**Quality Enhancement Plan for The University of Texas at Arlington
"Active Learning: Pathways to Higher Ordering Thinking at UT Arlington"**
Executive Summary

The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) of The University of Texas at Arlington reflects a shared vision of the educational experiences we want our students to have and of what we want our students to learn. After a careful, thoughtful, and extensive dialogue among the various interests that comprise our academic and broader communities (most significantly our faculty), the University selected as the goal of its QEP *the effective application of active learning to achieve higher order thinking skills*. Through the QEP, UT Arlington seeks to foster an environment in which our students will be engaged partners in their own learning process, and will develop stronger higher-order thinking skills: application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

The process for selecting the QEP theme was self-reflective, open, and stakeholder-driven, and was undertaken in concert with other University initiatives, including the institution's long-term strategic plan and our new branding campaign. This process resulted in the following definition of active learning for the QEP:

> *Active learning places the student at the center of the learning process, making him/her a partner in discovery, not a passive receiver of information. It is a process that employs a variety of teaching and learning strategies to place the responsibility for creating and defining the learning environment on the instructor and the responsibility for effective engagement in the learning process on the students. Active learning encourages students to communicate and interact with course materials through reading, writing, discussing, problem-solving, investigating, reflecting, and engaging in the higher order thinking tasks of application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. An active learning approach draws upon a continuum of teaching and learning strategies…*

This definition embodies many reasons why a QEP premised on active learning resonated so deeply with the University's constituencies. The variety of teaching and learning strategies promotes innovation within the colleges and schools consistent with our strong-college model of governance and history of strong teaching. This variety of approaches acknowledges that our diverse and changing student population employs a number of different learning styles that need to be taken into consideration. Fostering an environment in which students are engaged in their classes and developing their higher order thinking skills is not only a goal to which our faculty aspire, but is also an end that our students indicate they desire, that our alumni report are most beneficial to them, and that employers believe produce the skills they seek in future employees.

Approaching the QEP from an institutional research perspective, we have designed a project to investigate the impact of active learning techniques on students' acquisition and development of higher order thinking skills. The questions asked are:

1. *Does active learning contribute to enhancing higher order thinking skills among UT Arlington students?*
2. *What are the most effective active learning strategies for increasing higher order thinking skills?*
3. *At what level in the UT Arlington undergraduate experience does active learning have the most impact?*
4. *How does the effectiveness of active learning strategies vary across the colleges and schools?*

Following an open call for proposals, 12 pilot projects were selected. The projects cover nearly all the colleges and schools, a broad range of the undergraduate experiences, and a variety of learning environments; as a group, they will allow us to explore active learning techniques in diverse educational contexts.

College/School	Level	Learning Environment
Architecture	Upper-division course	Computer-based portfolio building
Business	Introductory	Using projects to enhance required curriculum (build-a-catapult group project)
Education	Upper-division course	Using blogs/podcasts to foster on-line e-communities of learners
Engineering	Capstone	Increasing reflective practice within engineering capstone experience across the college
Engineering	Introductory	Using classroom response technologies in large class
Engineering	Introductory	Using computerized, interactive homework
Honors	Symposia	Interdisciplinary interactive symposia
Liberal Arts	Introductory	Using classroom response technologies in large class
Liberal Arts	Introductory	Using projects to enhance required curriculum (group project module on elections)
Univ. Library/ Liberal Arts	50-minute session	Using projects to enhance required curriculum (plagiarism case studies)
Nursing	Capstone	Active learning projects on-campus as well as satellite locations
Science	Capstone	Problem-based research experience

The effectiveness of active learning techniques in each project will be assessed at the course, program, and University levels at several points in the QEP three-year implementation period. At the end of the third year, the data will help us identify active learning "best practices" for the institution, thereby informing the University's decision making in matters of allocating teaching resources. The QEP will also inform the University's larger ten-year strategic planning initiative geared toward promoting its "Strategic Planning Priority I": "to provide an environment that fosters broad-based education as well as professional studies designed to facilitate successful careers, personal development, and community service." It will also initiate dialogue on teaching and learning so that faculty can learn from one another, especially across disciplines. Finally, it will encourage and support innovation in the classroom.

To learn more about Active Learning at UT Arlington, contact Dr. David J. Silva, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, djsilva@uta.edu or visit http://activelearning.uta.edu/qep/qep.htm.