation courses, which are requirements for completion of the degree, had to be offered to meet the criterion. Please note that level 2 courses were not offered as this level does not meet the criterion ‘final year’ course.
The criterion presumes of course that students take courses as intended /expected. That is, students completed all level one courses before moving to level 2 courses and these students are now ready to take the level 3 courses to complete their programme of study. It is now obvious, given the complaints and requests for overrides, that a number of students are not taking their courses as intended and subsequently were disappointed when they requested, and did not receive level 2 courses this semester to complete their study. I take this opportunity to dissuade students from this practice as it seriously affects the quality of their performance and ultimately the type of degree they receive. Failure to take courses in the sequence – levels 1 through 3 - places a student at a disadvantage because the basic concepts covered in lower level courses (1-2) to assist in better understanding of concepts at the higher level seriously affect their performance. I emphasize therefore that students must follow the programme structure and take required prerequisites to avoid disappointments in the future and to improve their academic performance.

**Implications for future practice by students:**

The Open Campus wants all its students to succeed. Failure to take courses in the sequence designed is of particular concern for the Open Campus at this time because it is important that we ensure that our students attain high academic standards when they graduate from our programmes. And it should be a serious concern for students as it holds implications for the academic quality of one’s degree. Students who disregard consideration for sequence/course levels designed to address gradation of difficulty and reiteration of concepts place themselves at a disadvantage and are likely to either fail or perform below their potential, thus resulting in low GPA and a weak degree that will later hinder their chances for further graduate studies. As a student you must therefore ask yourself, “Is it sufficient to just pass, or is it important to perform at my full potential to gain a high GPA?” The position of the Department is that decisions taken regarding the offering of courses in the summer will be influenced by the programme design.

**Department’s strategy to address students with one or two outstanding courses:**

Let me now put in perspective the decision taken, plans for assisting students with 1-2 courses to complete their studies and recommendations for the way forward:

- **In the case of Management Studies** - we offered all ten level 3 courses to facilitate completion by final year students to allow them to graduate this academic year. Students requiring 1-2 courses at level 2 to complete their programme of study will have the option to take these courses during semesters 1 and 2. A list of these courses is being compiled.

- **Accounting** - Students do not presently qualify to do level 3 courses until semester one of the new academic year 2010/11. Why? Any Accounting student who has completed all level 2 courses would have entered the programme prior to 2008/09, in which case their contract with the Open Campus was to transfer to the physical campuses. However, they now have the option to remain and join the 2008/09 cohort of students to take level 3 courses. If these students would now like to remain in the Open Campus programme they would now follow the schedule designed for the 2008/09 cohort, which makes them eligible to begin level 3 courses in semester one. *(NB: The 2008/09 cohort is the first group of students admitted to take the full Accounting degree. Students prior to 2008 were admitted with the understanding that they would transfer to the physical campus to do level 3 courses to complete their studies.)*

- **Education Programmes** – Education programmes are scheduled as yearlong programmes and therefore courses are initially scheduled for summer. Given the particular structure/design of these programmes students are required to take courses in a
particular sequence. This sequence allows students to take three courses during a semester and two in summer. Therefore if there are students requesting courses not offered during this summer it implies that they took more than the number of courses they were allowed to take in semesters one and two. It could also mean that they have omitted to take some important courses in the order in which they were sequenced to be taken. Courses taken out of sequence are therefore likely to result, as happened this summer, in students either having only one course, no course at all to take or a request to take more than two courses. Thus, students awaiting courses will be required to follow the sequence of the programme next year and take the course/s when next they are offered. These programmes are offered through the School of Education. See Handbook for regulations.

Steps to improve services to students:

The Undergraduate Programmes Department is committed to improving its services. We will begin by taking the following steps:

- Provide a schedule for the entire academic year for students at the start of the upcoming academic year, 2010/11. This means that all students will know the courses offered in semester 1, semester 2, and summer before they actually begin the academic year. It is essential that students follow the guidelines provided by the Department to avoid requests for overrides and a recurrence of this summer. This will allow students to plan their course of study and manage their time more efficiently. All programme schedules will be posted on the Department’s Web Page at: http://www.open.uwi.edu/prospective/undergraduate.php

- For the Department to be successful it also requires active and responsible students prepared to use the Academic Advising provided by the Department. This will also be placed on the Department’s Web Site for the start of the new academic year. This Web Site will be updated each semester and summer to provide the most current / updated academic information as well as orientation information for the each semester /summer. Students therefore need to make it regular practice to visit their virtual Department.

- In addition we are also concerned about the quality of instructional support received by our students and will therefore be monitoring our courses carefully to assess the quality of instruction provided to students online. This will allow the Department to make decisions in the best interest of its students.

- Finally, I take this opportunity to encourage all students to visit the Open Campus Web Site to ensure they keep informed on what is happening on their campus. Visit your virtual campus at: http://www.open.uwi.edu/

Sincere best wishes for a successful and rewarding academic future.