

## OneBook and UT Arlington Conversations

This year UT Arlington embarked on two ambitious new programs: OneBook, a shared reading experience for our first year students, and UT Arlington Conversations, a parallel program for the entire university. OneBook was designed to give all freshmen a common experience, no matter how different their majors: reading, studying, and writing about the same book in their first semester English Composition courses and, for those enrolled, the one-credit Freshman Seminar. The program's objectives are to enhance critical thinking skills and higher order learning, to introduce first year students to college level academic discourse, and to foster students' ties with both their class and the University. The book selected by the Conversations Team for our debut year was the best-selling novel, *The Kite Runner*, by Khaled Hosseini, encompassing the turbulent period of the Russian invasion and the bloody Taliban years in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

To extend the benefits of this program to the rest of the campus, co-chairs



UT Arlington students conversing in a shady spot on campus.

of the program English Prof. Laurin Porter and Dr. Dawn Remmers, Director of Academic Advising and Student Success, designed a linked program, Conversations, which selects a key theme from that year's book as the focus

for university-wide lectures, films, and panel discussions. This program further enriches students' experience with the book and provides an intellectual focus for the entire campus community. The theme for AY 2006/07 was "Power." Freshmen were invited to participate in an essay contest with prizes awarded in the form of scholarships for tuition.

These programs received the enthusiastic support of both administration and faculty. All first year students received a copy of *The Kite Runner* at freshman orientation and studied it in their English 1301 classes, but they were not the only ones reading it. As word spread, faculty and staff across the campus read the novel, also, with several departments forming their own discussion groups. The kick-off event for faculty and staff was a wine-and-cheese book discussion the first Friday of the fall semester in the new University Club. Those who attended remarked that they'd never experienced anything like

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Pam Haws, PhD  
Associate Vice President  
and Director of  
Institutional  
Research, Planning  
and Effectiveness.

### FROM THE DIRECTOR

## There's No Place Like Home!

After a brief re-location at the UT Arlington Computing Center, IRPE staff is back in our home location at Davis Hall. We made the move in order to reconfigure the office to accommodate our growing staff. Our most recent staff addition is Limei Gao, Undergraduate Reporting and Assessment Specialist, whose primary responsibility is working with QEP Principle Investigators to coordinate the ongoing assessment of student learning and higher-order thinking.

All of our staff can be found in 402 Davis Hall, including Dr. Araya Maurice who has moved from her previous location in the Testing Center. We still have one more person to add to complete our team, an Administrative Assistant. Jacey Rotert will arrive June 18th to fill the position vacated by Arnita Williams, who was recently promoted to Executive Assistant after Judy Varnell's retirement.

Drop by and see the changes we have made. Have a great summer!

## QEP Corner

### Implementation Includes a Website Portal and Assessment Tracking Database

As part of implementing the QEP (Active Learning: Pathways to Higher Order Thinking) three-year institutional research initiative, an Active Learning Website Portal was launched this May. The portal is designed to provide a dynamic, interactive environment where various constituencies can learn about the initiative and access vital resources and connections necessary to the health and growth of the initiative throughout the university. The website will provide many resources for faculty, students, alumni, and the University community as a whole. Faculty members will be able share current information and resources for active learning, as well as being able to access videos of past seminars and workshops hosted by the University. Also included on the portal site for faculty members is information concerning assessment techniques, syllabi and rubric templates, and a link for researching available grants for active learning. Students can find information explaining what active learning is or access information about the pilot project class sections that will begin this fall. Parents and the external community will be provided with information about why active learning for critical thinking is important and how the employment of such teaching strategies will benefit students in the future.

The various University constituents are asked to provide feedback, potential resources, and additions so that this site can continue to play a vital role in the Active Learning/Higher Order Thinking initiative. A website developer within the Office of Institutional Research, Planning and Effectiveness (IRP&E) will continue to update and revise the website based upon this input.

Additionally, a QEP-specific database is now being created to house the data collected during the QEP three-year institutional research initiative. This database will allow for inputting and tracking assessment data generated from each of the twelve pilot projects being implemented beginning this fall. This data

will be analyzed at both the classroom and program (defined as all twelve pilot projects together) levels. The database will also allow for tracking of the pilot project participants within the University-wide assessments of National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE), College Learning Assessment (CLA), and the Alumni and Employer Surveys. An Undergraduate Reporting and Assessment Specialist has joined the IRPE

Office to work specifically with analyzing the data produced by this initiative. The Undergraduate Assessment Specialist will also work along with the new University-wide Standing Committee on Active Learning and Higher Order Thinking and the initiative's research team.

Active Learning Website Portal:  
<http://activelearning.uta.edu/FacStaff/>

–Victoria Farrar-Myers, PhD  
Associate Professor for Political Science  
and QEP Coordinator

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## Unit Effectiveness Process (UEP) Updates

- The Annual Improvement Update Report for CY 2006 should have already been submitted (as of May 14th). If this report is still outstanding and your unit has not already been in contact with Rebecca Lewis ([Rebeccal@uta.edu](mailto:Rebeccal@uta.edu) or Ext. 2-5133), please take a few minutes to find out what needs to be done to get this report completed.
- The Assessment Results Report AY 06-07 first draft is due to Deans and VPs on 9/28/07. Directions for report completion will be available by mid-July.
- A UEP Listserv has been created. The Listserv is the method by which instructions, reminders and other UEP related information is distributed. If you are not on the Listserv or you are not sure if you are and would like to be, contact Rebecca Lewis ([Rebeccal@uta.edu](mailto:Rebeccal@uta.edu) or Ext. 2-5133).

[http://www.uta.edu/irp/unit\\_effectiveness\\_plans/uep.htm](http://www.uta.edu/irp/unit_effectiveness_plans/uep.htm)

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## Resources for You!

The Office of IRPE maintains several online resources, including, but not limited to the following:

- **Fact Book** – The Fact Book contains information about the University that is frequently requested by students, faculty, staff, alumni, and others. The Fact Book can be accessed as follows: <http://www.uta.edu/irp/factbook/factbook.htm>. The new 2006 version will be available soon!
- **The 2005-06 Common Data Set** – “The Common Data Set is a collaborative effort among data providers in the higher education community and publishers... to improve the quality and accuracy of information provided to all involved in a student's transition into higher education, as well as to reduce the reporting burden on data providers (description provided by: [www.commondataset.org](http://www.commondataset.org)).” The 05-06 Common Data Set can be accessed as follows: [http://www.uta.edu/irp/common\\_data\\_set/common\\_data\\_set.htm](http://www.uta.edu/irp/common_data_set/common_data_set.htm).
- **SACS Faculty Credential Guidelines** - Comprehensive Standard 3.7 regarding Faculty is available directly on the IRPE website for quick reference. The information can be accessed as follows: <http://www.uta.edu/irp/assets/SACSFacultyQualifications.htm>.

# Rubrics: What They Are and Why They Are So Great

In the bevy of educational terminology aimed at improved student learning and accountability, “rubric” has emerged as a buzzword. The educational field has co-opted the term to describe “a scoring tool that lists the criteria for a piece of work...; it also articulates gradations of quality for each criterion, from excellent to poor” or some such gradation (Goodrich, 1997: 14).

As a type of criteria-based assessment and/or grading, rubrics are a valuable educational tool that can provide benefits to both faculty and students. Sadler (2005) indicates that the arguments for criteria-based assessment and/or grading in relevant literature can be summed in two major points: 1) students are graded on the basis of their work alone without being compared to or competing with other students and 2) students deserve to know the criteria upon which their work will be judged. Sadler goes on to explain that the traditional grading model measuring overall achievement (i.e. the A-F model) can be argued to be a criteria-based model; however, the aggregate nature of traditional grades obscure patterns of strengths and weaknesses in student performance. Rubrics, on the other hand, can be used to determine student grades as well

as patterns of strengths and weaknesses. The following are additional reasons to use rubrics:

- Make grading consistent and fair
- Save time in the grading process (at least after the rubric has been developed)
- Clarify expectations to students
- Provide explanation of grades to students (especially useful when students contest grades)
- Track changes in student performance
- Generate consistency in teaching and grading among TAs and adjunct faculty
- Form the basis for course and programmatic assessment
- Assist faculty in agreeing on criteria for common exams, multiple sections and/or sequential courses (Walvoord & Anderson, 1998).

Rubrics can be sorted into two main categories, holistic and analytic (Quinlan, 2006). A holistic rubric evaluates a work

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**Figure 1. Holistic Rubric for Persuasive Speech**  
(from Quinlan, 2006 p. 28)

## Persuasive Speech Rubric

### 4 Points (Exemplary)

**Volume:** loud enough for all to hear  
**Clarity:** extremely articulate and easy to understand  
**Grammar:** no grammatical errors  
**Content:** convinces the audience and entertains or holds interest

### 3 Points (Benchmark)

**Volume:** loud enough for most to hear  
**Clarity:** articulate and easy to understand  
**Grammar:** 1-3 grammatical errors  
**Content:** convinces the audience

### 2 Points

**Volume:** audible only to audience members closest to speaker  
**Clarity:** difficult to understand  
**Grammar:** more than 3 grammatical errors  
**Content:** convinces some of the audience

### 1 Point

**Volume:** all have difficulty hearing  
**Clarity:** mumbles  
**Grammar:** excessive grammatical errors  
**Content:** no one is convinced; weak argument

### 0 Points

Does not attempt

Original Source: Personal communication between Quinlan (2006) and L. Hoffman (November 3, 2005).

**Figure 2. Analytic Rubric for Persuasive Speech**  
(from Quinlan, 2006 p. 29)

## Persuasive Speech Rubric

### Volume

4. Loud enough for all to hear; uses volume effectively to make points and get attention.
3. Loud enough for all to hear (benchmark).
2. Loud enough for most to hear.
1. Audible only to audience members closest to speaker.
0. Did not participate. Unable to evaluate.

### Clarity of Speaking

4. Extremely articulate and easy to understand.
3. Articulate and easy to understand (benchmark)
2. Difficult to understand.
1. Mumbles.
0. Did not participate. Unable to evaluate.

### Grammar

4. No grammatical or usage errors.
3. Fewer than three grammatical or usage errors (benchmark).
2. More than three grammatical or usage errors.
1. So many errors that it hurts to listen.
0. Did not participate. Unable to evaluate.

### Content

4. Convinces the audience and entertains; holds interest.
3. Convinces the audience; strong argument (benchmark).
2. Convinces some of the audience.
1. Very few or no one convinced; weak argument.
0. Did not participate. Unable to evaluate.

**Total Score** \_\_\_\_\_

Original Source: Personal communication between Quinlan (2006) and L. Hoffman (November 3, 2005).

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The mission of the Office of Institutional Research, Planning and Effectiveness, a component of the Office of the Provost, is to conduct research and analysis in order to provide information to support institutional planning, assessment, policy analysis, and decision making, and to facilitate institutional effectiveness to advance the mission of the University.



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## Fact Book Fine Point

*In 2005 the University awarded a total of 83 doctoral degrees with over 40% from the College of Engineering. Those 83 degrees bring the grand total of doctoral degrees conferred to 1,710 since the University became a doctoral-degree-granting institution.*

### One Book

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it at UTA: everyone from the president and provost, librarians and secretaries, and faculty from across the university gathered to discuss the complex issues presented in the novel. Throughout the year, brown bag lectures, films, plays, and departmental events explored questions of “Power,” its use and abuse, from multiple disciplinary perspectives. The culmination of the year’s activities was a public lecture given in the spring by former Prime Minister of Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto, who talked on “Islam, Politics, and the Modern World” to an audience of 2,000 in Texas Hall.

It has been exciting to be part of a new tradition, one which has provided the university with an intellectual focus and brought together faculty, staff, and students from different departments and colleges to explore and debate difficult issues. We are looking forward to another stimulating experience with next year’s book, Art Spiegelman’s Pulitzer Prize winning graphic novel about the Holocaust, *Maus*.

–Laurin Porter, PhD

Professor of English and Co-Chair,  
OneBook and UT Arlington Conversations

#### Editors Note:

Success of the OneBook program will be reported in a subsequent volume of the *Informer*. Essay contest winners and other details regarding the OneBook Program, as well as information about *The Kite Runner*, can be found at the following: <http://www.uta.edu/uac/one-book/contests-2006-07>

### Rubrics

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product based on the overall, perceived quality of the work. An analytic rubric disaggregates the criteria expected from the work product and evaluates them individually. Analytic rubrics may also be referred to as Primary Trait Analysis. Quinlan (2006) provides an example of each type of rubric. Figure 1 is an example of a Holistic Rubric for Persuasive Speech and Figure 2 is an example of an Analytic Rubric for Persuasive speech.

For more information about developing and using rubrics, please refer to the works cited below or the faculty/staff resources of the UTA Active Learning web portal: <http://activelearning.uta.edu/FacStaff/tools.htm>. IRPE staff is also available to provide assistance (contact Rebecca Lewis at [Rebeccal@uta.edu](mailto:Rebeccal@uta.edu) or Ext. 2-5133).

#### Works Cited & Other References

Goodrich, H. (1997) Understanding Rubrics. *Educational Leadership*, Dec., 1996/Jan., 1997: 14-17. (Available online through UTA Library)

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–Rebecca Lewis, MA

Coordinator of Outcomes Assessment