

PREFACE

While the Caribbean has a long history of higher education, the wellbeing, sustenance and development of student populations have been less than interrogated and theorized. To a large extent, the scholarship on higher education in the region, has been limited to examinations of the status and advancements in higher education for the region, and, in more recent times, the impact of global competitiveness and patterns of internationalization on regional faculty and institutions. However, issues of student engagement and retention remain undertheorized with little treatment of the conditions and dynamics that impact these. With ongoing disquiets for student engagement, integration, and success (NACADA, 2006; Trowler, 2010; Darling, 2015; Curtis, Mahabir, & Vitullo, 2016), it is important that we tease through existing and future archetypes of academic advising and mentoring across all contexts.

With the absence of such scholarship in the Caribbean, an imperative therefore is for the scholarly treatment and advancement of academic advising and mentoring infrastructures and praxes that are embedded within institutions of higher education. Attending to this scholarly priority, however, requires that we locate existing models and practices across institutional contexts. It requires also, that we assess the relevance, effectiveness, and alignment of these to the personal and professional lives, goals, and possibilities of our increasingly diverse student populations. Such explorations call for closer considerations of 'good' versus 'best' practice, localized initiatives, the framing and executing of advising and mentoring, as well as the institutional and relational systems of support that are required as part of this process. In the area of mentoring, this research vacuum requires deeper reflections and examinations of relational and professional practice and of the institutional cultures or contexts that sustain these or not. Needed are explorations that examine the status and effectiveness of existing mentoring models and the possibilities for such models within the post-COVID-19 contexts.

Given this imperative, the papers in this special issue offer insights into and perspectives on advising and mentoring *within* and *for* the Caribbean. In her paper, Wanda Chesney reflects on the purpose, experiences, and lessons learnt from working through transformative and participatory academic advising agendas within higher education. Through these discussions, readers are given the opportunity to co-reflect on the possibilities and constraints of using liberalized learning systems for institutional change, but also, on the importance of open and authentic dialogue within that process. In addressing the development of mentoring models, Khan, Khan-Ventour and Reid extend the discussion to include considerations of the perceptions and preferences of diverse student populations. Keisha Samlal's paper, by contrast, presents first-hand insights into the experiences of doctoral mentoring, with musings on the importance of collegial relations and collaborative exchanges for developing one's professional identity. In the final paper, Margaret Westby speaks to the possibilities for redesigning and reframing mentoring models that engage with issues of identity, awareness, and empathy as critical components within the holistic

development of Caribbean students. The work also draws on the possibilities of using dance education within mentorship models as a cultural embodiment of the mind-body within the broader enhancement of students' collective psyche.

Together, the papers in this issue shed light on some of the current dynamics, challenges and practices of advising and mentoring systems within regional institutions of the Caribbean, while also strengthening the call for institutionalized mentorship structures that better support student populations. Considering growing evidence which supports the psycho-social and professional significance of advising and mentoring systems, it is important therefore to make visible and to encourage healthy scholarly inquiries, theorizations and institutional interventions that move this area of student development into a new and productively stratosphere. This special issue represents a step in that direction.

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