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**Understanding Best Practices in Higher Education Administration: Challenges,  
Constraints and Successes.**

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**BARBADOS  
WEST INDIES**

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**Understanding Best Practices in Higher Education Administration: Challenges, Constraints and Successes.**

Higher education goals are of utmost importance for all in today's societies. It is therefore required to achieve well being in all peoples and communities. However, understanding best practices in higher education administration, challenges, constraints, and successes must be born from a society's need within by making learning a crucial factor in nation's everyday lives. The current sociocultural context are changing and reshaping in the Caribbean region and the world in terms of demographics, the global economy, and technology. Hence, higher education must progressively be made available for all society and this must meet and fit a country's need to facilitate the "no child must be left behind" motto.

Best practice in higher education administration is looked at locally through our own strategic alliance in Trinidad and Tobago. This is fairly new and has quickly gained momentum and has transformed the tertiary education landscape. This is where the University of the West Indies – St. Augustine Campus (UWI) and the Cipriani College of Labour and Cooperative Studies signed off on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2006, to collaborate in Bachelor of Science Degree Programmes. This has proven to be fruitful as there are far more students enrolled in these programmes. In 2006, the Cipriani Labour College welcomed over 2,000 new students totalling over 2,580 students being registered and at UWI a new all time record of over 15,398 students in that same year.

Best practices are realized from strategic alliances which have brought on simple advantages such as library cooperation, cross registration, shared technology, the joint purchasing or sharing of goods and services, and faculty development. There are less problems, and easier access with mobility on each campus than ever before when it all comes down to an identification card to be shown to gain entry at the various campuses security gates and libraries.

There are many challenges and constraints that meet administrators of higher education. However, two of the most challenging are outlined, one there are a great number of administrators, experienced faculty, and staff that retire/resign and our colleges and universities are unprepared for this and are left with a void that have to be filled quickly by finding qualified replacements as the organization need to continue it's operation. Two, leadership and succession planning does not seem to be a widespread practice among tertiary institution in this region, as it becomes difficult to find new leaders or sometimes one may be hard to replace.

Constraints can be insufficient funding, untimely enrolment facilities or practices, and failure by the online registration technology. As oppose to universities and colleges in the United States coming out from my own personal experience do not waste time in enrolling new students, they do sign you up in a timely manner and not wait for a great number of people to sign up and to contact you after the deadline period or fail to contact you as we see in our own Trinidad and Tobago and failing to fix the online technology.

Successes in higher education can be realized when there is successful implementation of educational strategies that rely on mechanisms of funding, evaluation and monitoring, and feed-back loops to facilitate continued improvement and growth. The Labour College and UWI have seen increases in enrolment rates however, these institutions are aware of the endeavours or variables in the education environment that may have contributed to the climb mainly the free tertiary education offered by the

Trinidad and Tobago's government through the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses (GATE). UWI have assembled a task force of financiers to raise US \$300 million and both believe that they simply offer a better tertiary experience that is more rewarding and beneficial to students and that is making the statistical difference.

## Table of Contents

	Page
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Background/Literature Review</b>	<b>6, 7</b>
<b>Best Practices/Strategic Alliance</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Advantages of Best Practices</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Challenges</b>	<b>8, 9</b>
<b>Constraints</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Successes</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Benefits to students</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Limitations and Recommendation</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>11, 12</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>13</b>

Education is seen as the act or process of educating and its result produced by instruction, training, and study. However, adults for today are making tertiary education learning a continuous personal process. The organizers of this illustrious conference over the years are making a tremendous effort to find the best ways to organize this conference and it's workshops in adult learning and development for audiences with varying levels of expertise. The Association of Caribbean Higher Education Administrators (ACHEA) recognizes the need for an increase in the number of tertiary level institutions within the Caribbean region with organizational structures, administrative policies, and systems institutions to operate and function efficiently as instruction (instructional technology), training, and study are enhanced for our needs today. As the number of adults seeking higher education is growing, according to Merriam and Caffarella "It is commanding the attention of policy makers, business people and educators" (p. 1). For today there is a great diversity in study programmes to assist with this growing need. In the field of higher education it is affiliated with counselling, health, social work, human resource development, administration, and instructional technology and in such institutions as libraries, churches, business and industry. Along the lines of human capital development, information and communication, technological strategies, strategic marketing, financing strategies, quality assurance and accreditation. The theme for this conference is looking for answers in understanding best practices in higher education administration as it prepares to deal with its challenges, constraints, and successes for our future development in the Caribbean.

For today adults find that they must continue their learning past formal schooling in order to function at work, at home and in their communities. Hence, there is a greater need for new knowledge, for updating old information, and for retraining. At present adults are able to change their economic standing by qualifying themselves and make job changes. As education is the key to bolster or propel one into something new, hence this action is heeded for one in the future. Learning is a personal process which takes up part of an adult life and his/her societal context shape what an adult also needs and wants to learn, to a lesser extent, when and where learning takes place. According to adult educational writers Merriam and Caffarella as they observes, “Learning is intimately related to the world and affected by it” (p. 1). This clearly shows how close learning or education is to us all over the world (globalization) and what it does for each and every one of us. We all have seen that education has moved overtime from institutional building walls (classroom) to one’s living room or bedroom, because of the growing need and the increased long distance learners.

Apart from education structures, demographics were also looked at. Merriam and Caffarella stated that, “Demographics are about people, groups of people, and their respective characteristics” (p. 6). It does not matter where one is located all it comes down to is having access to a computer in the home as new delivery modalities are made possible, also evening and weekend classes and the opening up of Virtual Schools. The older adults, working adults and school leavers are the ones taking up the mantle to be better educated, hence one of the reason why the population is better educated than ever before. According to Dr. Fehnel – higher education consultant, “In America, working adults contribute the largest segment of higher education, while residential undergraduate students account for less than 25% of the current enrolment in higher education” (p. 2).

We can also relate to this surge as we see it also happening in the Caribbean. Higher education is indeed very expensive and there are ways which to ease the burden for access as participation rates are increasing. Such as the government assistance as in the case for Trinidad and Tobago through the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses (GATE), awarding scholarships or contributing to part of the payment of tuition fees, this greatly contributed to the increased enrolment rates.

### **Strategic Alliances and Partnerships**

There is a growing need for Strategic Alliances and Partnerships for higher education in preference to mergers of universities and colleges. Mergers are seen as static and irreversible as oppose to a strategic alliances which are seen as fluid, temporary, focused on a set of understanding and covenants between two or more complimentary learning organizations. These characteristics of strategic alliances constitute a component of best practices. However, according to Dr. Fehnel “Arguably two of the foremost authorities on higher education mergers, James Martin and James Samuel, have confessed that they were wrong in arguing the case for mergers in their 1994 book on this subject and have switched to arguing the case for partnerships and strategic alliances” (p. 3 & 4). They have also predicted that over the next decade strategic alliances will outnumber mergers 20 to 1. Without a doubt partnerships and strategic alliances helps us mange higher education in the changing global environment. With its characteristics outlined earlier it is also cheaper, much more affordable, and more accessible and it’s used on each demand.

Right here on our shores in Trinidad and Tobago the University of the West Indies – St. Augustine Campus and the Cipriani College of Labour and Cooperative

Studies signed a memorandum of understanding on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2006 to collaborate in Bachelor of Science Degree Programmes (Newsday p. 23). This have since proven to be very successful as enrolment rates at the Cipriani Labour College rose to 2,500 in 2006/2007 as oppose to 1,750 in 2005/2006 and 1,100 in 2004/2005 (Cipri p. 12). Also St. Augustine beats Mona in enrolment, as enrolment at UWI Mona grew by six percent in the academic year 2005/2006 to reach an all time high 15, 398, its student population was surpassed by the Trinidad and Tobago's St. Augustine Campus (Express p. 31). Also Cipriani went further and signed partnerships with the National Labor College (NLC catalog p. 17) and Munroe College both in the United States (myself being a recent graduate at the NLC).

### **Advantages of Best Practices**

Best practices are realized from strategic alliances which have brought on simple advantages. Such as library corporation, cross registration or joint enrolment agreements, shared technology, the joint purchasing or sharing of goods and services, and faculty development. There are less problems and easier access with mobility on each campus than ever before. It all comes down to an identification card to be shown to gain entry at the various campuses security gates and libraries, have been successful. Another advantage of best practice which benefited students is that they can transfer up to fifteen to seventy credits from these partnerships toward the requirement in their major for a Bachelor of Arts Degree.



## **Challenges**

There are many challenges and constraints that the administrators of higher education have to deal with. However, there are two main challenges that bring about major concerns. The first of these challenges are that there are a great number of administrators, experienced faculty/staff that are retired or resigned or are in the process of doing so. According to Cipri, The Caribbean Association of Tertiary Institutions (ACTI) President outlined two challenges in the region, “One is that as more of our administrators and experienced faculty and staff retire, our colleges are scrambling to find qualified replacements for these outgoing staff” (p. 23). With this, our colleges and universities are unprepared and are left with a void that has to be filled quickly by finding qualified replacements as the organization need to continue it’s operation. To help solve this dilemma an action plan must be put in place in the event for things going the other way. Records must be kept of names of other staff and faculty of persons who can be sourced at short noticed. Secondly, leadership and succession planning does not seems to be a widespread practice among tertiary institution in this region, as it becomes difficult to find new leaders or sometimes one may be hard to replace. According to Cipri, “Dr. Roosevelt Williams stated that “Tertiary institutions throughout the region are finding it very difficult to find qualified and suitable personnel to lead and effectively manage those institutions for which they are responsible and that some are convinced that a vacuum of leadership exists or is best threatened” (p. 23).

## **Constraints**

In addition to the above challenges, it is evident that there are constraints which are hindering the progress of the administrators. Constraints can be insufficient funding,

untimely facilities/practices, and failure be the online registration technology. As oppose to universities and colleges in the United States of America, from my personal experience, those administrators do not waste time in enrolling new students. Sign ups are done in a timely manner, with each class set to go regardless of the number of students enrolled for the class. If there are any changes, students are contacted prior the deadline period and are not failed to be contacted like what we see taking place in our system in Trinidad and Tobago. As for today globalization is an important aspect of our day to day functioning hence the online registration is a crucial integration into our system. It saves time and most people do have computers in their homes hence one can apply online at their own convenience.

### **Success**

Successes in higher education can be realized when there is successful implementation of educational strategies that rely on mechanism of funding, evaluation and monitoring, and feed-back loops to facilitate continued improvement and growth. The Labour College and UWI have seen increases in enrolment rates however, these institutions are aware of the endeavours or variables in the education environment that may have contributed to the climb mainly the free tertiary education offered by the Trinidad and Tobago's government through the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses (GATE). UWI have assembled a task force of financiers to raise US \$300 million (Express p. 31) and both believe that they simply offer a better tertiary experience that is more rewarding and beneficial to students and that is making the statistical difference. Success also comes from strategic alliances that work for students when

credits can be transferred to assist one in attaining a Bachelor of Arts Degree and this saves time and money as well.

### **Benefits to students**

Comfortable and properly laid out environments will make it worthwhile for students to study and apply for a university place. Administrators must recognize this and start making enrolment procedures less difficult and allow more students to apply by way of online methods and have the best face to face methods. Students are also customers and wish to have access to the best product and assistance or they will go somewhere else. Stories were told of how UWI treats students, I must say that I personally had fears of applying at UWI for a degree programme, but I did so at Masters level and it had the same untimely information being passed on but, I must say that at registration I was greatly assisted in person, as I could not apply online because there was a failure in the online technology.

### **Limitation and Recommendation**

There must be an awareness of the challenges and constraints as well as successes which must be taken noticed of for proper implementation and management of higher education. Higher education is of a sensitive nature and it's for changes in societies advancement of our human capital development, human resources, information and communication, technology, marketing and financial strategies. We must become better educational providers and administrators for the future of our Caribbean in this global network. As we look towards the future positive effects of globalization include the need for on-going education and training programmes for staff and faculty to keep up with the

changes in the environment. Set timely goals that will take action on filling posts that will become vacant from time to time and with implementing succession plans that meets the needs of leadership and minimizing square pegs in round holes syndrome.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, we in this part of the region must make higher education a constant part of our lives. There must be realistic moves to enable us to transform our own higher education policies as administrators must collectively work towards quality assurance as they address the challenges and constraints found in administering higher education. The success that already exists in higher education must be enhanced upon for the future development. As ACHEA continues to host these types of conferences they recognize that there is work to be done by the administrators in higher education and all is not lost and it is worth saving. Education is an attitude towards life – an ability to see and understand problems, solve them and to utilize information and forces for the best solutions of life's problems.

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