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Reconsidering Access: Using Specific Impact Ranking Metrics to Manage Access in Conventional and Open Higher Education

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Abstract: This paper considers the widening access and participation agenda, its implications for higher education institutions (HEIs) and contends that it must be underpinned by strategic measurement and monitoring. Access is viewed through the following lenses: (i) supporting participation, and (ii) facilitating equity. Using mixed methods, the paper draws on data from The University of the West Indies (UWI) and provides examples from key plans and initiatives over 20 years to showcase how the UWI has increased access. Concurrently, the need for more nuanced and complex datasets to assess the extent of equity is highlighted with metrics drawn from the *Times Higher Education University Impact Ranking*. The authors argue that the strategic use and management of data can promote public accountability associated with access and boost institutional reputation. However, universities will have to be innovative and accelerate measures to survive/thrive in the post-pandemic environment by identifying their institutional scope and "system of interest" in widening access.

Keywords: access and participation, equity, measurement and monitoring, the University of the West Indies, Caribbean.

Introduction

The onset of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in late 2019 and the subsequent declaration by the World Health Organization (WHO) of COVID-19 as a pandemic led to various forms of lockdowns designed to prevent the spread of the disease. Only essential businesses could remain open. By early-May 2020, face-to-face teaching at all levels for more than 1.2 billion students in over 190 countries, including more than 160 million students in Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC August 2020, 1), was replaced by remote learning which was designed to facilitate, in theory, access for continuity of education participation.

This momentous event highlighted issues of access and the urgency of the widening access agenda. This paper considers what access means and for whom, and contends that this agenda requires robust measurement and monitoring. Access is viewed through two lenses, viz. supporting participation and promoting equity. Consequently, policymakers and higher education administrators must consider population characteristics to determine access patterns and initiatives.

Utilising mixed methods, illustrations from key plans and examples of initiatives over a 20-year period, as well as student population data of The University of the West Indies (UWI), was examined. Additionally, data was extracted for the UWI Open Campus (OC), which is mandated to increase access for underserved populations, to show how it has implemented the widening participation

agenda. Moreover, as part of the access of equity project, key indicators developed by the *Times Higher Education University Impact Ranking* are considered as an intervention for additional data capture and tracking.

Overview of The University of the West Indies

The UWI, a regional university with five campuses that serve seventeen countries and British overseas dependent territories in the Commonwealth Caribbean, has developed an aggressive approach to ensure access to education. Since 1997, its strategic plans have emphasised increasing participation, serving diverse communities and populations by addressing enrolment deficits for persons with geographic, gender and special vulnerabilities, among other needs. Additionally, the Open Campus (OC), established in 2008, with fifty in-country site locations, offers multi-mode teaching (distance, blended, online and face-to-face) for pre-university, professional and continuing education programmes, as well as a three-tiered registration process to facilitate access to tertiary education. The OC emphasises its mission to be "open and available to all people who wish to reach their full potential" (OC website) and has introduced measures that demonstrates that "system of interest" (Lane 2017, 279).

Socioeconomic Profile of the Region

Addressing the issue of access requires understanding socioeconomic realities as changes in economic growth can impact the quality of life for certain sectors of the population. Significant regional vulnerabilities include exposure to natural and manmade disasters, limited economic diversification, high public indebtedness and small open and trade dependent economies that result in low economic growth, and high unemployment and underemployment especially, among youth and women. Other forms of exclusion include ethnicity, race, identity and sexual orientation, disability, migrant status, and nationality, among others. Since these vulnerabilities foster poverty and disrupt the educational pursuits of young people, public policies and interventions that promote inclusive and resilient growth are required.

Concomitantly, the region is experiencing a decline in fertility and a reduction in mortality, leading to fewer people under the age of 20 and a growing older population. The contributing countries of the UWI is likely to experience a 15.3% increase in population between 2005 and 2030. The economically active population increased as did median age (see Table 1). The higher education sector must respond as the focus shifts from the traditional student and consider lifelong learning in different formats while also bearing in mind, inadequate Information Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure and low connectivity, particularly, for various socioeconomic, geographically isolated, underserved populations (CEPAL, OECD & CAF, 2020, n.p.).

Table 1: Demographic data — Caribbean

	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030
Population growth[1] ('000)	39746	41217	42622	43532	44806	45829
Economically active population (15-64) ('000) [2]	25441	26770	27908	28484	29350	29742
Median Age[3]	27.8	28.8	30.2	31.9	33.3	34.7

Source: UN Population Database.

[1] UWI-17-, Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bermuda, The British Virgin Islands, The Cayman Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, and Turks and Caicos.

[2] Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Grenada, Jamaica, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago.

[3]Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Grenada, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago.

Regionally, economic growth contracted by 0.6% per year on average over the period 2014–2019 (IMF Jan 2020 and ECLAC Dec 2019). As GDP is expected to further contract, fewer resources will be available for public expenditure including for the education sector thereby slowing the development process and shared prosperity (CDB 2016, 22). Since gross enrolment ratios (GER) for tertiary education in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), declined from 116.05% in 2005 to 108.73% in 2018 (UIS, 2020) (see Table 2), "safeguarding financing for education" so as not to exacerbate "inequalities in access to education" (ECLAC Aug 2020, 16) must be at the forefront of government policies to facilitate social and economic recovery.

Table 2: Gross Enrolment Ratios

Country	2005	2018	Country	2005	2018
UWI Contributing Countries			*Other*		
Anguilla	113.4	..	Australia	102.7	100.1
Antigua and Barbuda	..	105.0	Canada	97.3	101.5
Bahamas	100.4	81.3	China	..	100.2
Barbados	96.1	99.3	Cuba	101.1	101.9
Belize	113.2	111.7	Germany	103.1	103.8
Bermuda	97.5	..	Ghana	86.5	103.5
British Virgin Islands	112.3	102.5	Indonesia	107.9	106.4
Dominica	91.4	..	Malaysia	99.9	..
Grenada	103.2	106.8	New Zealand	99.7	101.0
Jamaica	..	91.0	South Africa	105.9	98.5
Montserrat	156.1	109.5	Turkey	103.1	94.9
Saint Kitts and Nevis	109.6	..	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	106.3	101.0
Saint Lucia	102.9	102.6	United States of America	101.8 (+)	101.2 (+)

Country	2005	2018	Country	2005	2018
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	118.1	113.4	Vietnam	97.7	110.5
Trinidad and Tobago	99.2 (+)	..			
Turks and Caicos Islands	80.9	116.5			
World	102.2	101.1	Latin America and the Caribbean	116.0	108.7
Small Island Developing States	99.7	118.4	Europe	101.7	101.0
			Northern America	101.4	101.2

Source: http://data.uis.unesco.org/#

+: National Estimation

Note: Number of students enrolled in a given level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the official school-age population corresponding to the same level of education. However, a high GER generally indicates a high degree of participation, whether the pupils belong to the official age group or not. A GER value approaching or exceeding 100% indicates that a country is, in principle, able to accommodate all of its school-age population, but it does not indicate the proportion already enrolled. The achievement of a GER of 100% is therefore a necessary but not sufficient condition for enrolling all eligible children in school (UIS).

Recognising the challenges in access, CARICOM (Caribbean Community), an inter-governmental organisation comprising fifteen small island states and five associated members, has been working to increase and democratise access to tertiary education. Its *Human Resource Development (HRD) Strategy 2030* emphasises access, participation, equity, quality, and relevance to redress the socio-economic deficits in education and broaden and democratise the education system. This vision aligns with SDG 4 of Agenda 2030: quality education for all. Strategic imperatives for the tertiary education sector include increasing enrolment to support priority development needs, reinforcing flexible pathways to facilitate learners' needs, and promoting inclusion and diversity (*CARICOM HRD Strategy 2030,* 2017, 42). They are expected to strengthen the access in equity agenda and foster socio-economic growth.

However, the impact of COVID-19 and the public policy response have exacerbated existing economic challenges for vulnerable population groups (International Banker, Dec 2020; IMF Oct 2020, xv; and ECLAC Aug 2020, 16). Low-income families, single parents, and mixed households[1] face reduced incomes (CARICOM et al. July 2020, 22). The levels of poverty and extreme poverty could increase and the impact on hunger could be significant (ECLAC and FAO June 2020, 20). HEIs will therefore have to consider how to attract and provide access to persons whose immediate concern may be livelihood security.

Methods

The authors made use of the sequential explanatory mixed methods design, consisting of two distinctive and interactive approaches as outlined by Creswell (2009). Quantitative data in the form of student population data for the UWI and its online campus (Open Campus) was collected and analysed over a 20-year period identifying changes in patterns in enrolment based on selected variables (e.g., campus, age, etc.). A qualitative case study approach was used to collect text data from strategic plans, policies and initiatives by the university to determine access projects and activities. The results of the two approaches were subsequently interpreted to obtain a more comprehensive

view of the research problem, i.e., measures that promote access and support equity and highlight the importance of data monitoring to ensure equitable participation.

Overview of the Concept of Access

The concept of widening access is multidimensional and includes barriers to participation, structural factors, individual agency, building resilience, and institutional practices. In the widening access discourse, attention is drawn to non-traditional students and those who constitute this group. Cotton, Nash and Kneale (2017) note that they include first generation students, mature students, disabled students, single parents, students from low-income families, and minority ethnic groups as well as migrants and refugees, indigenous persons and, in the Caribbean, young males.

Focus on widening access entails reasonable equal opportunity for persons to access higher education (Clifford et al.2012) while others like Tikly and Barret (2011) and Alexander and Hlalele (2012) emphasise the notion of 'parity of participation' and reducing socially created and reinforced differences in privileges and material advantages of some to the detriment of others. Drawing on the concept of social and cultural capital by Bourdieu (1986) that aids in reproducing and enabling hierarchies, Driscoll (2013) highlights the actual or potential resources individuals require to support their tertiary education pursuits including their ability to finance direct and indirect costs. This supports the view of Alexander and Hlalele (2012, 487) that access and participation cannot be isolated from "broader societal changes and constitutional contexts." Other areas of focus include a resilience approach and institutional initiatives related to retention and completion (Cotton, Nash & Kneale 2017; Prodan et al. 2015; Ziderman 2013).

The authors of this paper concur with the perspective of access advanced by Deller, Kaufman and Tamburri (2019, 6) and Prodan et al. (2015, 537), which they believe offers insight into the institutional approach adopted. These authors conceptualise access in the following ways:

i. growth model focuses on increasing the capacity of the system to accommodate an increasing number of students who want to attend college/university

ii. equity of access model focuses on which students are — and which are not — taking part in higher education or gaining entry.

Adoption of these models will provide acute insight into the type of access initiatives and help identify the use of strategic indicators. HEIs that measure access in terms of the growth model focus on enrolment rates and utilise additional parameters such as gender, nationality, age, first-generation, income, and disability that introduce layers of insight into marginalised or under-represented groups within the institution. For the equity of access model, attention is focussed on under-represented groups.

Global and Regional Policy Perspectives

The introduction of widening participation policies and initiatives since the 1970s, a result of labour-market oriented logic and equity of opportunity philosophies (Détourbe & Goastellec 2018, 1), has led to the expansion of post-secondary and tertiary education (PSTE). In the CARICOM region, the emphasis began to shift from a regional university and national PSTEs to private and offshore institutions which offer courses or programmes approved for delivery to students at a location outside of the country of an HEI's main campus through cooperation with an international partner. This dual

approach is perceived as an efficient means of fostering access to quality programmes and, simultaneously, economic, and social development through development of human capital.

From the 1990s, the multilateral agenda was designed to address global challenges including, poverty, inequality, human rights, education, and environmental degradation among others. Lane (2017, 275) noted that "Education for All has been a concept at the heart of international development since 1990 and has found its latest instantiation within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as SDG 4, 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'". Of the ten targets listed for SDG4, two are integral to access:

i. Ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational, and tertiary education, including university

ii. Eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and children in vulnerable situations.

Since 1993, CARICOM has emphasised access and participation in tertiary education. The *Future of Education* (1993, 22-23), the first regional educational policy document, stressed developing communication and technologies, improving access, and utilising open learning strategies to deliver tertiary instruction. The subsequent human resource development policy in 1997 highlighted the imperative of increased access to education and training and critically set an enrolment target of at least 15% of the post-secondary age cohort in tertiary-level education by 2005 (CARICOM 1997). Some two decades later, CARICOM (2017, 25) indicated that "[s]everal Member States are also working towards or have exceeded the targets of 15% tertiary education participation." However, ECLAC (2019, 192) and CARICOM (2017, 30) have noted that enrolment rates in the CARICOM region remain at less than half the rate of developed countries. Recognising that such deficits will have a deleterious impact on the social and economic development of its Member States, CARICOM continues to emphasise increasing and democratising access to tertiary education to "strengthen equity in access to and provision of HRD [and] assure relevance of HRD to learners' needs and socio-economic demands" (*CARICOM HRD Strategy 2030,* 2017, 54). The Baseline Report for the *CARICOM Human Resource Development 2030 Strategy* has recommended targets for measuring access and participation for the tertiary education sector (see Table 3).

Table 3: Regional baselines — access and participation targets

Indicator	Regional Baseline	Regional Indicative Targets
Percentage of students enrolled in STEM programmes at the tertiary education level[1]	37.96%	50%
Gender Parity Index at tertiary level[2]	2.17	1

Source: CARICOM 2019, 8, 10, 52-54.

[1] The CARICOM Member States for which data were aggregated were: The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, British Virgin Islands, Guyana, Montserrat, St Kitts, St Lucia, Trinidad and Tobago, and Turks and Caicos Islands.

[2] The CARICOM Member States for which data were aggregated were: The Bahamas, Belize, British Virgin Islands, St Kitts, St Lucia, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago.

At the sub-regional level, the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), an eleven-member-country economic union, has developed education sector strategies since the early 1990s. Its *OECS Education Sector Strategy (OESS) 2012-2026* supports the widening access agenda and requires Member States to align their education sector strategies to the regional strategic imperative to increase provisions for tertiary and continuing education (OECS 2012, 14, 82-83).

Broadening of Access at the UWI

Demographic data for the UWI as a whole and for the OC specifically show variations in the student population. At the university-level, the undergraduate population was 78.3% of the total student population in 2008 and 71.5% in 2018. The share of OC enrolment was 11.9% in 2008 but with fluctuations over the subsequent ten-year period. While in 2012 and 2013, the OC share of total university enrolment fell to under 10%, overall university enrolment increased. The OC which started with an enrolment of 5,196 students in 2008 increased its share to 30.7% in 2018. Undergraduates represented 99.6% of its student population in 2008 and 84.5% in 2018. The data suggest that the proportion of undergraduates to postgraduates is growing (see Table 4).

Table 4: Ten-year enrolment trends at the university and open campus

	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	% Change
UWI (total – on and off campus)												
Undergraduate	34110	33496	35075	36188	36829	36756	34443	34334	34549	34449	35327	3.5
Graduate	7610	9589	8091	8701	10242	10184	9688	9694	9762	9336	9167	20.4
Grand Total	**43579**	**46440**	**48575**	**50439**	**52031**	**52091**	**49064**	**49092**	**49162**	**48525**	**49380**	**13.3**
Open Campus												
Undergraduate	5177	5607	5932	5914	6282	6047	5407	5421	5717	5352	5738	10.8
Graduate	19	141	237	302	362	359	313	723	914	924	1051	5431.5
Grand Total	**5196**	**5748**	**6169**	**6216**	**6644**	**6406**	**5720**	**6144**	**6631**	**6276**	**6789**	**30.6**
OC enrolment as % of total university enrolment	11.9%	11.1%	10.7%	10.3%	9.9%	9.9%	10.5%	10.5%	10.5%	10.7%	13.7%	

Moreover, females outnumbered males, with the female-to-male ratio in 2008 at 2.2:1 and in 2018 2:1. While the gender participation gap narrowed slightly at the university level it widened at the OC, diverging from the university pattern on enrolment with a 4.1:1 female-to-male ratio in 2008 and a 5.4:1 female-to-male ratio in 2018 (see Table 5).

Table 5: Ten-year enrolment trends at open campus and university — gender

	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019
University											
Female	69.2%	68.6%	68.5%	68.1%	68.7%	68.2%	66.9%	65.9%	65.4%	65.6%	66.6%
Male	30.8%	31.4%	31.5%	31.9%	31.3%	31.8%	33.1%	34.1%	34.6%	34.4%	33.4%
Open Campus											
Female	80.3%	80.8%	81.1%	82.0%	84.6%	85.0%	85.5%	84.8%	84.9%	84.6%	84.4%
Male	19.7%	19.2%	18.9%	18.0%	15.4%	15.0%	14.5%	15.2%	15.1%	15.4%	15.6%

The overall university student population by age group was more traditional. The 24 and under group accounted for just over half of the student population (53%) and the 25-34 group just over 25%. Conversely, at the OC, the largest age cohort was 25-34 (44%) followed by the 35-44 group (25%). The 45-54 and 55 and over groups accounted for less than 10% and 2% at OC and the UWI (see Table 6).

Table 6: Ten-year enrolment trends at the university and open campus — age

Age Groups	2008-2009	2011-2012	2013-2014	2015-2016	2018-2019	2008-2009	2011-2012	2013-2014	2015-2016	2018-2019
	University-level					**Open Campus (All Levels)**				
24 and under	49.5%	53.4%	50.8%	56.3%	57.3%	19.2%	18.9%	18.8%	18.1%	20.0%
25-34	28.0%	26.9%	29.1%	26.0%	25.5%	43.6%	44.9%	45.5%	44.0%	42.8%
35-44	13.7%	12.4%	12.6%	11.4%	11.3%	26.5%	24.1%	25.2%	26.4%	25.6%
45-54	7.3%	6.0%	6.0%	5.4%	4.5%	9.9%	9.8%	8.4%	9.8%	9.6%
55 and over	1.5%	1.4%	1.5%	1.3%	1.2%	0.7%	0.9%	1.0%	1.5%	1.8%

The OC, as previously noted, has fifty sites in the region facilitate the broadening of access. For convenience, ten-year data is broken into two discrete periods — 2008-2013 and 2013-2019. Overall, at all sites, there was an increase in enrolment of 16.5% at the undergraduate level and a 303.7% at the

graduate programme over the ten-year period. At the undergraduate level, there were declines in Monserrat and Jamaica by 92% and 19%, respectively (see Table 7).

Table 7: Enrolment at open campus country sites

Country Sites	2008-2013	2013-2019	2008-2013	2013-2019
	Undergraduate		Graduate	
TOTAL	**28907**	**33682**	**1061**	**4284**
Anguilla	417	847	11	125
Antigua	996	1249	15	158
Bahamas	223	881	100	348
Barbados[1]	953	1341	13	271
Bermuda	4	4		
Belize	741	968	19	158
British Virgin Islands	274	4	2	25
Cayman Islands	208	626	12	107
Dominica	1654	1893	32	222
Grenada[2]	1798	2249	42	141
Guyana VISO	0	1	0	2
Jamaica[3]	7288	5887	257	882
Montserrat	364	354	4	12
St Kitts and Nevis[4]	938	1329	9	89
St. Lucia	2510	3783	137	295
St. Maarten VISO	0	2	0	1
St. Vincent and the Grenadines	1420	2450	50	191
Trinidad and Tobago[5]	9087	9373	358	1218
Turks & Caicos	32	108	0	35
Virt Intl. Student Office VISO	0	3	0	4

[1] Barbados – Data for Cave Hill and The Pine combined.

[2] Grenada – Data for Carriacou and St George's combined.

[3] Jamaica – Data for Brown's Town, Camp Road, Denbigh, Junction, Mandeville, May Pen, Mona, Montego Bay, Morant Bay, Ocho Rios, Port Antonio, Savanna-La-Mar, SWTC, and Vere combined.

[4] St Kitts and Nevis – Data for St Kitts and Nevis combined.

[5] Trinidad and Tobago – Data for Gordon Street, Mayaro, Point Fortin, San Fernando, Sangre Grande, St Augustine, and Tobago combined.

The issue of access and participation is tied to demographic changes as well as the individual's inclination or immediate interest and resources to pursue further education. The state of the economy and labour market opportunities also influence the choice to move seamlessly through the education system or to delay entry. One way to bridge that gap for those seeking advanced credentials (baccalaureate degrees) and workplace experience is the use of prior learning assessment (PLA). This approach "evaluates learning gained outside a traditional academic environment" and "captures the college-level learning and knowledge students acquire while living their lives—working, participating in employer training programs, serving in the military, independently studying, volunteering or doing community service, and studying open-source courseware" (Sherron et al. 2019, 62). Moreover, it "supports student persistence, shortens time-to-degree, and boosts degree completion" (Sherron et al. 2019, 62) which is important for the adult student or those from underserved populations.

As an opportunity for extending access, PLA was endorsed as a "mechanism which involves identifying learning, documenting, assessing, and recognising acquired skills, knowledge, values, and abilities of individuals from non-formal and informal sources." The OC offered PLA as an option for matriculation/admission and for advanced placement for specific Year 1 social sciences/humanities programmes. PLA is a new initiative to the region and not surprisingly, enrolment of students remains low. Of the 818 who expressed interest and received pre-advising only few were eligible. Only thirty-one students (24 female and 7 male) were registered for PLA between 2014 and 2019 from ten sites. PLA offers a level of access but requires strategic and targeted marketing and a critical identification of programmes/courses that will suit the needs of the population and the labour market.

Equity of Access at the UWI

Are diversity and inclusion critical to the widening access and participation agenda? Or are they understood to be subsumed under increasing participation rhetoric? Are persons with disabilities or the indigenous population seen as important in increasing male participation or having polices to facilitate access to persons with lower matriculation requirements? To achieve the goal of inclusion and equity universities must move from broadening access to deepening access (Prodan et al. 2015, 537), which is moored to broader societal and constitutional contexts (Alexander & Hlalele 2012, 487). This will require HEIs particularly in developing countries to place emphasis on 'parity of participation' (Tikly & Baret 2011), which must be ably supported by a robust dataset that considers the fragmented nature of the population and gauge the extent of access measures and how these are implemented. HEIs should therefore consider their scope and "system of interest" (Lane 2017, 279) to ensure relevance to their mission, operational context, and resources.

Social injustice issues require policy measures that ensure access and success of students. Institutions may therefore find it useful to audit their administrative systems, policies, and services to grapple with issues of poverty, inequality, and disadvantages affecting students/potential students by

considering what systems and mechanisms exist to support this sub-population and if they are sufficient before integrating add-ons. Ideally, these policies (e.g., access and participation plans, outreach public education activities, financial aid, mentoring programmes, non-discrimination policies, public education events, etc.) should support the potentialities of the different sub-population groups and ensure that either the disparities are reduced, or no new disadvantages are introduced by systematic monitoring.

The UWI has undertaken several measures that support the implicit vision of the SDGs. Table 8 highlights some of those policies and initiatives that contribute to measuring progress on the SDGs and provides the foundations for access based on equity.

Table 8: Examples of policies and initiatives by the UWI in support of SDGs and access based on equity

SDG	Examples of Policies	Examples of initiatives
SDG 1: No Poverty		• Provision of scholarships and bursaries by the UWI Development and Endowment Fund (UWIDEF), financed by annual contributions from donors, assists with tuition costs. Also, hardship grants, which assist with living expenses and tuition fees. • Provision of local area scholarships — undergraduate scholarship for students from Sangre Grande (north-eastern town in Trinidad) for the Faculty of Science and Technology at St Augustine campus. • Implemented a programme for staff to make monthly contributions towards a fund to assist students with living expenses.
SDG 2: Zero Hunger		• OC offered a 'one time' 2.5% COVID-19 Relief Discount applicable to students who paid their fees in full during the first month of the AY2020/2021.
SDG 4: Quality Education	• The UWI Quality Policy (2017)	
SDG 5: Gender Equality	• The UWI Gender Policy (2017) • Code of Principles and Responsibilities for Students	
SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities	• Student Disability Policy	• Ensures that students with disabilities receive equal access and opportunities to participate in all university programmes, services, and activities. This includes referrals to campus service providers (e.g., housing, health services, food services, transportation) and co-ordination of academic accommodations (e.g., classroom situations, examinations).

In 2019, the *Times Higher Education* introduced a new league table, *University Impact Rankings,* that captures metrics on the 17 SDGs. It offers a framework for action and reform on key social, economic and environment issues and challenges facing the global community. The UWI has participated in this ranking and for the 2021 iteration, it supplied data for three of 16 optional goals — health, gender inequality and climate action — and the compulsory SDG, partnership for goals. Overall, the UWI was ranked in the *THE* 401-500 band of over 1,117 universities. For the social equality/justice SDGs, it was ranked among the top-300 universities of 776 ranked universities for gender equality with a score in the range of 49.4–55.2.

This SDG ranking offers a plausible set of metrics that can be captured, measured, and tracked. Such measures enable HEIs to fit into a wider global development agenda and offer a platform for HEIs to align their strategies and agendas to the relevant SDGs. Additionally, they offer HEIs the opportunity to showcase their teaching/research/outreach activities in the areas of poverty, inequality, and disadvantages, the core of social justice issues and to connect more strategically to their stakeholders including students. The metrics are also relevant for benchmarking access and inequalities (see Table 9).

Table 9: THE University Impact Ranking Indicators related to access

SDG	Rationale	Metric and Indicator	Implications for Access
SDG 1: No Poverty	Demonstrate how HEIs are helping to address intergenerational poverty by offering persons from poorer backgrounds quality education	**Proportion of students receiving financial aid to attend university because of poverty** *Number of low-income students receiving financial aid*	The proportion of low-income students to those of higher income shows if income is barrier. The percentage of low-income students receiving indicate if systems are in place to mitigate challenge with income.
SDG 2: Zero Hunger		Student food insecurity and hunger (programmes or interventions)	The prevalence of food insecurity will aid in deciding the programme or intervention required to maintain a healthy life and ensure positive education outcomes.
SDG 4: Quality Education	Explores early years of schooling and lifelong learning	**Proportion of first-generation students** *Number of students starting a degree* *Number of first-generation students starting a degree*	Data on the proportion of first-generation (and continuing generation) students will show if lack of "navigational capital or understanding of college access and success process" (NRC 2012, 34, 39) is a hindrance.
SDG 5: Gender Equality	Focuses on "providing women and girls with equal access to education [as] a key part of delivering gender equality"	**Proportion of first-generation female students** *Number of women starting*	Data on the proportion of first-generation (and continuing generation) females will show if lack of "navigational capital or

SDG	Rationale	Metric and Indicator	Implications for Access
		a degree *Number of first-generation women starting a degree*	understanding of college access and success process" (NRC 2012, 34, 39) is a hindrance.
		Proportion of women receiving degrees *Number of graduates: Total Number of graduates by subject area (STEM, Medicine, Arts & Humanities / Social Sciences): Total*	Data on the proportion of women receiving degrees will show if parity has been achieved in certain disciplines.
		Proportion of international students from developing countries *Number of international students from developing countries*	Data on this (and developed countries) show the diversity that can be used to promote inter-cultural understanding.
SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities	Explores how universities are tackling economic, health based and international inequalities.	**Proportion of students with disabilities** *Number of students with disability*	Data on this will identify students with impairments, or impairments and activity limitations, and thus, create a barrier for participation and performance.

The indicators draw attention to the social issues and relations and under-represented groups that can impede access. However, as some institutions may not be capturing specific datapoints it may be useful to consider alternatives such as surveys to collect data on basic needs including, for instance, housing and food security. Several universities in the United States have undertaken targeted surveys of students to better understand the prevalence of food insecurity.[2] Or in the absence of datapoints on first-generation students, it may be prudent to include such a question on student entry or experience surveys. Although there may be concerns regarding confidentiality and data privacy given small subpopulations especially, in developing countries, availability of data remains a fundamental part of interrogating the widening and deepening access project and to fulfil the social justice agenda.

Nevertheless, there are subtleties regarding the indicators based on a geographical and cultural understanding of how inequalities operate. Are the international higher education indicators identified culturally relevant to a postcolonial region? Should HEIs determine other specific development indicators? Which approach is most effective for a publicly funded university? And, how valuable is the monitoring of 'parity of participation' (Tikly & Baret 2011), for informing university decision making and performance? In the Caribbean, there is a disparity between male and female entry rates to HEIs, which requires interrogation regarding educational choices and achievement and, as such, it might be more relevant to look at an indicator that focuses on male

participation. Moreover, monitoring and tracking of entry and progression rates must be extended to include differences in programme level and disciplinary differences. Furthermore, an indicator on the indigenous population is desirable given the presence of such sub-populations in several CARICOM countries. While the *THE* focuses on data for first-generation students, it may be relevant for this indicator to intersect with indigenous students, i.e., the number of first-generation indigenous students.

Where Does the UWI Go From Here?

As the public higher education sector responds to the needs of a 'new normal' environment, the focus, for some, is on expansion through the creation of mega-universities via partnering and collaboration and building new virtual campuses that will *inter alia* educate working adults who are seeking to enhance their skills. Nevertheless, issues of quality, affordability and flexibility will have to be interwoven into their plans and offerings. However, public institutions in the Caribbean have competitive factors — history, brand recognition, and accreditation — which can be leveraged to tap into wider global markets including the diasporic market.

In the case of the UWI, its access agenda is now intertwined with its expansionist plan. Under its global collaboration agenda, it has established several global sites (e.g., UWI-University of Havana, UWI-SUZHOU, UWI-SUNY, etc.) thereby, realising the goal of accessing the international student market. However, international students' numbers remain low at one per cent of total student enrolment. This move to access the international student market must be evaluated through the lens of what unique programmes and experience can be offered to stimulate the blue or orange economy, medicine, area studies, sustainable development, etc. What unique online or blended or face-to-face experience is on offer?

The UWI established its fourth landed campus in Antigua and Barbuda in 2019 — the Five Islands Campus — to provide more direct access to higher education to the population of the Eastern Caribbean. More recently, it announced its intention to embrace the remote online market by creating a global online campus that builds on the infrastructure and capacities of the other campuses. It expects to enroll between 50,000 and 100,000 global self-funding students by 2022 from regional and international markets. These include Guyana and the non-English speaking Caribbean, a southern regional continental strategy that will enable the UWI to enhance its access of equity agenda by including the indigenous population, which represents 10% of the total population, and the geographically isolated population in the continental hinterlands.

Despite these initiatives, concerns with sustainability for regional and international student access and participation remain, given the current economic climate, demographic pressures, changes to the nature of work, and the relevance of higher education vis à vis the attractions of the labour market. More importantly, the dual expansionist strategy ought to be interrogated to determine if it will indeed improve national and regional student access, participation and equity and its contribution to improving quality educational outcomes. Or will it lead to increased tension as more resources are directed to accessing external markets and the gains in regional student access and participation decline? Will increased national and regional access be improved through joint degree programme offerings? What are the social and economic costs of the widening access agenda and the various interventions applied by HEIs? What new or adapted teaching and learning ecosystems will need to

be created? Will global classrooms be the wave of the future? What legal issues will have to be considered in this new impetus to access and knowledge management? These are some of the issues that the UWI will have to contend with. Beyond the university setting, there is also a need to consider the effectiveness of the widening access agenda for public HEIs over time, which is linked to the structural policy (re)forms and the broader social justice agenda. Both a cost-analysis of the gains/expected gains from the promise of expanded access, and a determination of areas of critical and essential change that can drive the benefits of widening access and participation in developing countries, are required.

Other Future Considerations for Higher Education

The access measures discussed earlier are particularly relevant not only for benchmarking, but especially, in this current social and economic climate where there are job losses, and the transfer to students of increased cost-sharing, which raise concerns about the affordability of higher education. The disquiet about the relevance and value of higher education, declining absorptive capacity of the labour market, and mismatch of skills to labour market needs will also affect the decision of persons to access higher education. The shift from the traditional form of higher (academic-oriented) education to para-professional and/or technical and vocational education and training will negatively affect enrolment. Other factors such as changing demographics and competition from international players may also negatively affect interest in HEIs.

The 4IR (Fourth Industrial Revolution) has implications for all aspects of economic activity as well as for the role of higher education. The education sector will thus have to reconsider its delivery mode, pedagogy, credentialing, and its role in "shaping future technology by being the testbeds for innovation and educating future generation" (World Economic Forum). There are likely to be noticeable changes in workforce requirements leading to a demand for retooling/reskilling, which in the Caribbean will depend on the extent of uptake and absorptive capacity of the labour market. As the market changes and the imperative of retooling/reskilling becomes acute, will this upskilling cost be borne by the individual, or will medium-to-large size companies develop and implement their own programmes or collaborate to create corporate universities? In addition to preparing individuals to live, adapt and work within the 4IR culture, HEIs must also prepare them to function effectively in the Anthropocene epoch. Thus, they will have to determine what new knowledge, skills and values are needed and what shape the curricula and co-curricular will take especially, as they move towards transdisciplinary programmes.

Further, the nature of employment is changing from "full time permanent jobs …. Towards non-permanent flexible types of jobs that are project based" (Abrol, Srivastava & Suman 2020, 14). There are increasing trends towards pop-ups, and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). Job patterns are changing to cater to 'gig' workers, who are hired for specific deliverables and can be engaged in multiple places. While the focus is on the skills to deliver on the immediate job needs, this approach can have a deficit impact on foundational learning critical to creating a creative, innovative, knowledge-based economy, particularly in developing countries.

The extent to which HEIs will be impacted depends on the pace of labour market transformation. As institutions seek to reimagine what the learner, learning and learning communities would look like they will have to ensure that persons with learning interests and needs have appropriate training

forms (e.g., modular, stacked, etc.) and pathways (e.g., traditional, PLA, etc.). They will also need to conduct gap analyses and mapping of their own programmes and competencies taught against those required for the transformations in the labour market. For instance, what would be the best training model for the gig workforce to ensure that they have best opportunities to compete successfully? HEIs can also draw on the information available from tracer surveys, as well as "labor intermediation platforms [that] capture a wealth of information on job seekers (what jobs they have as well as their qualifications and skills), and exactly what employers are looking for. This type of data has multiple advantages" (Bosch, Pagés & Ripani 2018, 19). These platforms supply details on types of jobs being generated and the skills required. Additionally, a probabilistic classification model based on national labour/occupational data can be used to calculate whether an occupation is computerisable or not using the Frey and Osborne 2013 model.

Big data is being used to improve decision-making and drive operational and programme improvements and predict outcomes. As institutions grapple with the looming changes because of 4IR, job market transformations, the impact of COVID-19 and the Anthropocene crisis, upscaling the use of data/big data/learning analytics to improve access, entry, participation, and success is a matter of urgency. Analysis of demographic and performance data will help predict student enrolment and outcomes, whether a student will enrol at an institution, stay on track for courses, or require additional support. This would help institutions meet the annual enrolment targets and revenue goals laid out in their access and participation plans and introduce more targeted recruiting and more strategic use of institutional aid for underserved communities.

Conclusion

This paper contends that access is more than increasing participation and that HEIs should identify their institutional scope and "system of interest" in widening access. More importantly, it highlights that HEIs, in scaling-up their management of access, must increase the strategic use and management of data. The paper also points out that using the metrics developed by the University Impact Rankings and tailoring it to its needs is a good starting point to uphold the goal of access of equity.

A case study of The UWI is provided to show that data on access is available but that greater analysis of other intersectionalities (e.g., indigenous, disabilities, etc.) to promote public accountability associated with access and boost institutional reputation is required. Ideally, this strategic data use and management should be accompanied by an audit/assessment of the measures that facilitate a more inclusive community and secure equitable outcomes for our students. Further, a strategic exercise that maps the immediate and short-to-medium term needs of the labour market is needed to determine the type of programmes required are matched to access and participation. Access also includes measures that enable students to successfully complete their studies, which was not considered in this paper. However, the current economic crisis combined with the pandemic will affect enrolment and completion rates in the short-to-medium term. Thus, universities will need to be innovative and to fast-track measures to survive/thrive in the current environment while holding to its tri-mission.

The authors carefully considered the myriad barriers that impact college access for students. The case study of the UWI (2019) adds insight to their assertions regarding the importance of data monitoring to ensure equitable participation. The authors spotlight additional questions and gaps in knowledge

that will need future investigation. They highlight the impact of demographics on the ability to deepen access to college work among diverse populations. Pairing the case study of UWI (2020) with sustainability goals offers a framework to investigate strategies that may be useful in promoting participation among disparate groups. Considering how universities obtain and implement student demographics data will enhance their ability to apply participation goals more effectively. Overall, the authors contribute to the general base of knowledge in the specific area of interest and provide a necessary platform for additional inquiry in that field.

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[1] Mixed households are composed of immediate family members, other relatives as well as non-family members (CARICOM et al. July 2020, 2).

[2] Examples of food insecurity surveys undertaken at US HEIs include: (i) Hope Lab survey 2018 – approximately 48% of two-year college students experienced food insecurity, and 41% of four-year students identified as food insecure. Upwards to 10% of college students have gone an entire day without eating. (ii) Rutgers-New Brunswick students undertook a Basic Needs Insecurity Survey 2019 — one in three Rutgers students reported having been food insecure in the 30 days prior to the survey — 31.5% undergraduates and 29.9% graduates. (iii) Real College Hope Lab Report 2020 — nearly three in five students were experiencing basic needs insecurity (food and/or housing) and 38% of students at four-year institutions were affected by food insecurity. See Aucejo et al. 2020, Stebleton, 2020 and Cuite et al. 2020.