In September 2005, twenty-three faculty and staff members attended a training at Eagle Creek Resort to learn how to assess Eastern’s Electronic Writing Portfolios.

Dr. Robert O’Brien Hokanson, Associate Professor of English and Coordinator of the Communication Ability Department at Alverno College, developed and led the one and one-half-day training.

Readers volunteered from all four colleges, the School of Continuing Education, Booth Library, and the Center for Academic Support and Achievement. Dr. O’Brien Hokanson urged readers to look for patterns across the portfolios rather than focusing on each individual document submitted to the portfolios. As they learned what to look for in the portfolios, readers examined seven aspects of writing: focus/purpose, organization, development, audience, style, mechanics, and sources. Following the training, these skills formed the basis for the first readings of the portfolios.

Readers were given access to a secure, password-protected web site and were given the month of October to read 13-14 portfolios. Portfolios were chosen at random through a software program written by two Eastern CIS majors in Spring 2005. Ten percent of the completed portfolios were read for a total of 312 portfolios encompassing 973 documents. Readings will take place annually each fall. Readers were asked to complete a reader’s guide for each portfolio read and an overall

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evaluation sheet covering all the portfolios they read. After portfolios had
been read by individual readers, four focus groups were held so that faculty
could come together and share their observations about how effective
undergraduate writing is at Eastern.

The following table represents how readers rated the portfolios they read by
the skills and then the overall score. See the website for an explanation of the
skills and assessment levels.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Strong</th>
<th>Adequate</th>
<th>Weak</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus/Purpose</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanics</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While readers were asked to provide information on how well students met
the above writing skills through a reading guide that divided each skill into three
levels of effectiveness, the majority of the data gathered from the readings and

focus groups were qualitative. What follows are a small sampling of the
findings:

The first submission from English 1001G or 1002G was often the
strongest submission in the portfolios while the submission from the senior
seminar tended to be one of the weaker submissions.

Readers also noted that students who had difficulty sustaining focus or
a sense of purpose also had issues with development and those whose
papers were weak in terms of organization showed little evidence of
development.

Style was one of the skills that readers found most problematic
across the portfolios. Many people commented that the documents
lacked sophistication of style and were not written in academic prose.

The full narrative report is available at www.eiu.edu/~assess.

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**EWP CONT.**

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**SPEAKING CONT.**

student speeches were videotaped. Those examples are available by going
to the assessment web site and clicking on “Primary Trait Analysis
for Speaking Matrix for Assessment of Oral Presentations.” To view each
presentation, simply click on the camera icon in each cell of the rubric.

This academic year, SAC plans to increase the number of resources on
the web site and to offer a workshop for faculty looking for ways to assess
the undergraduate speaking goal either at the program level or through
one of the courses where data is currently being gathered.

Dr. Sherry Holladay, Associate Professor of Communication Studies,
and Dr. Rodney Marshall, Assistant Professor of Communication Studies,
will lead this interactive workshop. Clips of student speeches—individual
and group presentations—will be used to discuss how to assess oral
communication skills combined with content.

Attendees will be encouraged to use the rubric and discuss the
strengths and weaknesses of the examples provided.

“Using the University Rubric to Assess Individual and Group
Presentations” will be held on Thursday, February 23, 2006 from
1:00-3:00 p.m. in the Arcola-Tuscola Room of the MLK Union.

Faculty struggling with assessing presentations in senior seminar or
seeking ways to assess effective speaking at the program or course
level are encouraged to attend the workshop and seek guidance from
these experts in oral communication. We ask that you RSVP to 581-6056
or kkweeney@eiu.edu so that we ensure enough materials are prepared
for the workshop.