

Jamaica Student Handbook

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Introduction

This student handbook is provided as a guide for students in the Jamaica program. The handbook is available online and students interested in being in the program are encouraged to read the handbook. This handbook does not substitute or supersede any university policies which apply to all students including but not limited to the Academic Integrity Policy, University admission policy, graduate school dismissal policy and residential policies.

A Brief History

The Jamaica-Western Carolina University (WCU) Program began in 1970 when a select group of student teachers from WCU were chosen to student teach in Jamaica. These students were interested in acquiring a meaningful educational experience in another culture. Most of these students entered the experience with little or no exposure to the world beyond the mountains of western North Carolina. WCU professors who went to Jamaica to supervise the students at the time also taught courses to Jamaican teachers who were trained in Jamaica's teachers' colleges.

Subsequently, the Jamaican Ministry of Education invited WCU's College of Education and Allied Professions to offer a bachelor's degree program to a select cadre of highly motivated and bright Jamaican teachers who hold a diploma from a three-year Jamaican teacher's college. The first cohort pursued a concentration in guidance and counseling to fulfill a need in Jamaican schools at the time. Since then, concentrations have also been offered in school administration, special education, early childhood education, and math/science. In addition, a graduate degree (MAEd) in Educational Supervision was added in the late 90's and Special Education in 2018.

The primary goal of the WCU Jamaica Program is to provide advanced studies in school leadership and in inclusive educational practices, areas on expertise needed in Jamaican schools. Additionally, a secondary goal is to enable Jamaican teachers to raise their teaching qualifications to the masters level. Since the program's inception in the early 1970s, more than 4000 Jamaican teachers have earned a Bachelor of Science in Education (BSEd) degree from WCU. As of 2022, WCU no longer offers baccalaureate level programs in Jamaica.

Before teaching a course in Jamaica, WCU professors are orientated to the Jamaican educational system. During their stay in Jamaica, some of their time is spent in Jamaican schools, observing and participating in the teaching and learning environment of their students, the Jamaican teachers. Western's approach has always been to assess the level of current educational practice in Jamaican schools, monitor initiatives proposed by the Ministry of Education and then attempt to help the country's educators improve the quality of their efforts. Just as teachers are taught to "begin where the student is," WCU professors in Jamaica begin where the teachers and schools are.

The support of the Ministry of Education has been continuously strong, regardless of the person holding the office of Minister.

Degree Program Description

WCU offers Masters of Arts in Education (MAEd) degrees in Educational Supervision and in Comprehensive Education Special Education (with an emphasis on inclusive education) in Jamaica for teachers who hold a baccalaureate degree in Education. **These programs do not lead to teacher certification in the United States.** Please take note of the following statement: If teacher certification is desired in the US at a later date, there may be additional requirements that may include exams, courses, and/or portfolio-based assessments as required by the different state departments of education in the state where teacher certification is sought.

Students enter and proceed through the program in cohorts. The program is usually completed in two years. Jamaican students often excel in their coursework. WCU faculty members regularly comment on the Jamaican students' high level of commitment, conscientiousness, thoroughness, and strong work ethic. Additionally, faculty have high expectations for student work. Post-course and Post-program reviews indicate a high level of satisfaction by students and alumni.

Classes meet three hours for 10 days for a total of 30 contact hours. Students will have a pre-course assignment and/or a post-course assignment to complete before and after the professor teaches the face-to-face portion of the course. This portion is completed through online coursework, a total of 15 contact hours. Each course is unique in the way that is it taught. Course syllabi will provide details for the out of class component of each course. That may include online meetings, independent/group work, projects, etc. Courses are typically taught in Jamaica in January, March, May, June, and October. A tentative schedule for the entire program is posted on the website prior to the start of a new cohort. Students are advised to review that schedule often as the schedule may change since it covers a two-year period. Courses are taught primarily by regular, full-time, tenure-track WCU faculty or regular adjuncts to the university.

Once all academic, program, and financial requirements are met, students' degrees are typically conferred at the end of the session in which they took their final course. Transcripts and diplomas are sent to the student after printed diplomas are received.

The WCU chancellor or designee and other university officials conduct commencement ceremonies in Jamaica in order to allow families to celebrate this milestone with the graduate.

Program Administration

The Jamaica MAEd programs are jointly administered by the Executive Director of Educational Outreach (EO) and the Dean of the College of Education and Allied Professions (CEAP). The program is self-supporting; the costs of delivering courses are covered by tuition. Classes are taught in high school or equivalent classrooms at three sites: Kingston, Montego Bay, Discovery Bay. The learning environments are up-to-date. Classrooms have air conditioning and instructional technology needs are in place such as internet connectivity and projection.

Costs and Funding

Under the terms of the contract, the on-site coordinator with some of the revenues collected for the courses, provides classroom space, facilities, equipment, instructional supplies, and administrative and clerical support; assumes responsibility for recruiting and enrolling students and collecting fees; and covers costs of postage, supplies, and materials. Students pay tuition and fees in US dollars for each course taken in Jamaica. Per class tuition for courses in Jamaica is set for each cohort. Students should refer to the Jamaica Program website, <http://www.jamaica.wcu.edu>, for tuition and fee amounts. Students purchase their own textbooks and should purchase at least 30 days in advance of the class start date. Towards the end of their program, students will be charged a small graduation fee. This covers the order and purchase of the student's diploma, cap and gown, and transcripts. Course costs are subject to change.

Students may be behind one outstanding payment and still be eligible for course registration. Students with two or more outstanding payments will not be registered for class under any circumstance. Students who fall behind two course payments will be unenrolled from the course and program until they meet their financial obligations. Transcripts will not be provided until student accounts are paid in full.

Materials

Syllabi and textbooks are comparable to those used in WCU's other education programs. Of course, syllabi are revised to more adequately meet the needs of Jamaican teachers. A few courses (e.g., school administration concentration) are developed specifically for the Jamaican program.

Typically, syllabi are emailed to students one month prior to the start of the courses and are available on the Jamaica program webpage: <http://www.jamaica.wcu.edu>. Students are often instructed to read certain portions of the textbook(s) prior to the professor's arrival. Students should purchase the textbook at least 30 days in advance of the start of class. Assignments may be due the first day of the face-to-face portion of the class. Professors also often give assignments that must be completed and submitted after the two-week, face-to-face instructional period.

While Jamaican students have access electronically to WCU's library resources, we recognize of the disparity between the library resources in Jamaica and those at WCU. Professors are encouraged to supplement their textbooks with other readings and materials – often relevant to the Jamaican/Caribbean educational contexts. Textbooks needed for each class are posted on the website. Students may be able to source used books from other students or online.

Admission to the Program

Graduate Program Admission:

The experience of the MAEd faculty is that Jamaica has many educators who are "at promise," and

these are the graduate students who are sought to enroll in the MAEd program. The following procedures have been established to identify those Jamaicans most capable of graduate study in Educational Supervision and Special Education.

Applicants must hold the bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited university.

Applicants holding a bachelor's degree not from a UCI accredited University must have their transcript evaluated by [WES: World Education Services – Credential Evaluations](#).

Applicants must submit official transcripts of all undergraduate work.

Applicants must submit an essay addressing their school and teaching context relative to the specific program for which they are making application. Writing prompts are provided.

Student Resources

Upon admissions to Western Carolina University students are assigned a University ID. This provides students access to their student account on [MyWCU](#) as well as their student email and Canvas. MyWCU is the one-stop resource for students to access all their needs. On MyWCU students can view their course grades and unofficial transcripts. On MyWCU, students can access direct links to Canvas and their student email account.

Catamount email is the official communication method for University/student communications, including messages concerning notifications and alerts as well as course information from instructors. Instructors will often send assignments and updates to course work to students through Catamount email.

Students must monitor this email account as instructors are not expected to use your personal email to send you information.

Canvas is the online classroom portal for Western Carolina University. Students will be expected to use this to submit assignments and participate in class, as indicated by their instructors.

Student Support Services

As a student, you receive equivalent support as other residential and distance students at WCU.

Students receive orientation to the program and the University at the first class including an overview of this handbook. There are also online tutorials in the library for reference after the first class. IT support mirrors the support for other distance students. All students are enrolled in the online tutoring program (BrainFuse). Students may access this service at any time during class. Students' progress in a cohort model therefore the course schedule is set. Students should follow this schedule. However, the program director will assist any student who misses a course due to an unavoidable circumstance to develop a plan for degree completion on an individual basis. See "missed course" policy for more details in the Key Policies section of this document.

Students do receive additional advising from the staff in Jamaica including counseling about financial

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resources for attendance and other types of support. The on-site coordinator also acts as a liaison with the Jamaican Ministry of Education – both at the central offices and the regional offices, School Principals, the United States Embassy and area financial institutions. The coordinator provides on-site support for classes including assistance with accessing resources and assignment collection. The on-site coordinator also acts as a liaison for the student to the Western Carolina University resources. The on-site coordinator also works with financial institutions to assist students with loans or scholarships.

Students currently enrolled in WCU can apply for scholarships by visiting:

<http://www.scholarships.wcu.edu>.

Students receive additional support from Educational Outreach. This support includes maintenance of a website with up-to-date information for the student. The website, <http://www.jamaica.wcu.edu>, also contains frequently asked questions and key policies sections which allows the student to get instant answers to the most asked questions.

Go-to Contacts:

Brittany Marshall, Student Services Specialist, WCU Jamaica Program

bmarshall@wcu.edu | 828-227-3022

Dr. Carolyn Callaghan, Executive Director, Educational Outreach, Co-Director, WCU Jamaica Program

ccallaghan@wcu.edu | 828-227-7397

Dr. Dan Grube, Assistant to the Dean for International Programs, College of Education and Allied Professions, Co-Director, WCU Jamaica Program

drgube@wcu.edu | 828-227-3322

Educational Outreach, Main Office

learn@wcu.edu | 828-227-7397 | 800-928-4968 toll free | 828-507-7531 WhatsApp

Transcripts/Diplomas/Graduation/Liaison with Ministry

Nearing the end of the two-year program, students will apply for graduation online with the help of Educational Outreach staff. Official diplomas will be ordered once degrees are posted on your transcript.

Students are charged a graduation fee towards the end of their program. This fee covers the ordering and shipping of the student's diploma, cap and gown, and transcripts.

Once degrees are conferred and payment has been received in full, (this may take up to six weeks) students will receive a packet containing their diploma, transcripts, and financial letter addressed to the Ministry of Education.

Key Policies

First Course Payment. Once admitted, students must make payment for the first course at least two weeks prior to the start of the course. This payment is required to ensure the cohort will be allowed to go forward prior to the instructor's arrival in-country.

Missed Payments. A student may not be more than one course payment behind. Students who fall behind two course payments will be unenrolled from the course and program until they meet their financial obligations. Transcripts will not be provided until student accounts are paid in full.

Missed Course(s). If a student misses a course for financial or other reasons they have several options to get back on track in their program. 1) they may take the course with the next cohort offered in their location, 2) they make transfer an equivalent course* from another accredited university, or 3) they may request an independent study, and if approved, the student is responsible for the cost of the course and the instructor pay.

* the course must be approved by the program coordinator prior to taking the course outside of WCU's program.

6-Year Rule. Work to be applied toward any master, specialist, or doctoral degree must be completed within six years immediately preceding the completion of requirements for the degree. Graduate credits to be accepted in transfer must have been earned within the six-year period.

Dismissal from the Graduate School. A graduate student who accumulates three grades of C or any grade of F will be dismissed from the Graduate School. Students will be informed in writing by the Graduate School at the time of dismissal.

All Academic Regulations for graduate students at WCU can be found [here](#).

Academic Honesty

One of the benefits of a cross-cultural program occurs when students and instructors suspend some of their own customs and values and seek to understand those of the other culture. In the area of academic honesty, however, there must be no misunderstanding about WCU standards. Students must realize it is the instructor's responsibility to strictly enforce the University's academic integrity policy. It is the responsibility of the student to read, understand and adhere to the policy as stated on the following website:

<http://www.wcu.edu/experience/dean-of-students/academic-integrity.aspx>

Graduate students must also adhere to the requirements outline in the Western Carolina University Graduate Catalog for the year they entered the program. Here is a link:

<http://catalog.wcu.edu/content.php?catoid=40&navoid=1430#grd>

Description of a two-week course in Jamaica

Approximately one month prior to the start of a class in Jamaica, students will be emailed their course syllabus. Students are expected to read the syllabus and complete course requirements specified for completion before the arrival of the professor. In other words, **students are expected to purchase their books promptly as the course starts as soon as the student receives the syllabus.**

When the two weeks start, one has to be focused, and mentally prepared for the challenge of working and studying at the same time. There is an extra flow of adrenaline as students realize that each two-week course brings them one step closer to achieving their ultimate goal -- a master's degree!

The two-week period, however, can be difficult. During this time students have schoolwork for class assignments and presentations in addition to their career and family obligations. Sometimes friends and family get ignored, and a social life becomes non-existent. Mealtimes and other routines are disrupted, and stress creeps in. Fortunately, before these conditions become chronic, the two weeks are finished!

This is why professors expect students to complete some work in preparation for the two-week class. Students can read textbooks, keep daily journals, or do other assignments that do not require the presence of the professor. Completing work before the arrival of the professor lessens the stress associated with the two-weeks of night classes.

If at any point students have an issue accessing Canvas, email, etc. they should contact Brittany Marshall at Educational Outreach for assistance. (see page 5 for important contact information)

Expectations for the Student

Students are expected to be responsive to their instructors and to WCU's administration. This includes the Educational Outreach Office and any other inquiries from the institution.

Students are expected to be timely with assignment deadlines, attend all class sessions, and follow WCU's Code of Student Conduct and Community Creed. Information can be found [here](#).

Students are expected to communicate immediately with instructors if there are any problems that will prohibit them from completing assignments or attending a class session. If a student cannot complete a course in the expected time frame they should communicate with the Educational Outreach office as well as the instructor.

Students may not record any class session without the expressed permission of the instructor.

Students are expected to meet all financial obligations to the university in the expected time frame. See "key policies" section for additional information.

Hunter Library

Western Carolina University houses and provides access to a physical collection of 609,484 print volumes, including books, government documents, and serial back files; a collection of 454,917 electronic books; 1,565,300 units of microform, and 16,818 units of audiovisual materials, including audio, video, and graphic materials. The library provides access to 252 electronic databases, 195 from its own collection and 63 available through the NCLIVE statewide consortium. Together, the electronic database collections provide access to over 60,000 full text periodicals.

Other facets of Hunter Library's resources are its digital collections, available to users worldwide through the digital asset management system CONTENTdm. With more than 5,000 photographs, letters, postcards, audio recordings, and other documents, online visitors to Hunter Library's digital collections have access to rare and unique materials from Special Collections and from partner organizations such as the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the North Carolina Western Regional Archives, the Museum of the Cherokee Indian, the Southern Highland Craft Guild, and Catch the Spirit of Appalachia. In 2014, more than 40,000 visitors accessed Hunter Library's digital collections.

The Library participates in a consortia institutional repository: NC DOCKS. So far, WCU's contributions to this repository have consisted primarily of student theses and dissertations; However, faculty are also encouraged to submit their scholarship. All NC DOCKS materials are indexed by Google and are freely available to scholars and researchers worldwide. NC DOCKS is now partnering with UNC Chapel Hill's Odum Institute to host research data. As a result of this collaboration, Hunter Library can now assist patrons with data curation and data management plans.

During the first or second class in Jamaica, students are oriented to Hunter Library. Students have full access to the online resources and a reference librarian. The same reference librarian who serves other students in the College of Education and Allied Professions serves the Jamaican students. The reference librarian can be reached through a toll-free number, email and online chat.

Hunter Library houses and provides access to a Special Collections unit that contains 586 manuscript collections with a total of 2,250 linear feet of material. Special Collections also houses 25,000 photographs and 3,500 volumes of books, as well as collections of newspapers, maps, pamphlets, and microfilm. The Special Collections Department collects materials documenting the cultural and natural history of North Carolina, the history of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, and the history of Western Carolina University. In addition, the library houses a Curriculum Materials Center containing 16,174 volumes of children's books and 3,157 volumes of state adopted textbooks.