Quality of education is of great importance for higher education providers. It has become a must for any educational institution seeking to be a leader in the domain of higher education. It is only through the implementation of QA measures, institutions can achieve and maintain high standards in the long run.

Symposiums and workshops are conducted by (HEIs) to establish and maintain quality culture with a belief that such gatherings provide an excellent opportunity for sharing ideas and experiences. The College of Applied Sciences, Ibri, accords great care and attention to all aspects of quality assurance and invests efforts to ensure that all related functions are performed at the highest level of proficiency. CAS, Ibri, strives to communicate the quality culture to all its staff to ensure that quality remains an integral part of their daily tasks.

We are confident that this newsletter will be of benefit for all CAS Ibri stakeholders as well as for all those who are involved in quality assurance practices in the community.

Dr. Jehad Al-Khalaf
The Dean
During the first meeting for the academic year 2014 -2015, the Board of Trustees of the Colleges of Applied Sciences, discussed the Strategic Plan 2015 -2020 for the colleges of Applied Sciences and approved it. The meeting was headed by the Minister of Higher Education, H.E., Dr. Rawiya bint Saud Al Busaidiya.

The plan has gone through many stages which involved all concerned stakeholders in its developing process. The plan includes, CAS mission, vision and the six strategic goals with each having six objectives. In addition KPIs were set to measure the effectiveness of the implementation of the strategy.
Enhancing Writing Skills

There are a variety of directions a teacher can take to enhance the writing skills of students. First, among the many avenues a teacher can follow, is one of the fundamental steps of any good writing process. That avenue is the submission of multiple drafts.

When I receive a writing sample I use correction codes, a key of which was provided to the students on the first day of class, to point out the wrong turns students have taken in their writing. Importantly, the writing samples do not actually receive a mark. The only thing visible on the draft is the scribing which corresponds to the correction code list.

Students are often surprised when they do not receive a mark on their first drafts. After the surprise begins to pass, I inform the students that this is only the first draft. I instruct students to amend their essay according to the correction code in their possession. After they have done this, I further instruct them to return the corrected writing as a second draft.

I do not give students a time limit for submission of drafts. Furthermore, as students travel further down the road, they discover the number of drafts they can submit is unlimited. However, in English 1111, English for Academic Purposes, a first and second draft are required for the research portion of the class. So, when I encourage multiple drafts for the two narrative and two descriptive essays, they are practicing for the research paper, which, in the end, is worth a large percentage of the mark for the course.

I have found this method is effective, especially for students who are interested in the enhancement of their own learning experience. Students can observe a reduction in corrections with each draft they submit. When they reach their destination of a paper with no red correction marks, a feeling of satisfaction overcomes them, and me, as a teacher, as well.

Adam King
English Department

The vision of any educational institution clearly manifests the development of a learner, who is considered as the most important component of the educative process, to be an active and responsive member of the society. Achieving the goals set by the college requires clear objectives, good strategic plans, qualified workforce, and great effort, which can be materialized by all stakeholders, both from the college and the community. There are several approaches, principles and strategies of achieving these goals. One of the prominent approaches that may be integrated in our educational system is the 3Hs.

What is 3H?

The 3H stands for Head, Heart and Hand, which is commonly known as the learning domains. This approach targets the three learning domains, which involve the cognitive, the affective and the psychomotor, in achieving the holistic growth and development of a learner.

The Head. This domain refers to the learner’s cognition, generally known as knowledge. It includes the mental activities like principles, ideas, concepts, reasoning, etc. This encompasses the development of the intellectual skills and abilities, which are categorized by Benjamin Bloom as knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation, as elaborated by Clark (2004).

The Heart. This domain denotes the learner’s affective sphere. It is also known as attitude, which covers the formation in areas of feelings and emotions, appreciations, judgments and values.

The Hand. This domain represents the learner’s psychomotor field, which is known for skills. It involves the bodily or physical reflexes, coordination, physical movement and the use of motor-skill areas.

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Many institutions have been following this approach in developing their learners. This has become the basis in constructing programs, creating educational framework or structure and formulating objectives or learning outcomes. They create programs for learning empowerment and find ways in incorporating developmentally-learning opportunities to assess impact to the real world.

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has elaborated and loosely grouped the three broad categories in developing learners through life skills education. Moreover, ISUE (2012) has developed a model – 4H Clover (Head, Heart, Hands and Health), which targets individuals that will help them to be productive and successful in life. In a micro context, teachers may integrate this approach in planning a lesson, creating classroom activities, formulating objectives, and evaluating or assessing student’s performance.

To sum up, education prepares the learners for the actual, practical and tangible world. By applying the 3Hs in the development of our educational system, we are able to create programs that are geared towards learner's development and learning. In succession, the integration of this approach in the teaching – learning process triggers the skills of the head, the heart and the hand and moulds our students into responsible citizens, confident individuals, effective contributors and successful members of the society.

Edward Batulan Langcay  
English Department

The main purpose of program review is to assess quality and effectiveness and encourage the strategic development strengthening the institution’s priorities with respect to the program. It facilitates better planning and fosters culture of continuous improvement. Till now, research has been focused on the process of doing program review but now, it took a shift in making this sustainable.

The most common practices listed in this article are those, which every institution should adhere in perfection to make the continuous journey of program review successful and sustainable.

Firstly, every institution has its own way of going with the program review cycle but the main concern is the effective implementation of the recommendations and follow up to be done after every review. Many studies reveal that most of the higher educational institution’s start well but end on a low note with respect to the above said factor.

Another most common mindset is linking accreditation with program review – They are distinct but program review can incorporate outputs from the processes of other types of assessments and accreditation.

Choosing the external reviewers plays a pivotal role in program review, as they clearly define the mission and benchmarking strategy adopted by the institution. When an institution goes for an audit, the external auditors can clearly come to a conclusion of the benchmarking strategy of the institution by looking at this factor.

The last but not the least is the self-study report in program review process. The self-study is the opportunity to present its unique character, accomplishments, challenges and strategy. It should be informative not only to the external reviewers who are experts in the field but also to internal reviewers who are not.

So, Program review can be more effective and sustainable in stimulating planning and continuous improvement, when the above said best practices are carefully handled.

Syed Ziaur Rahman  
IT Department
In one of the classes that I am teaching this semester, a student’s statement attracted my attention. This student stated that unfortunately at high school he did not have a teacher who encouraged him to love learning. He added that he started to lose interest in most of the subjects taught at high school. His reflection on his prior experience of learning made me think about, “What we have done for our students to be memorable”.

I used to be a student before becoming a teacher and I had that constant fear every semester about “what kind of teacher I might have for each new semester”. Some teachers’ names are engraved in my mind and their splendid efforts to make me a better individual is never forgotten. Nowadays, EFL and ESL teachers encounter the great challenge of getting students to have positive attitudes towards learning. Our students in this era are not like me or you who were only relying on print sources. Technology has a massive impact on our students socially, educationally physically and psychologically. Using traditional and outdated ways of teaching is certain to alienate your students.

**Inspiring students**

I do not think that using technology in the classroom will “denigrate the two most important things we can do as humans: To teach. To learn” (Stoll, Clifford, 1999, p.23). I believe that teaching and learning can be promoted and enhanced if we wisely inspire students’ interests toward the subject matter and learning process by using slide shows, overhead projectors, smart board, smart pen, blackboard, films and videotapes. Nowadays, some universities and schools use 4Di/3Dhive, imprints, digester, ambook and vark. All these types of technology aim to inspire students to have a positive learning experience and make their learning more purposeful. This inspiration will not normally happen or occur by using conventional techniques that students are fed up with.

**Embrace technology**

In addition, if the school doesn’t embrace this technology in this era where every child has a laptop and an IPad, it will present an odd and a ridiculous image to learners. This is because at home these same learners are able to have an opportunity to discover how the world is viewed and access updated information just by browsing the net, an experience which is not afforded at school. By having a conservative belief that incorporating technology in teaching will damage and disparage the teacher’s sacred role, we will not create more than uninspired and spiritless minds and souls toward learning.

We can fuse the use of technology with teaching in a cautious way in which we can guide and direct the students in how to use this technology in the appropriate way. For example, not all the information can be delivered to the students during the lesson because of time constrains.

Sometimes, there will be additional and extra information that the teacher will wish to give to the students, but because of the limited time, he/she will try to direct the students to get this information by searching the net. Some students, especially ESL students, may require more attention from the teacher to help them develop and improve their skills in learning the target language. This would be very difficult with a class that consists of thirty or more students. So the teacher can guide these students to go to certain links on the Web in order to expose themselves outside the classroom to electronic activities that are designed for ESL students. These programs can enable these students to try activities in a particular area of language such as grammar structure or vocabulary.

**Instant feedback**

An interesting thing about these activities is the instant feedback that these students can get after completing an exercise. In addition, the learners who suffer from deficiency in their speaking or listening skills can use certain programs on the net that may again provide them with activities to improve these skills. These activities are designed to meet the diverse level of the learners (beginner, intermediate and advanced), and they enable learners to listen and see how the words or certain sentences are pronounced and how people may use the target language.
Hence, adopting computers in teaching will not eradicate the teacher’s role; instead computers can be supportive to teaching by assisting in accomplishing certain objectives that the teacher may plan to fulfill in the class. In addition, using this technology will enhance student’s independence and self-esteem in their abilities to view learning as an on-going process. This will empower students to view learning as an interesting process that can extend beyond the classroom boundaries by looking at different sources of which the Web is one.

**Using the Web**

Using the web will provide students with “infinite access to resources beyond the region” and “provides new points of view for a region’s communities of practice” (Brown, 2000, p.20). Those who are also interested to pursue their further studies will gain useful information about the field of their interest, and the nature of the country they will go to, by browsing the web and sending e-mails and consulting “various experts”. Without this technology, it will be hard for students aiming for further studies to gain any vision or insight of where to go and what to study.

Some reading I did confirms the idea that adapting the use of technology can assist the interactive communication between individuals and boost the social and lifelong learning.

For example, Hunt (2005) in his article “What is inkshedding?”, shows that inkshedding, which means the immediate response to the writers’ ideas, could be more effective and enhanced by electronic mediation. Hunt argues that electronic inkshedding has emerged to meet student’s rich experience with computers and networks. According to Hunt, electronic inkshedding varies from any other electronic reading because it embraces reading in a community where the reader has to write an immediate response to what he/she read.

Mrs. Umama Al Kalbani
English Department
Oman Quality Network in Higher Education (OQNHE) organized a two-day conference in quality management and quality enhancement in higher education during 24-25/2/2015. It aimed at creating awareness, sharing good practices and providing a platform to bring policy makers, higher education institutions (HEIs) and interested stakeholders to share experiences and ideas. His Excellency Dr. Said bin Hamad Al Rabie, the Secretary-General of the Education Council, was the patron of the conference.

Participants in the conference were policy makers in higher education, higher education professionals, representatives from government, industry and HEIs officials with responsibility for quality assurance and quality enhancement. There were two keynote addresses, one international and the other one from the region.

The first day keynote speaker was Dr. Jawaher Al Mudhaki Chief Executive of the National Authority for Qualification and Quality Assurance of Educational and Training (QQA) Kingdom of Bahrain. She presented a paper titled “Quality assurance in GCC higher education sectors: realities, obstacles and priorities”. On the second day Professor Lee Keng-mun Executive Director Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications, Hong Kong shared the Hong Kong experience in quality assurance and education in a paper titled: “Quality assurance for institutional effectiveness: challenges, opportunities and pitfalls”.

A good number of papers were presented throughout the two-day sessions covering conference themes. The conference provided an opportunity to deliberate on how higher education development in Oman and the region can be nurtured and stimulated through sustainable policies and practices in quality assurance.
A workshop to prepare the final draft of the Strategic Plan of CAS was held in the Directorate General of the Colleges of Applied Sciences on 22, 23 October, 2014. The aim of the workshop was to get feedback from CAS representatives and the stakeholders for the final version of the Strategic Plan.

A committee including Dr. Mohamoud Al Shaikh, Dr. Basim Ashammary, Dr. Hamadi Dhao, Mrs. Ameena Al Yaqoubi, Mr. Ziaur Rahman Syed and Dr. Balaji Swaminathan was formed to study the First Phase of the Strategic Plan and the Initiatives of it (the Second Phase 2015-2020) in June, 2014.

A questionnaire was made regarding the Strategic Plan and was uploaded to the CAS website which aimed to get feedback from CAS academics, administrative Staff, students and different stakeholders.

Presentations

The first day of the workshop included presentations by the Strategic Plan committee about the vision, the mission, the first and the second strategic goals of the Strategic Plan. The participants were divided into groups to discuss the scope and give feedback. During the second day, strategic goals three to six were discussed.

By the end of the workshop, it was decided that a meeting will take place in the following week to make changes suggested by the workshop attendees and to prepare a draft sample of the operational plan.

QAD visit to Ibri College of Technology

A team from CAS-Ibri visited the Ibri College of Technology on 15th, February, 2015. The visit aimed to share experiences in quality assurance practices. The team included; the Quality Assurance Dept.’s staff, and 3 members from the Quality Assurance Committee. The team had a meeting with the Assistant Dean for Financial and administrative affairs, a member from the Quality Assurance Committee, and the quality assurance Coordinator at the college. The Coordinator gave a presentation on: the recommendations/Affirmations of the college’s quality audit report, the college’s action plan to deal with these recommendations, the Strategic and Operational plans, and the internal auditing systems adopted at the college. The two teams had emphasized the importance of this kind of reciprocal visits and decided to plan further future visits.
The CAS-Policies Project which began in 2012 aims to ensure that the colleges’ policies and procedures are established, applied, monitored and reviewed consistently and appropriately across the CAS colleges, and that the policies are consolidated in a CAS-Policy Manual.

This was initiated at the directives of Her Excellency, the Minister for Higher Education, Dr. Rawiya bin Saud Al Busaidi, and the recommendations of the quality audit reports issued by the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA), that all colleges should consolidate their approved policies and ensure their effective dissemination, accessibility and implementation. Colleges should develop a framework for governing the development, implementation and review of their policies and related documents.

In light of her Excellency’s directives, a committee was formed at the CAS level chaired by the Director General of the Directorate of CAS (DG) and membership of a number of CAS Deans, Assistant Deans as well as representatives from the Directorate General of CAS who have a direct relationship with policies development of the policies and follow-up.

Review of current policies

One of the main things assigned to the committee is to review current policies and to propose new policies according to what is being practiced in international universities and to the actual needs of the colleges.

The committee held a series of meetings and prepared a list of policies that the colleges need to establish as a matter of necessity. The Committee also formed policies working groups from administrative and academic staff from all CAS.

In March, 2012 a workshop was held to introduce policies project and its goals for all group members, and to identify what is meant by a policy, a procedure and a guideline. Members also were made aware of the mechanisms of writing a policy and a template to be used.

The policies groups drafted more than 20 policies under the coordination of the Policies Steering Committee.

The policy writing mechanisms and a policy template were also presented during the workshop to the members.

The policies Steering Committee reviewed, and send them back to the drafting groups with the suggested amendments.

In early 2014, policies review groups were formed by the Steering Committee from all CAS to review original drafts and prepare the final drafts. Each group included a member from the Drafting Committee in addition to other members who were involved in the policies management process. CAS-Ibri has reviewed more than 7 policies. In April 2014, a final workshop was held for final discussions and modifications.

Definitions

- **Policy**
  A set of principles which describe requirements and limitations. It is characterized by indicating “what” needs to be done by establishing rights, requirements and responsibilities.

- **Procedure**
  Procedures are often attached with policies. Any procedure provides information about “how to implement” the policy.
The quality assurance Department at CAS-Ibri had the pleasure of an exclusive interview with OAAA Executive Office

The OAAA is charged, based on Royal Decree No. (2010/54), with regulating the quality of higher education in Oman to ensure the maintenance of a level that meets international standards, and to encourage higher education institutions to improve their internal quality. The main responsibilities of the OAAA include institutional and program accreditation, in addition to the development and maintenance of the national qualifications framework.

1. In OAAA values transparency is mentioned, can you please elaborate on the way it is achieved?

Values support the way that we work. Transparency is important in our approach to our external review activities so that stakeholders and the public understand why and how we do things. This is demonstrated in the extensive consultation we have had in the development of the Quality Plan, the Standards for General Foundation Programs, the institutional and program standards and accreditation processes and in the production of our manuals, such as the Quality Audit Manual. People need to know how OAAA makes accreditation decisions and this will be a key component in the forthcoming Standards Assessment Manuals. OAAA process, policies and Quality Audit Reports are available on our website and the recent launch of the Arabic language website will support a great awareness of our activities. Transparency is also important to the OAAA as it develops the Oman Qualifications Framework (OQF); we are working with a range of stakeholders on the Oversight Committee and one of the first tasks will be to develop a Consultancy Strategy to ensure that stakeholders and the public are fully aware of the role and purpose of the OQF.

2. In the second stage of the Institutional Accreditation (the Standards Assessment), institutions are accredited against a certain set of standards. What was the developing and benchmarking process adopted for these standards?

The Conceptual Design Framework (CDF), available on the OAAA website, outlines the approach to the development of the standards and the extensive benchmarking that has been carried out. The institutional standards have been developed based on a review of the original standards published as part of the Requirements for Oman’s System of Quality Assurance (ROSQA). The ROSQA standards were mapped against the areas in the institutional accreditation scope, as outlined in the Quality Audit Manual. Standards reflecting both ROSQA and the institutional accreditation scope were initially benchmarked against standards used by international accreditation agencies from: the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, countries experiencing rapid growth in their higher education sectors and at similar stages of development to Oman; the USA, as a number of Omani Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have established affiliations with American colleges and universities; Australia and Estonia, countries with recently developed standards which have been extensively benchmarked; and Malaysia which provides a model of how excellence, beyond meeting minimum standards, is encouraged. As the project evolved the number of agencies from across the world used as benchmarks was widened to more than thirty to ensure a comprehensive benchmarking exercise.

The OAAA also formed a panel of international experts from UK, USA, Australia, Malaysia, Bahrain, UAE and Germany to provide feedback on the draft CDFs and institutional standards.
3. How would the standards be beneficial for the higher education institutes in Oman?

The OAAA recognizes that standards drive behavior; these institutional standards have been internationally benchmarked and HEIs meeting these standards will in effect be meeting international standards. This means that accreditation decisions will not only be important within Oman but also outside Oman, for HEIs looking to develop partnerships with overseas institutions and seek international accreditation. The OAAA approach to institutional accreditation also allows for recognition of good practice as HEIs can be accredited with merit overall or against a standard.

4. What are the strategies developed to test the effectiveness of the implementation of these standards?

In the Institutional Standards Assessment Application (ISAA), HEIs will be expected to rate themselves against each standard and criterion and to provide a commentary to support this rating. HEIs will submit evidence to show how effective they have been in implementing the standards. Panels will consider the information provided in the ISAA along with the evidence to decide whether these standards have been effectively implemented. During the Standards Assessment Visit Panel members will meet staff, students and other stakeholders to triangulate the evidence. Panel decisions will be made according to the rating definitions and characteristics given in the CDF.

The OAAA has established a two-stage approach to institutional accreditation; one strategy to evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of the standards at HEI level will be the cycle of Quality Audits post Standards Assessment which will indicate the sustainability of the HEI’s approach to implementing the standards.

5. What are the challenges which OAAA faced during the process of developing the standards?

There have been a number of challenges. One has been to ensure that the local context and the diversity of the sector is appropriately reflected in the standards and therefore to ensure that the consultation process is as comprehensive as possible and communication with the Consultative Committee is effective. The meeting of deadlines has been, and remains a challenge. It is also a challenge to ensure that the assessment strategy will be as transparent and effective as possible.

6. Is OAAA planning for any training sessions for the (HEIs)?

Yes, the OAAA plans to carry out regional training workshops for all HEIs before summer 2015. There will also be training workshops for locally-based external reviewers.
7. Is there a schedule for the institutions to go through the Standards Assessment?
Yes and the date that an HEI will go through Standards Assessment is indicated in the Institutional Review Schedule available on OAAA website. However, public Institutions such as Colleges of Technology, Colleges of Applied Sciences and Health Institutes are not scheduled for standards assessment yet.

8. What happens if any institution did not fulfill all requirements of the recommendations in its Audit Report?
Institutional accreditation is a two-stage process; in Stage 2 of the process, the Standards Assessment, HEIs need to report in their application (ISAA) how they have responded to Recommendations and Affirmations from Stage 1 of the process, Quality Audit. The responses of an HEI to its Affirmations and Recommendations will be an indication of the effectiveness of the HEI’s approach to quality improvement. Standards Assessment is about meeting the standards and criteria but in this context, whether or not Recommendations and Affirmations have been responded to appropriately will be relevant (as the areas of scope are the same in both stages of the process) and will be considered. The OAAA recognizes that HEIs are organizations that change and there may be cases where the Affirmation or Recommendation became irrelevant due to changes in circumstances; in such instances, the HEI still needs to report this in their ISSA.

9. Is there any appeal mechanism for the institutions which will not be happy from the result of the Standards Assessment?
Yes, the OAAA has an appeals process in place and the Appeals Manual can be found on the OAAA website.

10. Will OAAA accreditation help higher education institutions in Oman in achieving university ranking by any foreign agency?
This will depend on the ranking process used by the agency. The OAAA, however, has reservations about the value of HEI rankings by some foreign agencies; widely recognized shortcomings of international rankings include concerns about rigor of data collection and also that weightings on different aspects of HEI activity (research, teaching etc.) are pre-set by rankings agencies. The OAAA does, however, strongly support reliable data on HEIs being made available to the public so that interested parties can assess HEIs in relation to their particular needs. The OAAA intends to publish Standards Assessment results in the form of ratings against each standard and each criterion for each HEI. This will allow stakeholders to make their own comparisons between different HEIs in Oman using their own weightings.

11. How OAAA accreditation process is different from ABET or any other recognized accrediting agency?
ABET, like many international accreditation bodies, is a specialized, program-based accreditation body. Such bodies represent specific fields of study or professions and their accreditation processes focus strongly on programs from the perspective of the relevant profession. In mature HE sectors such as the US and the UK, such accreditation processes are common and provides additional endorsement of programs which have already been considered by rigorous quality assurance processes internal to HEIs and external scrutiny from national or regional quality assurance bodies. However, different program accrediting agencies will inevitably use different standards and processes, with different levels of transparency and rigor and different assessment outcomes. This creates a need for a level playing field at national level which the OAAA’s program accreditation process is set to address.

The OAAA program accreditation process will use generic standards which can be applied to all programs, except medical programs. The focus will include attention to all core academic matters and to national academic requirements such as compliance with the Oman Qualifications Framework. While the OAAA’s program accreditation panels will include relevant subject specialists, the process will aim to verify how effectively HEIs are in ensuring that the syllabus and curriculum for each program remains appropriate in relation to relevant benchmarks rather than specify syllabus and curriculum requirements for different academic programs. The process will view all programs
using the same scope and the same standards and criteria. It will utilize the same standards assessment process and apply the same accreditation outcomes. The publication of a detailed Program Standards Assessment Manual will ensure transparency in the process and illustrate the rigor of the process. Performance against standards and criteria will be rated and ratings will be published so that stakeholders can make comparisons between aspects of different programs.

12. What are OAAA future plans?
The OAAA is in the process of developing its 2020-2015 Strategic Plan. As well as institutional and program accreditation activities and the development of the OQF, this will include an approach for the quality audit of Foundation Programs and the intention to undergo the INQAAHE recognition process.

13. What is the message you would like to give to the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) with respect to OAAA accreditation?
It is critical to the OAAA’s Mission and Vision to encourage and support HEIs to attain accreditation and for this status to be recognized internationally. As indicated in OAAA Program Standards CDF, accreditation will result in public recognition that the HEI as a whole is in good standing and meeting international benchmarks of good practice; similarly, the good standing of individual programs will be publically recognized, and provide reassurance to employers that graduates will be equipped with sound knowledge and skills, from a reputable program and HEI. For the HEI, accreditation status represents an important confirmation of the quality and standards of the HEI and its programs, and is therefore also a powerful marketing tool in attracting and recruiting prospective students.

Quality in higher education, however, ultimately remains the responsibility of HEIs themselves, and the OAAA congratulates and encourages all those who contribute to the building of a quality culture both within their institutions and across the sector. The publication of newsletters such as this, and the work of those who support and contribute to the Oman Quality Network in Higher Education (OQNHE), a network which is recognized and respected throughout the region, are examples of such efforts in action.
Undergraduate Research is nowadays a hot topic with large number of critics as well as proponents. Undergraduate education is the first step for a student to identify his or her interests in a particular domain. Though the curriculum at this level is quite broad but a new focus can be created where a student can explore and evaluate his or her acumen in a field of personal choice. This article will try to investigate the two sides of the views and the related pros and cons inherent in them.

Opponents of Undergraduate Research

Many academicians carry a view that the Undergraduate education gives a student an opportunity to build on the foundations and study different allied areas in a particular domain. They further believe that this particular stage should be left untouched by any extra emphasis on research. In fact it is believed that for a research to be of credible value, one should possess strong skills in analytical and numerical reasoning, statistical thinking and many other subjects. Hence the student at this stage should not be forced into actual research without building on the essentials that are necessary for a fruitful and a meaningful exploration. Undergraduate period should be used, as such, to provide knowledge and skill development that may come handy in later higher stages of higher education.

Proponents of Undergraduate Research:

There exist a sizable proportion of academicians who would vouch for strong research push at the Undergraduate level. They view it as a stepping stone and a gradual initiation into research. There is a view that the quality of research at the Masters and Doctorate level has declined over a period of time and this decline is primarily attributed to the absence of any initiative at the Undergraduate level to motivate students to start thinking of new research ideas. Further, it is also conceded that pushing students into research brings more creativity and novel thinking which is otherwise mostly lacking at this stage.

Whatever be the reasons in favor or against the Undergraduate research, one thing is very clear that due to fast changing technology, a strong research culture need to be nurtured in institutions of learning. The research in basic sciences is on the decline mostly in the developing countries as it is not very well funded and considered inferior vis-a’vis cross-disciplinary contemporary research areas. The prime motivation to do research is to celebrate creativity and fresh thinking in young minds.

Munesh Singh
IT Department

TRC's Faculty-Mentored Undergraduate Research Award Program

The Research Council is Oman’s exclusive research funding body and leader of research development in the country. It serves as a focal point and hub dedicated to promoting and supporting research, scientific enquiry, and innovation in the Sultanate of Oman. At the heart of its work is nurturing research talent to power innovation and create economic benefits which would ensure national prosperity.

Faculty-Mentored Undergraduate Research Award Program (FURAP) is one of TRC’s new projects. It is dedicated to support undergraduate students’ projects carried out under the supervision of a faculty member.
Academic Advising: Integral Part of Higher Education

Academic Advising is an integral part of any Higher Educational institution as it promotes students and faculty's individual growth. Regular student meetings give the advisors an insight into their diverse academic and personal needs. Advisors use this insight to help students orient themselves in their academic journey to see value in the learning process. Advisors help students develop and reinforce realistic self-perceptions and help them use this information in mapping out their future. This in turn helps them make informed and responsible decisions regarding their careers.

Advisors must develop and maintain cordial relations with other departments such as financial aid, housing, career guidance and counseling to address physical and educational needs of the students. They must direct students to experts who specialize in credit transfers, help in coming out of probation and get graduation clearance.

Advisors articulate the need for administrative support of advising and related activities. They also share their personal experiences and techniques in solving student’s academic problems, with their respective colleagues. Advisors are encouraged to investigate all available avenues to help students explore academic opportunities.

Students’ information

Advisors seek access to and use student information only when the information is relevant to the advising process. They request change information on students’ records only with appropriate institutional authorization to do so. Advisors document advising contacts adequately to meet institutional disclosure guidelines and aid in subsequent advising interactions.

The primary goal of advising is to establish, between students and advisors, a partnership that will guide students through their academic programs. Advisors help students understand that learning can be used in day-to-day application through exploration, trial and error, challenge, and decision making.

Student Advisory Councils are a general trend in the Sultanate of Oman by which students in public and private higher education institutions will have an opportunity to give their feedback about the academic and non-academic services provided to them in formal and organized ways. The Advisory Councils will enhance transparency and constructive criticism principles which are key elements in building students’ personality.

The Student Advisory Council Committee will consist of the following body: Council Deputy Chair, Head of the Academic Committee, Head of the Students Services Committee, Head of the Activities and Initiatives Committee, and the Secretary of the Council which will be either the Dean or the Head of the Students Affairs.

An office will be allocated for the council members which will be headed by the council Chairman and the membership of: Council Deputy Chair, Head of the Academic Committee, Head of the Students Services Committee, Head of the Activities and Initiatives Committee and the Secretary of the Council which will be either the Dean or the Head of the Students Affairs.

Media Campaign to Raise Awareness of Student Advisory Councils

Prime Role For Student Advisory Councils

A. Fida Mohammed
IT department
College of Applied Sciences- Ibra
ADRI is an adaptation of the Approach >> Deployment >> Results >> Improvement (ADRI) cycle developed by the Australian Business Excellence Framework. It is a variant of the Plan Do Check Act cycle made by Dr. W Edwards Deming in the 1950s. ADRI is used to review performance over a particular period and it can be applied to an analysis of any given topic.

Evidence-based method

**Approach:** What the institution aims to achieve and how it proposes to achieve these aims. The approach may also be thought of as the intentions that the institution has in relation to the topic under analysis. The statements of the intent take many forms, ranging from the highest strategic levels to the lowest operational levels.

**Deployment:** Whether the plans are being followed in practice, and if not, why. The deployment stage also known as ‘implementation, ‘process’, or most simply, ‘do’. One of the most effective ways to investigate deployment is to explore people’s “lived experiences through interviews, focus groups or departmental meetings.

**Results:** What trends do the performance indicators show and how do results compare with the best practices. In general, every goal must have a reported result (or multiple results) and vice-versa, i.e. every result should link back to a goal. In ADRI cycle, it is essential that a causal relationship can be shown between the approach, the deployment and the eventual result, otherwise the result may be just chance, with no guarantee that the institution understands how to influence future results.

**Improvement:** What an institution knows about itself in order to get better and better. The fundamental assumption of this dimension is that the institution ought to be continually reviewing its activities and looking for ways to improve. Targets should be recalibrated each time; processes should become more efficient and more effective over time; results should indicate increasing success. This requires a comprehensive system of review – not just consideration of results.

Two aspects of ADRI

In the context of continuous improvement, ADRI can be used to review performance over a particular period: the performance of a university as a whole or some clearly identified unit, function, process or item within it. For example, ADRI can be used to assess institution performance against the goals identified in the strategic plan after five years. It can be also used to assess the performance of the academic departments against their annual plans, or the delivery of a course or a student support service.

ADRI can also be used as a guide when any kind of initiative or activity is being planned. Objectives, Deployment are obviously important on the planning phase, but consideration should also be given to Results and Improvement. In the context of Results, it is important to identify the assessment method of the results, and what might the institution consider doing if performance indicators show a particular trend. It is also important to identify the sort of processes for improvement that
Kaizen

The word Kaizen means "continuous improvement". It comes from the Japanese words 改 ("kai") which means "change" or "to correct" and 善 ("zen") which means "good". Kaizen was first implemented in several Japanese businesses after the Second World War, influenced in part by American business and quality management teachers who visited the country. It has since spread throughout the world and is now being implemented in environments outside of business and productivity.

Two elements

There are two elements that construct kaizen, improvement/change for the better and ongoing / continuity. Lacking one of those elements would not be considered as kaizen. For instance, the expression of “business as usual” contains the element of continuity without improvement. On the other hand, the expression of “breakthrough” contains the element of change or improvement without continuity. Kaizen contains both elements.

Kaizen approach is based on the premise that there is no perfection in a process, because no structure, product, or system ever achieves the ideal stage and where it can be improved by further reducing waste. The message is that not one single day should go by in the firm without some type of improvement being made in some process in the company.

All-inclusive

Kaizen is everyone's job, and it involves everyone in the organization from top management, to managers then to supervisors, and to workers. Everyone is encouraged to come up with small improvement suggestions on a regular basis. In most cases these are not ideas for major changes. Kaizen is based on making little changes on a regular basis: always improving productivity, safety and effectiveness while reducing waste. It requires sophisticated problem-solving expertise as well as professional and engineering knowledge and involves people from different departments working together in teams to solve problems.

Essence of Kaizen

The essence of Kaizen is that the people that perform a certain task are the most knowledgeable about that task; consequently, by involving them and showing confidence in their capabilities, ownership of the process is raised to its highest level. Kaizen techniques became famous when Toyota used them to rise to world automotive leadership. Rather than undertake large projects, Toyota’s staff was encouraged to identify problems, no matter how small, trace their root causes, and implement all necessary solutions.

One of the key elements of Kaizen is that it generates process-oriented thinking and rather than identifying employees as the problem, Kaizen emphasis that the process is the target and employees can provide improvement by understanding how their jobs fit into the process and changing it. The companies that undertake a Kaizen philosophy place an emphasis on the processes – on 'how' of achieving the required results.

Three pillars

According to Masaaki Imai, who made the term famous in his book Kaizen: The Key to Japan’s Competitive Success, Kaizen has three pillars:

1. Housekeeping: which is basically the process of managing the workplace. For proper housekeeping a valuable methodology is used, the 5S methodology. This term is derived from first letters of Japanese words referred to five practices leading to a clean and manageable work area: Sort, Straighten, Sweep, sanitize, and Sustain.

2. Waste (Muda) elimination: Muda is any non value-added task or activity. In Kaizen philosophy, the aim is to eliminate the seven types of waste (Continued...
deadly wastes) caused by: overproduction, waiting, transportation, unnecessary stock, over processing, motion, and a defective part.

3. **Standardization**: This is better explained and presented by the PDCA Cycle (plan-do-check-act), known as Demming cycle.

- **PLAN** refers to selecting the theme, understanding the current status and setting objectives, and analyzing the data in order to identify root causes;

- **DO** is the process of establishing countermeasures based on the data analysis;

- **CHECK** is confirming the effects of the countermeasures; and

- **ACT** is to establish or revise the standards to prevent recurrences, and reviewing the above processes and working on the next steps.

Same example of the Kaizen philosophy in action is the Toyota production system, in which suggestions for improvement are encouraged and rewarded, and the production line is stopped when a malfunction occurs.

Kaizen in Japan is a system of improvement that includes both home and business life. Kaizen even includes social activities. It is a concept that is applied in every aspect of a person's life.

The Center for Community Service and Continuing Education at Sultan Qaboos University organized a one day workshop on ISO 9001 on 11 January, 2015.

The workshop was presented by Sandra Feliciano from ISEC institute in Portugal. During the workshop, she gave a brief history of quality management and clear comparison about ISO 9000:2005 and ISO 9000:2015. She emphasized on the current challenges of quality management in higher education and explained some of ISO's best known standards that are applied to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The standards provide guidance and tools for the institutions that want to ensure their services consistently meet stakeholders’ requirements, and that quality is consistently improved.

ISO 9001 family is working on the draft ISO 9001 standards (ISO 9001:2015), that will be applied to the HEIs. The final version is expected to be published by the end of 2015.
‘Induction’ and ‘orientation’ are terms that can have different meanings in different organizations. Hr dictionary (2013) explains that there are variations to induction and orientation programs that are implemented, from organization to organization, and from country to country (Induction and Orientation, 2013). Nevertheless, these programs share a common objective, namely to assist new employees or team members to ‘acclimatize’ to the culture and working practices of a new organization.

Proactive effort

From an organization’s perspective, the implementation of induction and orientation programs represents a proactive effort, in respect of employees, “to maximize productivity and minimize high turnover” (Business Victoria, 2014). Productivity and employee retention are challenges faced in all organizations, but especially in educational institutions, where both are of great importance.

For this reason, schools, colleges, and universities worldwide are initiating induction and orientation programs, and these programs focus principally on perhaps the most essential element of the education system, the instructional staff (i.e. the teachers and lecturers).

At the start of the fall semester, and the 15/2014 academic year, The Department of English at Ibri College of Applied Sciences drew up and put into practice an induction and orientation program for new English teachers at the college. Current members of the English department shared their ideas for a provisional orientation – induction program, to be implemented this academic year.

The English department’s objectives were to provide new teachers with a helpful introduction to the community and the college campus. The orientation program provided teachers with maps of the campus, a walking tour of the campus, and introductions to department heads and essential administrative staff. The induction program also contained workshops on the course content and new technology.

Buddy system

One highlighted feature of the new induction program was the buddy system. This was suggested and initiated by a senior teacher, Barry Van Rooyen, following his own first year experience at the college.

The idea of the buddy system is to provide new teachers with an informal and comfortable environment whereby they can ask questions and process new information (such as on policies, methodologies & procedures) with guidance from senior teacher. An effective buddy system prevents new teachers from problems such as being isolated, feeling frustrated, slipping into ‘survival mode’, and even giving up.

As Mr. Van Rooyen explains, this mentoring helps adjust new teachers to their new environment and teaching materials and also to “familiarize new teachers with Blackboard and SIS” (personal communication, 2014).

Mr. Van Rooyen voluntarily acted as a buddy to a new teacher at CAS-Ibri, Susannah Donkor. As an induction and orientation tool, Ms. Donkor found the buddy experience “invaluable” (personal communication, 2014), describing Mr. Van Rooyen as “approachable, supportive, knowledgeable, and above all … very patient” (personal communication, 2014). According to both participants, this type of mentoring system was helpful and should be continued in the English department in the future as part of the induction and orientation experience for all new teaching staff.
Best Practices in Academic Advising

Academic advising is a key element in the educational process in higher education institutions; therefore, it should be implemented in the best practices that are required to help students cope with academic life and obtain required academic levels for the work market.

To make sure that academic advising effectively contributes to student academic life, it should start from the very first day the student starts college. The first obstacle that the student face in higher education is that he/she has come from a completely different educational environment in which students depend on their teachers and parents in gaining knowledge and solving problems.

In addition, it is very important to raise awareness of academic life in higher education institutions among pre-university students. In fact, the academic institution, parents and student are all responsible for keeping the student’s academic life on the right path.

Learning environment

The integration of all processes and services provided in the institution provide a comprehensive high-quality learning environment that fits all kinds of students regardless of gender, culture, interests, abilities and psyche. One of these services is student activities that help students sharpen their skills and discover their capabilities. These also play an important role in positively expressing youth issues, suggesting solutions for them as well as directing students’ interests.

The College of Applied Science, Ibri, is a pioneer in academic advising through the Time Management and Self-Realization Program (TMSRP) which aims to address individual cases among students through the application of professional methods, to identify goals and solve problems under supervision of a psychological specialist.

It is also good practice when the student is considered a partner in the educational process through contributing to curriculum evaluation and decision-making; discussing problems and suggesting solutions.

Developing Advisors skills

In addition, developing academic advisor skills is essential to the success of the advising process. The advisor must be able to conduct advisory work professionally and should have excellent communication skills. Meanwhile, the institution has to spare no effort in finding the best practices in advising and preparing professional development programs for academic advisors.

The academic Advising process has to deal with various categories of students; weak, average and excellent students, who have to be encouraged to continue with their hard work and self-development.

As a final point, the best practice in academic advising is achieved when the academic institution successfully creates a parallel between the academic status of the student and student awareness of the institution’s principles and regulations.

Sheikha Al-Gharibi
Assistant Head of Admissions & Registration Center

Best Practices in Academic Advising
As we live in an evolution of digital knowledge, the only person who is educated is the person who has learned how to learn, the person who has learned how to adapt and change; the person who has realized that no knowledge is secure, that only the process of seeking knowledge gives a basis of security.

E-learning should support right knowledge at the right time in the right way. Quality assurance of e-learning systems becomes a crucial factor in implementing such systems. What does quality of e-learning systems actually mean? What is the difference between e-learning quality assurance and quality control? This study is an attempt and a step to answer the above questions.

1. Quality of e-learning systems:

There are numerous definitions of quality. Quality is fitness for use. Quality is meeting or exceeding customer expectations at a cost that represents a value to them. Quality should be defined as surpassing customer needs and expectations throughout the life of the product. Quality means “meeting requirements”.

With this definition, to have a quality product, the requirements must be measurable, and the product’s requirements will either be met or not met. With this meaning, quality is binary state; that is, a product is either a quality product or not. The growth of e-learning has increased greatly in recent years. Yet, there has been criticism of the quality of the systems currently being used.

Many organizations are still experimenting with e-learning, using different approaches, applying different technologies and models for the delivery of e-learning content. Quality cannot be achieved by assessing an already completed product. The aim, therefore, is to prevent quality defects or deficiencies in the first place. The sooner a defect is located and corrected, the less costly it will be in the long run.

Quality in the field of e-learning is not associated with a well-defined measure. It is variable with respect to scope, perspective, and dimension. So, the requirements are the most important document. The quality system revolves around it. Everyone is committed to quality. Quality requires a commitment, particularly from top management. Close cooperation between all participants is required to make it happen. To ensure e-learning quality, well defined standards and procedures must be followed.

2. E-learning quality assurance and its components:

E-learning quality assurance (EQA) is systematic activities providing evidence of the fitness for use of the e-learning system. (EQA) is achieved through the use of established guidelines for quality control to ensure the integrity and long life of e-learning systems.

Quality assurance is a set of support activities needed to provide adequate confidence that processes are established and continuously improved to ensure products that meet specifications and are fit to use. (EQA) plan is an outline of quality measures to ensure quality levels within an E-learning development effort. The plan is used as a baseline to compare the actual levels of quality during development with the planned levels of quality.

The plan provides the framework and guidelines for development of understandable and maintainable code. (EQA) is a strategy for risk management. It exists because e-learning quality is typically costly and should be incorporated into the formal risk management of a project. (EQA) is a managerial function that prevents problems by heading them off, and by advising restraint and redirection.

Auditing is an inspection activity that verifies compliance with plans, policies, and procedures. (EQA) activities can be categorized into testing, configuration management, and quality control. However, the success of (EQA) program also depends on a coherent collection of standards, procedures, conventions, and specifications as shown in figure 1.

Continued...
Evaluation Is The Key to E-learning Quality

1.2 E-learning testing:
E-learning testing is a popular risk management strategy. It is used to verify if functional requirements are met. Tests are only as good as the test cases, but they can be inspected to ensure that all the requirements are tested across all possible combinations of inputs and system states.

2.2 E-learning quality control:
E-learning quality control (EQC) is the process by which product quality is compared with applicable standards and action taken when non-conformance is detected. Quality control is defined as the process and methods used to monitor work and observe whether requirements are met. It focuses on reviews and removal of defects before shipments of products. (EQC) consists of well-defined checks on a product that are specified in the product quality assurance plan.

For e-learning products, quality control typically includes specification reviews, inspection of codes and documents, and checks for user-deliverables. Usually, document and product inspections are conducted at each life-cycle milestone to demonstrate that the items produced satisfy the criteria specified by the (EQA) plan. (EQC) is designed to detect and correct defects, whereas (EQA) is oriented toward preventing them.

2.3 E-learning configuration management:
E-learning configuration management (ECM) is concerned with labeling, tracking, and controlling changes in the e-learning elements. It controls the evolution of an e-learning system by managing different versions and their relationships. (ECM) has a stabilizing effect when there is a great deal of change activity or a considerable risk of selecting the wrong e-learning component.

As we are living through a cultural shift that has taken us from an emphasis on teaching, to an emphasis on facilitating learning, Evaluation is the key to quality e-Learning, and having a plan for the process is the key to evaluation. So, Quality assurance of e-learning systems becomes a crucial factor in implementing such systems.

Dr. Amr M. Kamal
IT Department
His famous books:
- What every U.S. business person should know about successful management and bringing quality back home
- Out of the Crisis

Known as Father of Quality Evolution

His famous sayings:
- Quality is everybody’s responsibility
- It is not enough to do your best, you must know what to do and then to do your best.
- The result of long-term relationships is better and better quality and lower and lower costs.

Hint: you will find the answer on ADRI article