



Unwrapping Academic Advisement and Student Satisfaction in Higher Education in Jamaica: A Case of Two Private Institutions

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Abstract

Academic advisement and student satisfaction are critical components of student success in higher educational institutions, and they help to determine graduation success rates. Across the world, universities are giving more attention to students' overall university experience and how they can make it more favorable. However, academic advisement and student satisfaction are understudied in Jamaican and Caribbean contexts. This study hopes to bridge that gap by adding to the scarcity of literature. To achieve this, the researchers sought to ascertain students' perceptions of academic advisement at their university, factors influencing student satisfaction, and how they can be improved. Data was obtained from 62 students from Northern Caribbean University and the University of the Commonwealth Caribbean via a Google Forms questionnaire with both open- and close-ended questions. Data was analyzed using content and thematic analyses. The findings show mixed views concerning students' perceptions of academic advisement, with most views trending negatively due to lecturers' lack of effective communication. Significant factors that affect student satisfaction include efficient communication, quality teaching and emotionally intelligent faculty, flexible learning and payment plans, student support services, appropriate learning facilities, and opportunities for holistic development. To improve the situation, students recommend enhanced communication and responsiveness, improvement in academic advising and support and systematic issues, and enhanced student engagement and well-being. The study has implications for academic advising and student satisfaction frameworks and how technology can be leveraged to improve communication outcomes.

Keywords: *Higher education, Jamaica, Advisement, Satisfaction, Student Success.*

A. Introduction

One of the primary aims of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is to ensure that they prepare and graduate students to meet the demands of the job market through employability or entrepreneurship; notwithstanding, the university experience – though highly academic – is not entirely focused on academics but also on the holistic development of students. Students are important assets to their universities and colleges because they eventually become the ambassadors of their institutions, and based on specific experiences encountered throughout their study tenure, they are likely to recommend or dissuade others from attending these institutions. Consequently, HEIs must facilitate students' success and satisfaction. Even though the notion of success is not always easy to articulate, academic advisement has been repeatedly

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mentioned as one of its primary factors (McFarlane & Wallder, 2021). Zegarra (2019) states that students stand a high chance of succeeding if HEIs cultivate enthusiastic student engagement. Rafiq, Afzal, and Kamran (2022) mention that, as HEIs aim to create environments that foster academic excellence and student development, the importance of effective student advisement and mentorship cannot be overstated.

Zaher (2024) indicates that academic advising involves “a series of meetings between a student and an academic staff member in which they discuss issues that can affect the student’s academic progress” (p. 42). The University of Maine (1986) expands on this position by stating that academic advisement involves a process between the advisor and the advisee, which focuses on exploiting the advantages of education while discussing objectives in harmony with relevant course selections and university services and policies. In Jamaica, the University of the Commonwealth Caribbean (UCC) (2024) states that academic advising allows for individualized relationships between the student and their advisor, which, if done effectively, can lead to students’ academic success. UCC further articulates that academic advisement facilitates the discussion of career prospects and provides accurate guidance in designing academic programs and selecting specific courses, which will result in good academic performance (UCC, 2024). At Northern Caribbean University (NCU), the academic advisement process includes activities that monitor students’ progress in fulfilling program prerequisites and help students develop the capacity to evaluate their academic progress. Students are assigned academic advisors through their respective departments during freshman orientation week. Academic advisors help advisees with several services, including interpretation of policies and procedures, assistance in the registration process, and referral to appropriate institutional services for academic or personal matters. However, NCU’s policy advises that the university “cannot assume responsibility for challenges that may develop from the academic advisement process if students violate or fail to observe pertinent academic policy agreements and regulations” (NCU’s Undergraduate Bulletin 2020-2024, p. 41).

Jamaican students have often mentioned the lack of effective academic advisement as a significant issue during their university tenure, and their concerns were amplified during the coronavirus pandemic when HEIs shifted to the online teaching and learning modality. Madden (2023, p. A5) mentioned that “the lack of academic support, limited lecture resources, challenged socialization, increased stress and anxiety, and lack of motivation to attend classes” and “limited feedback from lecturers” were among the key issues raised by students. Despite these concerns, literature on academic advisement and student satisfaction in HEIs in Jamaica and the wider Caribbean is limited, although the topic has gained growing prominence worldwide. A 2021 study conducted by McFarlane and Wallder with undergraduate students at the University of Technology, Jamaica (UTech) discovered that, even though students appreciated their advisors’ experience and approach, they also recognized gaps in the administrative functions attached to the process, particularly in student-support system capabilities and follow-up. The study recommended strategic institutionalization of a mandatory advisement function, enhanced through a dedicated unit.

Given the limited documented research data, this study aims to explore students’ perspectives from two private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to address the existing gap. To achieve this objective, the researchers were guided by three key research questions: What are students’ perceptions of the academic advisement received at their respective institutions? What factors influence student satisfaction? Moreover, how can student advisement and student satisfaction be improved? These questions are designed to provide deeper insights into students’ experiences and inform strategies for enhancing academic advisement and overall satisfaction within the institutions.

B. Literature review

As established in the introduction, the literature concerning academic advisement and student satisfaction, especially in the Jamaican and broader Anglophone Caribbean contexts, is limited, even though these areas have gained growing importance globally. Exploration of research, journal articles, policy documents, and other relevant publications is intended to support and contextualize the importance of the research advanced here. The categories explored in this literature review correspond with the themes advanced through the research questions.

1. Roles and Responsibilities of Academic Advisors in Higher Education Institutions

Academic advisors can be likened to ‘tour guides’ for an unfamiliar or new territory. They are responsible for helping various subgroups navigate the rigors of higher education, including first-year students. Cicco (2021) suggests that academic advising is most effective when it has to start with establishing and maintaining a rapport with the advisee. According to McFarlane and Wallder (2021), academic advisors are crucial in supporting and helping students navigate academic programs, especially regarding course sequences and prerequisites. The authors note that academic advice is essential during the first semester when students acclimate to the teaching-learning environment. Chesney (2013) contributes to the conversation by highlighting that academic advice goes beyond providing guidance, emphasizing that it also includes monitoring the progress of students and recommending strategies to increase the likelihood of academic success. Additionally, the academic advisor should be instrumental in helping individuals resolve academic issues and refer students to appropriate resources should the need arise for additional assistance.

A survey of the national landscape reveals that NCU highlights the importance of proactive advice for students with low grade point averages (GPAs), as it is a requirement for advisors to engage these students to create a personalized recovery plan (NCU, n.d). Additionally, Mico University College’s (2018) policy on academic advisement encourages academic advisors to act as liaisons between students and faculty or administration to ensure that institutional resources are accessible and utilized effectively. As for UTech, Jamaica, the university has embedded its policy on academic advisement into its student handbook. The policy outlines that one of the roles of the academic advisor includes interpreting and explaining the academic policies at the institution and their implications for the success of the advisee. Additionally, the policy states that each academic advisor is allowed no more than 30 advisees at any given time (UTech, 2022).

2. Importance and Critical Components of Academic Advisement in Higher Education

Efficient academic advisement is important for higher education student retention, satisfaction, and success. According to McFarlane and Wallder (2021), effective advising enhances the student’s experience and promotes a sense of belonging. Furthermore, it is essential for aiding students to be retained for the duration of the program of study, and it also creates an environment where student autonomy is encouraged. Chesney (2023) postulates that academic advisement is also important for crisis management; for example, in a situation in which a student may be unable to complete a course or an assessment due to an emergent personal issue, academic advisement is necessary for temporary redirection until the student can return or complete the assessment.

Addressing the diverse needs of the student population is another critical component of academic advisement. Institutions like the Mico University College emphasize inclusivity but outline that academic advisement should also prioritize part-time students, international students, and students with disabilities. Their policy also suggests that appropriate technology should be integrated into the advisement process. Other key elements include accessibility, active engagement, and a student-centered approach. These themes are consistent in the policies

for the NCU and UTech. Each of these policy documents underscores the importance of personalized advice because it prioritizes unique aspirations and challenges (NCU, n.d; UTech, 2022; Mico University College, 2018). The importance of personalized and inclusive advisement cannot be overstated, as it ensures that students' academic journeys align with their personal and professional aspirations.

3. Characteristics of the Academic Advisor

Academic advisors' principal duties include academic advising on general education requirements, being a liaison between students and academic units, and maintaining proper academic records. McFarlane and Wallder (2021) argue that the absence of specific roles and responsibilities of academic advisors may result in poor academic advisement. Ward (2011) notes that in fulfilling their roles, academic advisors "listen, guide, suggest, provide information, and assist students as they adjust to campus and beyond". Andersen and Andrews (2023) emphasize that academic advising intertwines guiding students through their program of studies and being more engaged in personal mentoring. Montgomery (2017) indicates that mentoring demonstrates an advisor's understanding of the student and their career objectives, which helps to orient their future direction. Additionally, Hawthorne, Zhang, and Cooper (2022) highlight the importance of effective student-faculty interactions in achieving academic advisement and student success. O'Keeffe (2013) notes that student-faculty interactions positively impact students, which leads them to feel a more profound sense of belonging and connection to their institution. Faculty members who serve as academic advisors are well-positioned to impact students' learning and educational experiences.

4. Role of the Advisee

Data shows a correlation between effective student advisement and course completion rates (Stevens, Chen & Adrian, 2018). Green (2016) mentions that inadequate faculty-student interactions can affect students' educational experiences. However, although student advisement may improve students' academic experience (Zegarra, 2019), student participation is of paramount importance. The literature does not provide much data on the role of advisees; however, various universities have established policy documents that include a description. For instance, Mico University College (2018) outlines that the role of the student is to explore scholastic, employment, and personal goals and seek advice at specific times throughout their tenure at the institution to achieve their objectives. UCC (2024) emphasizes regular meetings between advisor and advisee to ensure students are on track for graduation. Ultimately, much emphasis is placed on students' responsibility (Pacific University, n.d) for their academic progress.

5. Constitution of Student Engagement and Satisfaction in Higher Education

Student satisfaction in higher education is a multifaceted construct influenced by various institutional practices and interactions students experience during their academic journey. Student engagement has long been recognized as a key determinant of student success and satisfaction. Kahu (2013) notes that student engagement is a catchword in higher education, defined and theorized from different perspectives, such as behavioral, psychological, socio-institutional, and even socio-cultural. However, Bryson, Hand, and Hardy (2009) sought to provide a holistic perspective, noting that "the conception of engagement encompasses the perceptions, expectations, and experience of being a student and the construction of being a student" (p. 1). In keeping with the constructivist approach, Bryson and Hand (2008) argue for a broader perspective incorporating the notion of 'becoming', emphasizing that HEIs should extend beyond obtaining academic qualifications. Kuh, Buckley, Bridges, and Hayek (2006) add that student engagement involves behavioral, emotional, and cognitive components, including participation in academic and extracurricular activities, a sense of belonging, and commitment to personal and academic development. To help improve student engagement, Bryson and Hand

(2007) suggest that academic faculty should consider three levels of engagement: discourse with students, enthusiasm for the subject area, and professionalism with the teaching process. However, despite indicating the importance of individual faculty, a broader institutional approach is necessary to provide the requisite resources and support systems that foster engagement for both students and faculty members (Hand & Bryson, 2008). Additionally, Kuh et al. (2006) point out that student engagement extends beyond the classroom to include co-curricular activities that help students feel connected to their institutions. Wanner (2015) highlights a shift in the complex globalized landscape of 21st-century higher education concerning student engagement, noting that while preventing student dropout remains a key focus, emphasis has been placed on learning outcomes, fostering academic success, enriching the overall student experience, and cultivating lifelong learning attitudes and skills.

6. Academic Advisement and its Influence on Student Satisfaction

Academic advisement is another critical factor in shaping student satisfaction. As established earlier, effective advising provides students with the tools and guidance necessary for academic planning, career development, and personal growth (Tinto, 1993). Robbins, Oh, Le, and Button (2009) note that strong academic advising positively correlates with higher retention rates and improved student satisfaction. Furthermore, effective advisement helps students align their academic goals with available resources, leading to a clearer understanding of their potential career paths and a more satisfying academic experience (Smith & Allen, 2006).

In Jamaican higher education, academic advising is particularly crucial in ensuring students' academic success, as it provides them with essential tools and resources for managing their academic workloads and making informed decisions regarding course selections. However, inconsistencies in the quality of advising have been reported. A study by Wallder and McFarlane (2021) highlighted students' frustrations with insufficient follow-up and a lack of personalized support, which negatively impacted their academic experiences. These findings suggest the need for standardized advising protocols tailored to meet the diverse needs of students. Wanner (2015) also noted that many students struggle with the transition to self-directed learning, especially when coupled with inadequate advisement. The additional pressures of managing deadlines and commitments outside the regular academic framework further exacerbate these challenges. Effective academic advisement could bridge this gap, providing students with the necessary support to navigate their academic responsibilities and achieve their goals.

7. Interrelation between Academic Advisement, Engagement, and Satisfaction

The relationship between academic advisement, student engagement, and student satisfaction is complex yet critical to fostering an environment prioritizing student success. Tinto's (1993) student persistence and engagement model posits that academic and social integration are fundamental to student satisfaction and retention. Advisement serves as a bridge, helping students align their academic goals with institutional resources while fostering a sense of belonging. Studies in the Jamaican context reveal that both engagement and advising practices significantly influence student satisfaction. Institutions prioritizing both elements create environments where students are more likely to succeed academically and feel valued. For example, a study conducted at the University of the West Indies (UWI) found that students who participated in structured engagement activities and received consistent academic advising reported higher satisfaction and academic achievement (UWI, 2016).

Research indicates that student engagement and academic advisement are crucial for fostering satisfaction in higher education. While institutions in Jamaica and the broader Caribbean have made strides in these areas, challenges remain, particularly in addressing the unique needs of students during and after the coronavirus pandemic. Moving forward, institutions should focus on developing robust engagement strategies and standardized advising frameworks to enhance the overall student experience.

8. Challenges with Academic Advising in the Caribbean Context

The literature reveals a correlation between academic advising, student satisfaction, and success in higher education. However, Chesney (2023) critiques the traditional prescriptive approach, which often fosters dependency and limits critical thinking among students. Instead, Chesney advocates for a praxis-based model that emphasizes critical reflection, dialogue, and learner autonomy, aligning with Paulo Freire's (1912-1997) educational theories. This transformative approach positions academic advising as integral to student development throughout their academic journey.

Chesney's (2023) study further identifies challenges within current advising systems in Caribbean HEIs. Issues such as inconsistent information dissemination, limited accessibility of faculty advisors due to competing responsibilities, and a prevailing culture of silence among students hinder the effectiveness of advising services. Such gaps are detrimental to the potential effectiveness of the advising services and the level of student empowerment. Graham, Scarlett, and Edwards-Braham (2023) highlight that sometimes the take-up rate of academic advisement among students is less than desired, which results in some of them going on academic probation, having to change programs of study, or completely falling out of their courses of study. Consequently, Chesney (2023) suggests that we do have a more unified, coherent framework that addresses these shortcomings more cohesively by embedding developmental advising with appropriate technology. For example, Graham et al. (2023) have piloted a study with computer science students at UTech, Jamaica, to assess how AI and conversational agents can improve academic advisement.

Within the Caribbean context, Chesney (2023) argues that advising is an aspect of education that has not been taken seriously, as it has often been treated as an ancillary service to education. Data suggests an underutilization of academic advising in HEIs, which affects the educational process, especially in developing regions like the Caribbean, where it is somewhat of a trend. Consequently, there has been a conceptualization of educative progress to advising-led programs, a transformative potential of praxis in advising. Chesney (2023) suggests that, for instance, in praxis-based advising, all forms of knowledge must be employed, including historical, qualitative, and quantitative knowledge, consciousness, critical reflection, and action. Put, students can take control of their educational career. Transitioning from traditional academic advising to a praxis-based model will restructure learners' perception of their participation in educational discourse by expanding their knowledge and cognition. This transition, therefore, opens a window of opportunities for learners to manage their lives, resolve problems, and change their attitude toward ideas.

Additional studies have shown that student advising quite notably impacts the level of retention of students as well as student satisfaction from their experience in high-learning institutions. A study conducted by Sechelski (2018) reveals that students' levels of academic achievement are directly proportional to their satisfaction with the quality of the advising they receive. The findings point to a phenomenon noting that moderately competent students report a greater sense of dissatisfaction in comparison with their more competent or less-abled counterparts. This indicates that the traditional advising practices may be inadequate to support middle or average student achievement.

The study also focuses on the student's satisfaction with the advising process and the factors affecting this satisfaction, including ease of access to the services and customization. Moderate learners may require more tailored counseling that combines mentorship with self-exploration, which they may feel is not provided by existing advising systems (Sechelski, 2018). On the other hand, highly competent students are likely to gain from applying for study skills and not relying too much on advisers, as in the case of the low-performing students who may also be provided

with strategies to meet specific academic threats. Such differences raise concern about whether adequate tailor-made advising services are suited to enhance their effectiveness.

C. Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore students' perceptions of academic advisement and satisfaction in higher education institutions (HEIs). A qualitative approach was chosen to provide an in-depth understanding of students' experiences, allowing researchers to collect rich, descriptive data. The research was conducted at two private HEIs in Jamaica, Northern Caribbean University (NCU) and the University of the Commonwealth Caribbean (UCC), targeting students from diverse academic levels and fields of study. The research procedure began with developing an online questionnaire using Google Forms. The questionnaire consisted of open-ended and closed-ended questions to gather comprehensive data on institutional communication, academic advisement, satisfaction levels, and students' recommendations for improvement. The survey was distributed via class WhatsApp groups and online class platforms over three months. Participation was voluntary, and 62 students (51 females and 11 males) responded to the survey.

Data collection focused on capturing students' insights through questions such as: "What are the top three things about your institution that you are satisfied with?" and "What recommendations would you make to improve student engagement and satisfaction at your institution?" Closed-ended questions used a Likert scale (1-5) to measure communication, engagement, and academic advisement satisfaction. Respondents were drawn from a range of academic programs, including bachelor's, associate, and master's degree programs, with the majority (85.5%) enrolled in four-year bachelor's degree programs. Their fields of study included Business (41.9%), Behavioral and Social Sciences (30.6%), Humanities (14.5%), Information Technology (6.5%), Natural and Applied Sciences (4.8%), and Arts (1.6%).

Data analysis employed qualitative content and thematic analysis to systematically interpret and identify recurring themes and patterns within the responses. After data collection, the researchers meticulously reviewed the data to extract significant themes, which were then coded and categorized. This process allowed for a structured data analysis, uncovering key insights into the students' experiences and perceptions of academic advisement and satisfaction. By integrating qualitative research design, systematic procedures, targeted data collection techniques, and rigorous data analysis, this study comprehensively explores students' experiences, contributing valuable insights into improving academic advisement and satisfaction in HEIs.

D. Findings and Discussion

Table 1 shows various aspects that impact student satisfaction and advisement between lecturers and students. Of the respondents (N=62), the majority (N=30) agree that the time allotted to their class schedules is sufficient for interacting with their lecturers/tutors, while N=16 neither agree nor disagree. Regarding out-of-class interaction, N=24 respondents neither agree nor disagree that the time is enough, while N=21 agree that they have enough time. Concerning lecturers' explanation of course concepts, N=23 agree that they are happy with the level of explanation, while N=14 neither agree nor disagree. A reasonable majority (N=27) agree that they know how to contact their lecturers/tutors outside of class, while N=14 strongly agree. Regarding lecturers'/tutors' accessibility outside of class, N=23 agrees that they are reachable, while N=16 neither agrees nor disagrees. Regarding having additional contact time with lecturers/tutors, N=21 agree to its usefulness, while N=19 neither agree nor disagree. Concerning in-person consultation hours with lecturers/tutors, N=29 neither agree nor disagree, while N=10

agree. However, concerning remote consultation hours with lecturers/tutors, N=23 agree, while N=14 neither agree nor disagree. Finally, whether students would benefit from more individualized attention with lecturers/tutors, N=22 agree, while N=17 neither agree nor disagree.

Table 1. Students' Perceptions of Their Level of Engagement With Lecturers/Tutors

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The time on my class schedules provided sufficient time to interact with my lecturers/tutors	5	3	16	30	8
I have sufficient time to interact with my lecturers/tutors outside of scheduled class times	5	7	24	21	5
I am happy with the extent to which my lecturers/tutors explain concepts	6	8	14	23	11
I know how to contact my lecturers/tutors outside of scheduled class times	5	5	11	27	14
My lecturers/tutors have made themselves accessible outside of class sessions	6	5	16	23	12
I would benefit from additional contact time with my lecturers/tutors outside of class schedule	7	8	19	21	7
I prefer office hours (individual consultation time with lecturers/tutors) to be conducted face-to-face	9	9	29	10	5
I prefer office hours (individual consultation time with lecturers/tutors) to be conducted remotely (over the phone, using videoconferencing platforms)	9	8	14	23	8
I would benefit from increased individualised attention with my lecturers/tutors	8	8	17	22	7

1. Student Satisfaction with Communication

Concerning means of communication, as seen in Table 2, the top four channels through which lecturers/tutors communicate with students are emails, Moodle, WhatsApp, and Zoom.

Table 2. Lecturers'/tutors' communication challenges with students

Communication channel	Number of student responses
Aeorion	4
BlackBoard Collaborate	1
Calls	3
Email	35
Face-to-face	1
Google Meet	1
Group chat	1
Messages (telephone)	4
Moodle	7
Online platform/portal	1
Social media	2
Telegram	3
WhatsApp	7
Zoom	6

When asked about the extent to which they are satisfied with the level of communication and engagement received, on a scale of one to five, with five being the highest, as seen in Figure 1, the majority (N=25) chose four. In contrast, the next great majority (N=20) chose three. This suggests that most students have a positive outlook on the level of communication and engagement received.

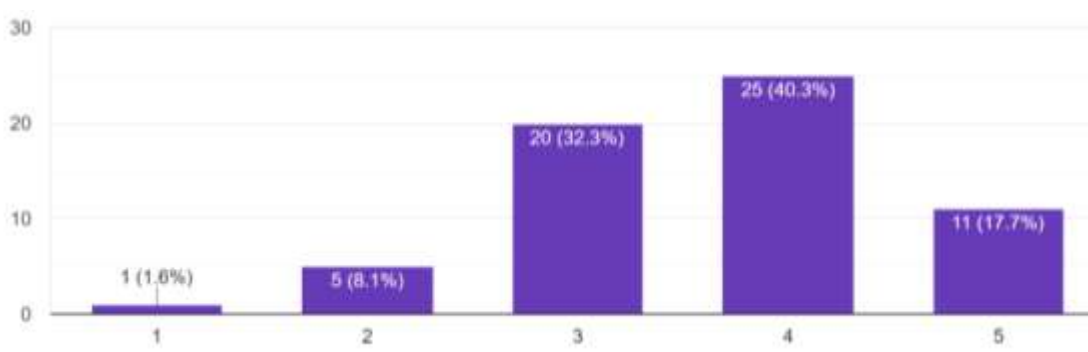


Figure 1. Students' level of satisfaction with communication and engagement

To further support their selection, students provided reasons they view communication positively, including timely reminders that help students plan ahead.

Excerpt 1: "The system does a good job of sharing and reminding students of all important dates and happenings in the school. It is helpful also as it is a central place to get scholarship opportunities, update on university programmes, initiatives etc."

Excerpt 2: "There is always an email sent to me outlining what is taking place at school. It allows students to plan more effectively while maximising on time management."

Excerpt 3: "I am very satisfied. All my lecturers make time to communicate with me within and outside of class hours. During class times, they all engage with the students."

Excerpt 4: "The institution's communication department ensures that students are aware of all scheduled activities taking place and ensures the information is sent out days in advance so as to avoid sudden plans."

Although email was overwhelmingly the most frequently mentioned communication method, many respondents noted issues with the volume of emails, delays, and the risk of emails ending in spam folders, as seen in the excerpts below.

In terms of email overload and unnecessary emails, the sheer volume of emails often results in important messages being overlooked.

Excerpt 1: “Too many emails are sent resulting in neglect of important information. They need a filter system.”

Excerpt 2: “We get frequent updates about everything, which is good, but sometimes the emails are too much and so we don't bother to check them at all when we receive emails. Therefore, we miss out on important things.”

Excerpt 3: “They communicate a lot; however, it's not normally what should be communicated. Most times the emails are full with church bulletin and church related information. I personally would rather information around school matters such as school closure times, school policy explained and quicker responses to requested information.”

Excerpt 4: “They send a lot of unnecessary emails sometimes. For e.g. funeral stuff. These are of people we didn't even know had died. Also, they send some emails more than once a week and at least 12 per hour. It sure gets annoying. I'd rather just receive emails regarding my studies and department and any other university updates that have to do with me.”

Communication delays is another emerging theme, as some students reported interruptions in receiving emails and responses to queries.

Excerpt 1: “Somewhat satisfied but sometimes the emails can be delayed and you don't know if the emails are sent to spam hence not knowing if someone received your email.”

Excerpt 2: “Although there is communication, there could be more effort. For example, if the matter is urgent, I would have to visit the campus office to get assistance because calling does not work sometimes. I would have to call numerous times and follow up while going in-person is better.”

Another theme that emerged was inconsistent communication styles among lecturers. According to the responses, some lecturers were praised for their responsiveness and helpfulness, while others were criticised for being unhelpful or even aggressive.

Excerpt 1: “For some lecturers communication is good and for some they are hard to reach out to.”

Excerpt 2: “Some Lecturers do not get back to you in a timely fashion regarding assignments or otherwise and students are left in the dark and then heavily marked at the end.”

Excerpt 3: “I am able to communicate with many of my teachers. However, many times I attempt to contact lecturers without reply, and receive no call/email/text back.”

Excerpt 4: “Communication is one sided. Scheduled emails are being sent to us; however, when students have an inquiry, it can take up to 5 business days to get feedback, and you are considered lucky when you get through to them on the phone.”

Technological issues were also highlighted.

Excerpt 1: “The only issue I have with it is the bandwidth.”

2. Student Advisement

When questioned about their level of satisfaction concerning academic advisement, most students indicated a positive rating, as seen in Figure 2. A combined N=42 respondents selected ratings between three and five, which suggest satisfactory to excellent. However, although some of their declarations align with their positive outlook, most of their opinions indicate a sense of dissatisfaction, as seen in Table 3.

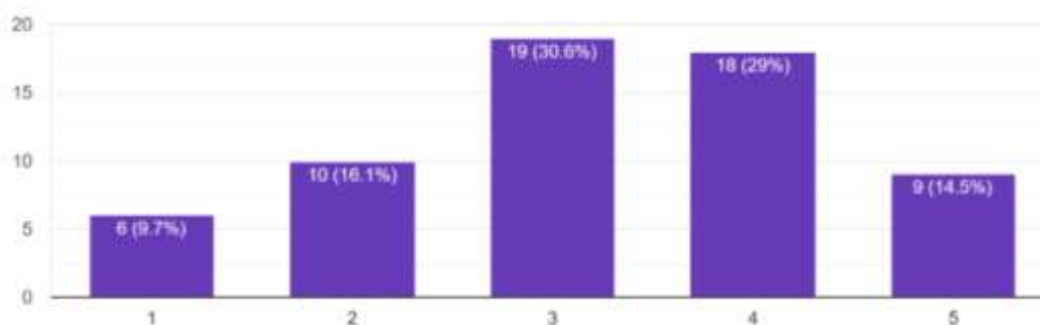


Figure 2. Students' levels of satisfaction with academic advisement

Based on the chart "Students' levels of satisfaction with academic advisement," the distribution of students' satisfaction levels with academic advisement services can be described as follows. A total of 6 students (9.7%) reported being very dissatisfied (level 1), and 10 students (16.1%) expressed dissatisfaction (level 2). The majority of students fall into the moderately satisfied category (level 3), with 19 students (30.6%), followed by 18 students (29%) who reported being satisfied (level 4). Additionally, 9 students (14.5%) were delighted (level 5). Most students are in the mid-to-upper satisfaction range (levels 3 and 4), comprising 37 students (59.6%), indicating that academic advisement services are generally effective. However, 16 students (25.8%) reported dissatisfaction (levels 1 and 2), which requires special attention to improve service quality. It is recommended that evaluations be conducted with dissatisfied students to identify specific issues they face. Furthermore, efforts should be made to optimize communication, accessibility, and the quality of interaction between students and academic advisors. Regular surveys or feedback mechanisms should also be implemented to monitor changes in satisfaction levels over time. These efforts are expected to enhance overall satisfaction and better meet the needs of all students.

Table 3. Excerpts of students' positive and negative views of student advisement

Positives	Negatives
"My advisor makes herself available upon requests and she checks up."	"Most advisers do not advise. They do not reach out and they are not very helpful."
"Academic advisement has been good for me so far."	"I haven't gotten much advisement. I received my course map and sign off on whatever courses I choose to study. Works for me I don't know if that is actual advisement."
"I am satisfied with the student advisement at my university."	"No one has advised me properly academically, throughout my time at NCU."
"My coordinator is always available."	"All my efforts to get some assistance are futile. I'm constantly trying to get in touch with lecturers to get some assistance and it's getting me nowhere. Honestly, I'm fed up at this moment."
"I'm pretty satisfied with the academic advisement at the University of the"	"Assigned Advisor know very little about their job in that aspect and some don't even respond."

Positives	Negatives
Commonwealth Caribbean. It's important to have the support and guidance to make informed decisions about my academic journey."	
"My academic advisement from my specific advisor has been been satisfactory. She is reachable and provides sufficient guidance on course selection and other departmental advisory."	"I am less satisfied with academic advisement at the UCC. I think their should be more communication between advisors and students."
"It's always a joy to speak to my Advisor. She has a wealth of knowledge and experience which has proven to work in my favour significantly."	"My academic advisor does not respond to email as rapidly as I'd like him to. Also, I'm unable to call or text him because he doesn't allow it."

3. Satisfaction at Higher Education Institutions

Respondents were asked to indicate the top three things they were satisfied with about their institution. A thematic analysis of the responses reveals satisfaction in four primary areas: lecturers and teaching quality, flexibility and supportive services, learning environment and facilities, and holistic development.

a. Lecturers and Teaching Quality

Numerous responses mention positive experiences and interactions, highlighting their expertise, didactic styles, helpfulness, and readiness to engage with students. Mentions such as "excellent academic programs," "knowledgeable professors," "passionate about teaching," "extraordinary lecturers," "friendly teachers," and "very understanding teacher" suggest a general satisfaction with the teaching quality provided by some faculty.

b. Flexibility and Support Services

Students appreciate the flexibility of course scheduling, online learning modalities, and diverse support services such as financial assistance, counseling, and career services. Indications such as "study flexibility," "flexibility of courses," "payment plans," "student support services," and the accommodation of working students demonstrate students' gratitude toward their institutions for their efforts in meeting students' diverse needs.

c. Learning Environment and Facilities

A few comments indicate elements of the physical environment, such as the campus itself, spacious classrooms, and the availability of resources (e.g., libraries and labs). The mention of a "warm environment" mainly refers to the social atmosphere of the institutions.

d. Holistic Development

Some responses cite the institutions' broader commitment to holistic development, incorporating academic pursuits, spiritual growth, and well-being and well-being. Mentions such as "holistic support affirmation curriculum," "spiritual values," and "holistic development" exemplify this focus.

Similarly, respondents were asked to indicate the top three things at their institutions with which they are dissatisfied. Among the major emerging themes are systemic communication failures, deficiencies in academic advising, faculty-related issues, and financial and resource constraints.

1. Systemic Communication Failures

The most prominent theme from the responses is the breakdown or absence of effective communication across both institutions. This issue manifests in three key aspects. First, unresponsiveness was a significant concern, with many students reporting difficulties in

reaching lecturers, academic advisors, and administrative staff. They highlighted instances where their inquiries were either ignored or met with significantly delayed responses, exacerbating their frustration. Second, inconsistency in communication quality was evident, as some lecturers were commended for their excellent responsiveness and support. In contrast, others were heavily criticized for lacking engagement and timely interaction. Lastly, inefficient systems contributed to the communication challenges, with students voicing dissatisfaction over outdated and dysfunctional database systems, archaic technology, and cumbersome administrative processes. These inefficiencies amplified students' frustration and impeded their ability to address pressing academic and administrative concerns effectively. This theme underscores the critical need for streamlined communication systems and consistent institutional responsiveness to enhance student satisfaction and engagement.

2. Deficiencies in Academic Advising

Students identified inadequate academic advising as a significant source of dissatisfaction in their higher education experience. One key issue was the presence of unresponsive advisors, where students frequently struggled to reach their faculty advisors or receive timely responses to their academic concerns, exacerbating communication challenges. Additionally, many respondents noted the lack of proactive guidance from advisors, often perceived as reactive rather than proactive in offering support. This included limited assistance with critical academic decisions such as course selection, academic planning, or career development, leaving students unsupported in navigating their educational journey. Furthermore, some students highlighted knowledge gaps among their faculty advisors, citing instances where advisors lacked sufficient understanding of institutional policies and procedures. These knowledge deficiencies resulted in misinformation and confusion, contributing further to students' frustration and dissatisfaction with the academic advising system. Collectively, these issues illustrate a need for enhanced training and improved responsiveness among academic advisors to meet student's needs and expectations better.

3. Faculty-related issues

The primary issues students raised with lecturers revolve around two main areas: teaching quality and workload management. Regarding teaching quality, some students expressed dissatisfaction with the instructional methods of certain faculty members. They highlighted poor explanations of course material, lack of engagement during classes, and perceived biases in grading, which they felt were unfair or inconsistent. Additionally, students noted a lack of empathy from lecturers toward their academic and personal challenges, which they believed exacerbated their struggles. In terms of workload and time management, students reported feeling overwhelmed by heavy workloads and the limited time allocated to complete assignments. Many also criticized the inflexible submission deadlines, which they found difficult to manage alongside other academic responsibilities. These issues collectively point to a need for improvements in teaching strategies, greater sensitivity to students' concerns, and more accommodating policies to enhance the overall learning experience.

4. Financial and Resource Constraints

Students expressed significant dissatisfaction with the financial aspects of their educational experience, highlighting two primary concerns. First, the high costs associated with their education, including exorbitant tuition fees and additional charges, emerged as a recurring issue. Many students found these financial demands burdensome, impacting their overall satisfaction with their institutions. Second, the lack of adequate resources further compounded their discontent. Limited access to essential resources, such as modern technological tools, insufficient facilities, and inadequate staffing, were frequently

mentioned. These constraints hindered their academic progress and negatively influenced their perception of the institution's ability to provide a supportive learning environment. Together, these financial and resource-related challenges underscored a critical area for improvement to enhance student satisfaction and support in higher education institutions.

4. Improving Student Engagement and Satisfaction

To address the issues raised by the students, they presented several suggestions, such as enhanced communication and responsiveness, improvement in academic advising and support and systematic issues, and enhanced student engagement and well-being.

1. Enhance Communication and Responsiveness

The feedback provided by students highlights recurring concerns that indicate a pressing need for significant improvements in academic advisement services. Key focus areas include timely responses, improved communication channels, increased transparency, and active listening. Many students emphasized the importance of receiving prompt responses to their emails, phone calls, and other forms of communication, as delays negatively impact their experience. Additionally, a strong demand is for more diverse and accessible communication channels, such as regular town hall meetings or online forums, to facilitate direct and open interaction between faculty and students. Transparency is another critical area, with students calling for institutions to be more transparent about their policies, processes, and decisions directly affecting the student body. Furthermore, students stressed the value of active listening, urging faculty and staff to prioritize their concerns and feedback in decision-making processes. Addressing these issues comprehensively can significantly enhance students' satisfaction and foster a more supportive and engaging academic environment.

2. Improve Academic Advising and Support

Students have consistently emphasized the need for improvements in academic advising and general student support services to address their needs better and enhance their academic experience. One key area for improvement is proactive advising, where students request faculty to take a more active role in guiding their academic and career trajectories rather than merely reacting to students' inquiries or requests. Additionally, students highlight the importance of increased accessibility, as they often face difficulties and delays in reaching faculty advisors and receiving timely support. To address this issue, students suggest implementing measures that ensure advisors are more available and responsive. Furthermore, students advocate for better advisor training, stressing the need for advisors to be well-informed and equipped to support diverse student needs effectively. They recommend training programs that cover essential areas such as effective communication, emotional intelligence, and a thorough understanding of institutional policies. By addressing these concerns, institutions can significantly improve academic advising and student support services, ultimately fostering a more supportive and enriching educational environment.

3. Address Systemic Issues

Many recommendations highlighted larger systemic issues within the institutions requiring significant attention to enhance efficiency and effectiveness. One critical area is technological improvements, where addressing technical challenges with online learning platforms and other technologies is essential. These improvements aim to create a more reliable and user-friendly experience for students and faculty alike. Another key focus is streamlining administrative processes to reduce inefficiencies and improve responsiveness. This includes restructuring procedures related to course registration, tuition payments, and other administrative tasks to make them more efficient and accessible. Additionally, there is a strong call for better resource allocation, emphasizing the need for increased investment in faculty, facilities, and support services. This is particularly important given the growing

student population, which places additional demands on institutional resources. These recommendations underscore the need for systemic reforms to address core challenges and enhance the overall institutional experience for students and staff.

4. Enhance Student Engagement and Well-being

Students provided several suggestions to enhance student engagement and well-being, focusing on three key areas. First, they recommended expanding the range of extracurricular activities to foster a stronger sense of community on campus. Students believe they can build connections and feel more integrated into the campus environment by offering diverse options. Second, they emphasized the importance of increasing opportunities for feedback and participation in institutional decision-making processes. This inclusion would make students feel heard and empower them to contribute to improvements within their institutions. Lastly, students highlighted the need to address workload issues to promote a better work-life balance. They expressed the desire for institutions to implement measures that reduce academic pressures and allow for a healthier balance between educational demands and personal life. These suggestions collectively aim to create a more supportive and engaging educational environment for students.

The findings indicate mixed views from students concerning their perceptions and experiences of communication and engagement at their institutions. On the one hand, there is support and praise for various elements of the institutions' communication models, but on the other hand, there are contrasting views. Most students gave a positive rating, suggesting a desirable level of satisfaction with communication. From a macro level, they are satisfied with the frequent updates received from their institutions, mainly via email, about important dates and happenings within the universities. However, students complained about email overload and unnecessary non-academic information being sent to them, which can overshadow important details. In the case of NCU, for example, a church institution, students receive many notices concerning church events and funerals, which are of little importance to some students. Students also highlighted the frequency of emails – sometimes repetitive– received in a short period, which can lead to frustration and heightened stress. The institutions may want to evaluate the communication strategies so that their students can consume important communiqués promptly. The lack of communication between faculty and students was also mentioned on a micro level. While some lecturers were applauded for their quick response times and support, others were criticized for extremely tardy replies to students' queries.

Concerning students' level of satisfaction with academic advisement, the majority of them chose satisfactory to excellent ratings (between 3 and 5 on the scale, see Figure 2); however, the individual positive mentions were overshadowed by the negative comments given by the students, which suggests that academic advisement needs significant improvement. Like the communication issue, students highlighted issues such as inconsistent access and responsiveness, insufficient proactive advising, lack of knowledge and preparation, inadequate support for non-traditional students, limited engagement and communication, unequal advisor performance, and the need for improved systems. Overall, despite the positive comments in Table 2, the picture presented is a significant dissatisfaction with the quality of advisement, suggesting a system-wide issue requiring immediate attention. This supports findings from Chesney (2023) that there are challenges with academic advising in Caribbean HEIs, and part of the issue is due to the limited accessibility of faculty advisors due to other competing duties. Wallder and McFarlane (2021) also alluded to students becoming frustrated with inadequate follow-up and a lack of personalized support from faculty advisors, which can affect their academic experience. Hawthorne et al. (2022) and O'Keeffe (2013) mentioned the importance of consistent student-faculty interactions for academic advisement to be meaningful; otherwise,

this may hurt student success. Ward (2011) noted that academic advisors should listen, guide, and provide students with relevant information.

Regarding student satisfaction, students highlighted positive aspects such as lecturers' personalities and the quality of teaching received, flexibility in terms of teaching modality and tuition payment plans, and student support services. Additionally, some mentioned the physical campus with spacious classrooms and the availability of different resources to enhance learning, while others appreciated that their institutions cater to their holistic development. However, in terms of dissatisfaction, systemic communication failures were raised as a key point, followed by deficiencies in academic advising, then faculty-related issues, and financial and resource constraints. Here, it is observed that student satisfaction covers a myriad of areas that can lead to student success or failure. Not only are lecturers' knowledge and competence needed to teach, but also their interpersonal skills to relate to and correctly guide their students. Flexibility in the university sphere is also critical in terms of providing students with different options through which they can pursue their courses. Some students live far from campuses, and many struggle to pay their tuition, especially in a developing economy such as Jamaica. Consequently, it is beneficial to have distance learning and payment plans. Furthermore, investing in human and infrastructural resources can make the university experience more rewarding for students.

Given the issues highlighted, it is unsurprising that enhanced communication and responsiveness emerged as the top recommendation to improve student engagement and satisfaction in higher education, followed by academic advisement. Once students clearly understand the direction to take in their course of studies, it is likely to lead to favorable outcomes. Consequently, faculty advisors may be required to be trained in order to be sure of the advice they give to students, as some have complained about improper guidance due to lecturers' knowledge gap. Notwithstanding, the institutions could consider implementing a dedicated unit for academic advising and have trained personnel disseminate expert information to the students; this would ensure consistency. Furthermore, with the prevalence of artificial intelligence, the institutions could explore establishing an online advising recording system, as Graham et al. (2023) attempted at UTech, where students set their appointments with their lecturers, and a summary of the session is recorded afterward. This aligns with the Mico University Colleges's (2018) policy that appropriate technology should be incorporated in the academic advisement process. Such a system would help to keep both parties accountable. Additionally, communication also extends to the administrative arm of the universities. It means that the relevant departments that interact with students should exercise effective customer service to help enhance students' university experience; after all, students are one of the primary stakeholders in HEIs.

The university should foster academic development and social and professional advancement. Thus, the call for more extracurricular activities is reasonable (Bryson & Hand, 2008; Kuh et al., 2006). This will contribute to students' holistic development and help them become rounded citizens who co-exist with others (Wanner, 2015). Furthermore, students recommend having more opportunities to be engaged in decisions that affect them. Although the institutions have student union bodies and representatives that liaise with the administrations, it would be prudent to have occasional sessions like town hall meetings where students can interact with academic leaders, voice their concerns, and propose feasible solutions.

The issues associated with student advisement and student satisfaction at NCU and UCC raise the need for student advisement frameworks to be created and implemented in these institutions, such as the praxis-based model referenced by Chesney (2023). Although policies exist in bulletins and handbooks, universities should further include core advising skills and methods and how to implement the framework. The framework would promote intentionality and consistency for advising by sharing collective values, objectives, and outcomes to guide

institutional practice. Additionally, the framework would consider developmental advising, in which the advisor is a partner who assists students in developing their potential, interests, and targets. This approach emphasizes the advisor-student interaction and the incorporation of academic, personal, and professional domains. In keeping with the institutions' outlook, other theories related to career development, decision-making, adult development, and cognitive development could also be considered. As NCU and UCC are private HEIs with unique contexts, future research could explore student advisement and satisfaction within other local (public) universities, including at the teachers' college level. This would help to garner a broader perspective on the issue across institutions, especially as it is an understudied topic locally and regionally. Additionally, collecting perspectives from educational administrators and academic faculty about the phenomena would be interesting to see how much they align with students' views.

The sample size used in this study is limited; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized. The disparity between the number of respondents from both institutions is also significant. Thus, a more granular analysis would need to be conducted to arrive at a better state of affairs within each institution. More data would, therefore, improve the validity and reliability of the findings/

E. Conclusion

Academic advisement and student satisfaction are important in students' overall success in HEIs. The study revealed mixed views regarding how students perceive their satisfaction and displeasure at their respective institutions. Serious concerns exist concerning the effectiveness and accessibility of academic advising services. Rectifying this requires a multi-dimensional approach, including improvements in faculty advisor training, resource allocation, communication strategies, and a review of the existing support systems to ensure that they better meet the needs of the students. Numerous factors affect student satisfaction, such as quality teaching and faculty's emotional intelligence, student support services, flexible learning options and tuition payment plans, availability of resources, and academic advising. Jamaican HEIs should consider leveraging AI to enhance student experience and create academic advising frameworks guided by relevant theories to improve the current conditions.

Acknowledgment

The authors thank all Northern Caribbean University (NCU) students and the University of the Commonwealth Caribbean (UCC) for participating in this study. Special thanks also to Stephen Francis, who was instrumental in designing the survey, and Dujean Edwards and Ricardio Madden, who shared the link with their students.

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