



Report on 2024 General Education Goals

ASSESSMENT OF GOAL 3: APPLY THE VALUE OF THE ARTS
AND HUMANITIES AND GOAL 4: THINK CRITICALLY

Revised Edition: Includes updated analysis with 2021 Goal 3 data.

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COMMITTEE | SEPTEMBER 17, 2025

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Executive Summary

This report summarizes the findings of the 2024 general education outcomes assessment, which focused on learning goal 3, "**Apply the Value of the Arts & Humanities**", and learning goal 4, "**Think Critically**". The assessment reviewed 110 anonymized student artifacts from various course delivery methods. The scoring was a collaborative effort in Spring 2025, conducted by the General Education Committee and with valuable assistance from the Student Learning Assessment Committee.

Key Findings:

- **Arts & Humanities:** Overall student performance showed a positive trend, increasing from an average of 59% in 2021 to 62% in 2024. High scores were observed in several subjects and delivery methods, with notable improvements. Students often demonstrated a strong ability to interpret the global significance of ideas (PLO3). However, a significant challenge persisted in relating ideas to a global context (PLO2), particularly within History courses, where it remained a critical area for development. Art delivered through Virtual Arkansas High School and Theatre on the Russellville Campus emerged as high-performing models, both demonstrating significant improvement and strong mastery across all program learning outcomes.
- **Critical Thinking:** The assessment data reveals a concerning overall decline in critical thinking performance, with the average score dropping from 57% in 2022 to 46% in 2024. This decline was observed across most course delivery methods (Concurrent, Mixed Technology, Online, Russellville Campus, and Virtual Arkansas High School) and in subjects assessed across both years (Art, Communication, English, Philosophy). While students generally demonstrated a stronger ability to identify an underlying argument (PLO1), assessing the quality of evidence (PLO2) consistently remains the most significant challenge.
- **Note on Data Limitations:** The 2024 assessment involved a significantly smaller number of artifacts, particularly for critical thinking, compared to the 2022 assessment. This should be considered when interpreting the year-over-year trends.

Recommendations:

Based on these findings, it is recommended that the university focus on the following in the next assessment cycle:

- **Enhance Arts & Humanities Learning:** Address the persistent "contextual gap" (PLO2) in History courses and share successful pedagogical strategies from high-performing models, such as ART Virtual Arkansas High School and Theatre on the Russellville Campus.
- **Improve Critical Thinking Proficiency:** Prioritize targeted interventions to strengthen students' ability to "Assess the Quality of Evidence" (PLO2). Additionally, investigate the root causes of the widespread decline in critical thinking scores observed from 2022 to 2024.
- **Strengthen Assessment Processes:** Ensure a consistent and sufficient artifact collection process to enable more reliable year-over-year comparisons. Review assessment rubrics for clarity and consider inter-rater reliability training for reviewers to improve scoring consistency.

Methodology

To assess general education outcomes, General Education Committee (GEC) collect and evaluate student artifacts from courses that align with specific learning goals. The process involves three key steps: artifact collection, distribution and scoring, and analysis.

Artifact Collection

At the start of each semester, courses linked to a designated general education goal are identified for all course delivery sections. The GEC director contacts faculty teaching these courses, providing instructions and a dedicated OneDrive folder for artifact submission. Faculty are asked to submit student work, ensuring all identifying information is removed and each student's submission is a separate file, to maintain anonymity. Note that submission is voluntary, so not all courses and delivery methods may be represented.

Distribution and Scoring

Artifacts collected the previous year are reviewed during the following spring semester. A representative sample of artifacts, drawn from various courses and modalities, is randomly assigned to GEC members for review via a SharePoint site. Each committee member typically evaluates 5–10 artifacts per goal using relevant rubrics. In Spring 2025, we collaborated with the Student Learning Assessment Committee to increase the number of reviewers, enhancing the scale of our evaluation.

For the Spring 2025 assessment, 11 of 20 reviewers completed their evaluations. The assessment focused on **110 total artifacts** (55 for "Arts & Humanities" and 55 for "Think Critically"). Artifacts that were assigned but not evaluated (45 per goal) were excluded from this report. A key limitation for the 2024 data is the significantly smaller number of artifacts reviewed, particularly for critical thinking, compared to previous cycles. The low sample sizes for certain subjects (e.g., Communication, English, and Philosophy) mean that the performance of a single student can disproportionately influence the reported scores.

- **Arts and Humanities Artifacts:** Collected from Russellville Campus, Concurrent, Online, and Virtual Arkansas High School courses in Art, English, History, Music, and Theatre.
- **Critical Thinking Artifacts:** Collected from Russellville Campus, Concurrent, Hyflex, Mixed Technology, Online, and Virtual Arkansas High School courses in Agriculture Business, Anthropology, Art, Biology, Communication, Economics, English, Environmental Science, Geography, History, Music, Philosophy, and Sociology.

Analysis

The data analysis involved a comprehensive evaluation of student performance for both goals, focusing on a comparative review of 2024 data against prior assessment cycles (**2021 for Arts & Humanities** and **2022 for Critical Thinking**). This included a detailed breakdown of scores by subject, course delivery method, and the specific Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) that define each goal. Analysis and synthesis of key insights and recommendations was conducted with the assistance of Excel, Notion, Notebook LM, and Gemini.

Summary of Findings

The assessment of student artifacts for the 2024 general education goals revealed distinct trends in performance for both Arts & Humanities and Critical Thinking.

- **Arts & Humanities:** Overall student performance in Arts & Humanities demonstrated improvement from 2021 to 2024, with the average score rising from 59% to 62%. High scores and notable improvements were achieved in several subjects and delivery methods. Analysis of the Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) indicated that students often showed a strong ability to interpret the global significance of ideas (PLO3). However, a key area for development was identified in relating ideas to a global context (PLO2), which presented a consistent challenge, especially within History courses. Art delivered through Virtual Arkansas High School and Theatre on the Russellville Campus distinguished themselves as high-performing models, exhibiting substantial improvements and balanced mastery across all PLOs.
- **Critical Thinking:** The assessment indicates a widespread and significant decline in critical thinking scores from 2022 to 2024, with the overall average falling from 57% to 46%. This decrease was observed across most established course delivery methods, including Concurrent, Mixed Technology, Online, Russellville Campus, and Virtual Arkansas High School. While students generally demonstrated a stronger ability to identify an underlying argument (PLO1), the most significant weakness in student performance was consistently found in the ability to assess the quality of evidence (PLO2). Additionally, several specific programs experienced substantial declines in overall critical thinking proficiency, pointing to localized challenges within various learning environments.

Analysis: Goal 3 Apply the Value of the Arts & Humanities

Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs): Goal 3, "Apply the Value of the Arts & Humanities," is defined by three distinct PLOs. The first, PLO1, focuses on a student's ability to **identify ideas** represented in various artistic and humanistic expressions, essentially recognizing the core concepts within a work. PLO2 assesses a student's capacity to **relate these ideas to the global context** in which they were created, emphasizing a contextual understanding. Finally, PLO3 measures a student's ability to **interpret the global significance** of a work, moving beyond simple identification to a deeper understanding of its universal meaning and impact on the human experience.

Data and Charts

Subjects and Deliveries Assessed: Five subjects (Art, English, History, Music, and Theatre) and various delivery methods were assessed for the "Apply the Value of the Arts & Humanities" outcome.

Scores: Previously assessed in 2021, this is the second time this outcome has been assessed. Table 1 provides average score and total count by year. Table 2 provides average scores subject, year, delivery method, and PLO. The top two highest scores per category (e.g., Average Score, PLO) are highlighted green and the bottom scores are highlighted red/orange.

Table 1: Arts & Humanities Count and Average Score by Year

2021		2024	
Total Count	Average Score	Total Count	Average Score
180	59%	55	62%

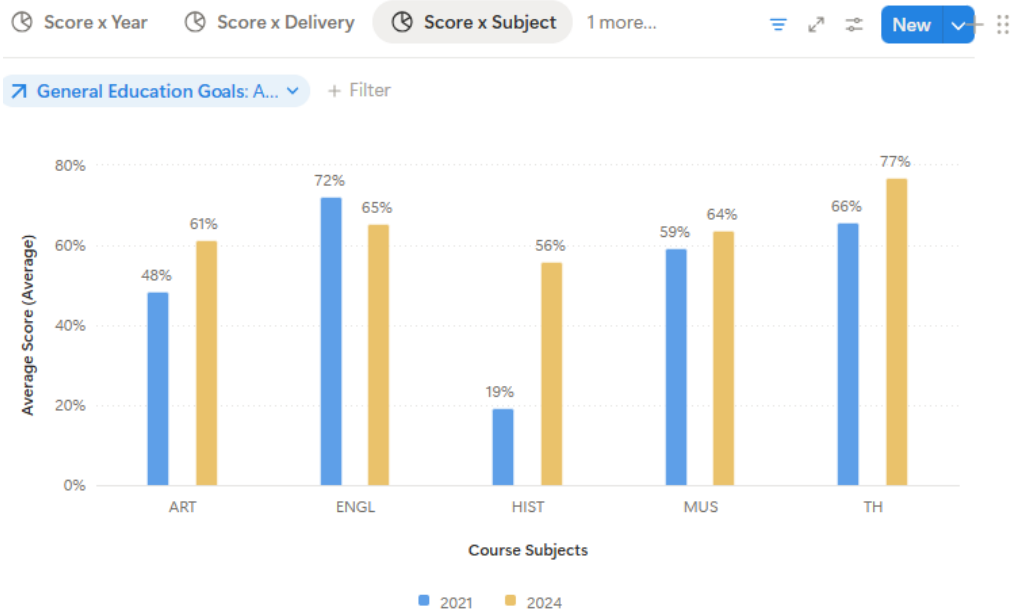
Table 2: Arts & Humanities Scores by Subject and Delivery

Year	Subject	Delivery Method	Count	Average Score	PLO1	PLO2	PLO3
2021	ART	All	36	48%			
2021	ART	Online	27	47%	49%	49%	42%
2021	ART	Virtual Arkansas High School	9	54%	50%	47%	64%
2024	ART	All	19	61%			
2024	ART	Online	13	53%	50%	48%	62%
2024	ART	Russellville Campus	2	58%	50%	63%	63%
2024	ART	Virtual Arkansas High School	4	90%	94%	81%	94%
2021	ENG	All	72	72%			
2021	ENGL	Independent Study	1	75%	75%	75%	75%
2021	ENGL	Online	11	76%	75%	77%	75%
2021	ENGL	Russellville Campus	60	72%	74%	68%	73%
2024	ENG	All	6	65%			
2024	ENGL	Russellville Campus	6	65%	71%	63%	63%

Year	Subject	Delivery Method	Count	Average Score	PLO1	PLO2	PLO3
2021	HIST	All	18	19%			
2021	HIST	Mixed Technology	18	19%	32%	13%	14%
2024	HIST	All	14	56%			
2024	HIST	Concurrent	6	61%	63%	58%	63%
2024	HIST	Online	2	79%	88%	63%	88%
2024	HIST	Russellville Campus	3	47%	42%	58%	42%
2024	HIST	Virtual Arkansas High School	3	39%	50%	33%	33%
2021	MUS	All	36	59%			
2021	MUS	Online	7	73%	71%	71%	75%
2021	MUS	RSVL Campus	29	56%	56%	61%	51%
2024	MUS	All	12	64%			
2024	MUS	Online	12	64%	63%	65%	65%
2021	TH	ALL	18	66%			
2021	TH	Online	12	65%	56%	60%	71%
2021	TH	Russellville Campus	6	67%	71%	71%	58%
2024	TH	All	4	77%			
2024	TH	Online	2	71%	63%	75%	75%
2024	TH	Russellville Campus	2	83%	75%	80%	88%

The following charts visualize the data in the previous tables.

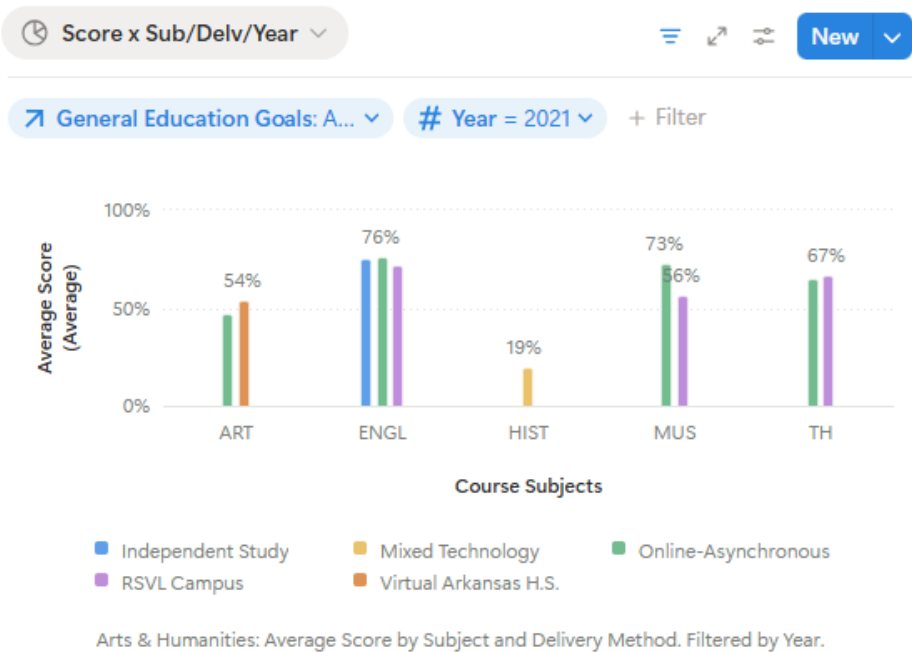
Chart 1: Arts & Humanities Average Score by Year and Subject



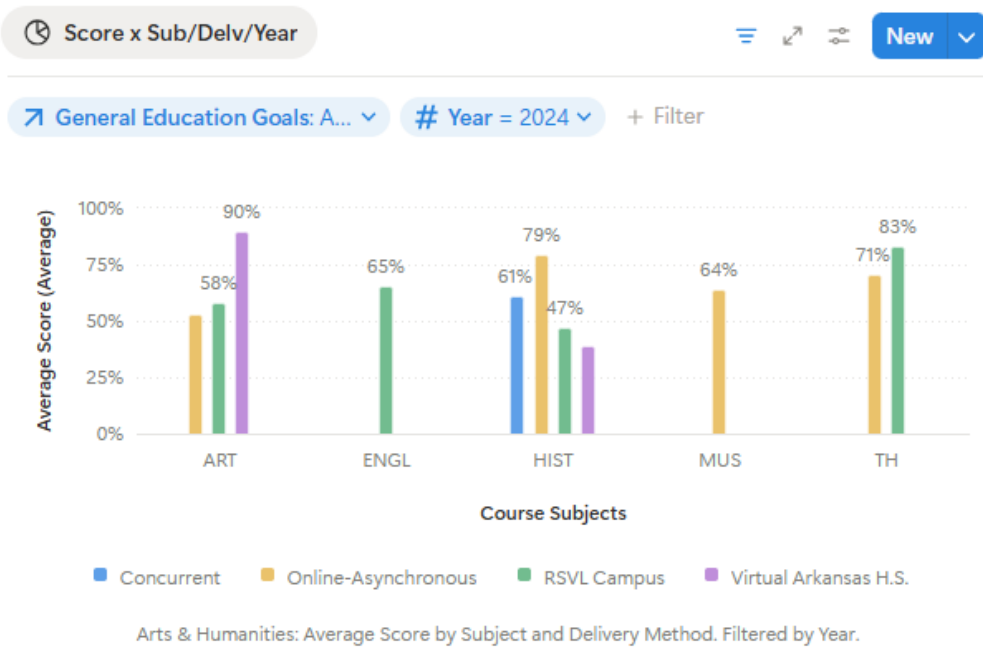
Arts & Humanities: Average Score by year for each subject assessed.

Chart 2: Arts & Humanities Average Score by Subject and Delivery

2021



2024



Overall Performance and Trends (2021 vs. 2024)

Comparing 2021 and 2024 data reveals an encouraging positive trend in Arts & Humanities, with the overall average student score increasing from 59% to 62% despite a significantly smaller sample size. This growth was driven by notable improvements in several subjects.

Art demonstrated a substantial rise in its average score, from 48% to 61%. This improvement was most pronounced in the Virtual Arkansas High School modality, where the overall score soared to a remarkable 90% in 2024. An analysis of the Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) for this model revealed a well-rounded mastery, with high scores across the board, including 94% for both identifying ideas (PLO1) and interpreting significance (PLO3). Similarly, **Theatre** on the Russellville Campus showed significant improvement, jumping from 67% to 83% and exhibiting strong gains in all PLOs, especially in interpreting significance (PLO3), which rose to 88%. These results highlight successful pedagogical models that can be explored further.

Performance in **Music** also improved, with the average score for online modalities rising from 59% to 64%. Most notably, the average score for **History** soared from a very low 19% in 2021 to 56% in 2024, although the modalities assessed changed between the two years. However, a persistent "**contextual gap**" was observed in History courses, where students consistently struggled with relating ideas to their global context (PLO2). This challenge was evident in the 2024 data, where PLO2 scores in History Online (63%) and Virtual Arkansas High School (33%) were notably lower than other PLO scores within the same subjects. While **English** saw a decline from 72% to 65%, the overall trend for the goal suggests a positive trajectory in students' mastery of Arts & Humanities learning outcomes.

Recommendations for the Next Assessment Cycle for Goal 3 Value of the Arts & Humanities

1. **Explore and Share Best Practices from High-Performing Models:** The significant growth and well-rounded mastery demonstrated in **ART Virtual Arkansas High School** and **Theatre on the Russellville Campus** warrant further investigation. Studying the course design and pedagogical approaches used in these high-performing models can provide valuable insights for improving student learning outcomes across all Arts & Humanities subjects and delivery methods.
2. **Focus Targeted Attention on the "Contextual Gap" in History Courses (PLO2):** The recurring low performance in History courses' **PLO2**—which focuses on relating ideas to their global context—indicates a persistent challenge for students. Dedicated discussions within the History department and across Arts & Humanities faculty should explore new pedagogical approaches to strengthen this specific skill and better connect historical concepts to their broader global environments.

Analysis: Goal 4 Think Critically

Goal 4, "Think Critically," is defined by four distinct Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs). PLO1 measures a student's ability to **identify an underlying argument** in a piece of work. PLO2 assesses their capacity to **evaluate the quality of evidence** by interpreting sources and questioning expert viewpoints. PLO3 focuses on whether students can **make reasonable inferences** from an argument, requiring them to analyze assumptions and evaluate different contexts. Finally, PLO4 tests their ability to **identify the thesis and conclusions**, which involves synthesizing different viewpoints to form a logical conclusion.

Data and Charts

Subjects and Deliveries Assessed: In 2024, eleven subjects (Agricultural Business, Art, Biology, Communication, Economics, English, Environmental Science, History, Music, Philosophy, and Sociology) and a variety of delivery methods were assessed for the "Apply the Value of the Arts & Humanities" outcome.

Scores: Previously assessed in 2022, this is the second time this outcome has been assessed. Table 3 provides average score and total count by year. Table 4 provides average scores subject, year, delivery method, and PLO. The top two highest scores per category (e.g., Average Score, PLO) are highlighted green and the bottom scores are highlighted red/orange.

Table 3 Think Critically Count and Average Score by Year

2022		2024	
Total Count	Average Score	Total Count	Average Score
125	57%	55	46%

Table 4: Think Critically PLOs by Subject, Delivery, and Year

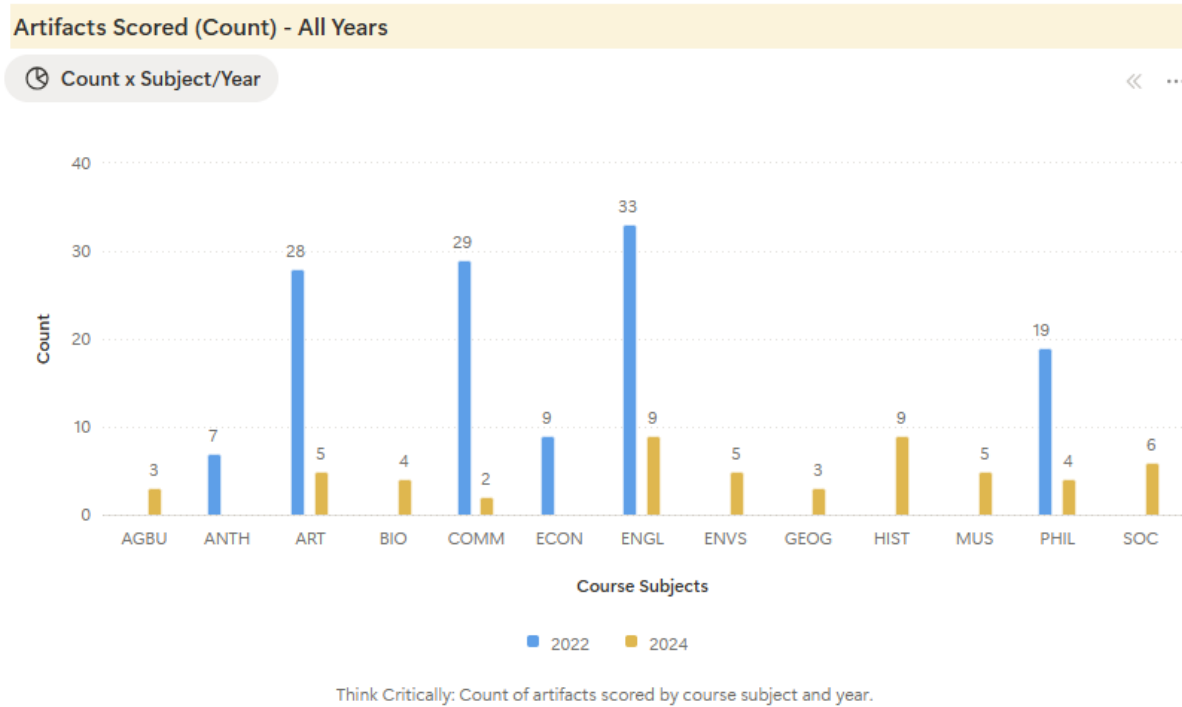
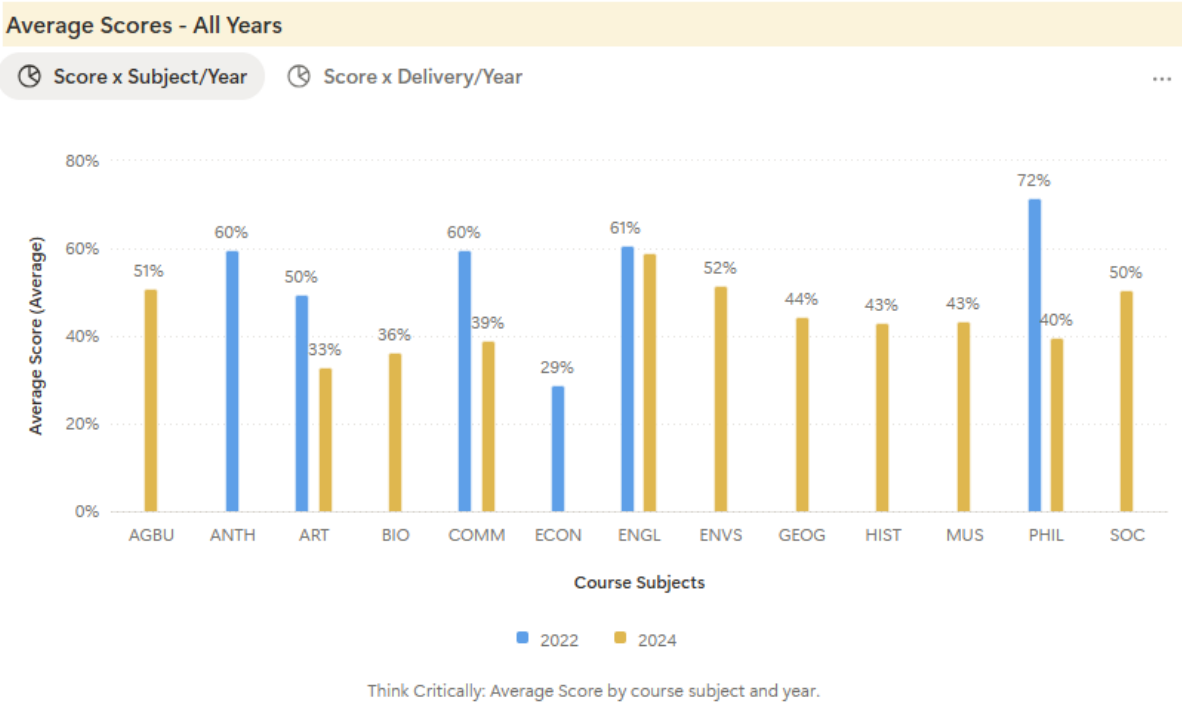
Year	Subject	Delivery	Count	Average Score	PLO1	PLO2	PLO3	PLO4
2024	AGBU	All	3	51%				
2024	AGBU	Russellville Campus	3	51%	58%	42%	54%	52%
2022	ANTH	All	7	60%				
2022	ANTH	Russellville Campus	6	57%	75%	48%	60%	69%
2022	ANTH	Independent Study	1	72%	100%	63%	75%	56%
2022	ART	All	28	50%				
2022	ART	Online	15	40%	52%	32%	45%	39%
2022	ART	Russellville Campus	13	60%	67%	58%	63%	59%

Year	Subject	Delivery	Count	Average Score	PLO1	PLO2	PLO3	PLO4
2024	ART	All	5	33%				
2024	ART	Online	4	26%	38%	22%	16%	30%
2024	ART	Virtual Arkansas High School	1	61%	75%	63%	50%	63%
2024	BIO	All	4	36%				
2024	BIO	Russellville Campus	4	36%	63%	25%	28%	39%
2022	COMM	All	29	60%				
2022	COMM	Mixed Technology	8	64%	81%	55%	64%	65%
2022	COMM	Online	11	62%	80%	63%	64%	57%
2022	COMM	Russellville Campus	4	48%	56%	38%	53%	48%
2022	COMM	Virtual Arkansas High School	6	56%	79%	56%	58%	49%
2024	COMM	All	2	39%				
2024	COMM	Mixed Technology	1	33%	75%	50%	25%	19%
2024	COMM	Online	1	44%	75%	25%	63%	38%
2022	ECON	All	9	29%				
2022	ECON	Russellville Campus	9	29%	42%	21%	29%	29%
2022	ENGL	All	33	61%				
2022	ENGL	Concurrent	4	68%	81%	69%	59%	69%
2022	ENGL	Independent Study	2	44%	63%	0%	63%	53%
2022	ENGL	Online	18	61%	75%	58%	59%	60%
2022	ENGL	Russellville Campus	9	60%	78%	58%	64%	54%
2024	ENGL	All	9	59%				
2024	ENGL	Concurrent	3	61%	83%	63%	58%	54%
2024	ENGL	Hyflex	1	67%	75%	63%	75%	63%
2024	ENGL	Online	2	75%	100%	56%	88%	72%
2024	ENGL	Russellville Campus	3	44%	42%	46%	50%	42%
2024	ENVS	All	5	52%				

Year	Subject	Delivery	Count	Average Score	PLO1	PLO2	PLO3	PLO4
2024	ENVS	Russellville Campus	5	52%	80%	50%	55%	44%
2024	GEOG	All	3	44%				
2024	GEOG	Mixed Technology	3	44%	50%	38%	46%	46%
2024	HIST	All	9	43%				
2024	HIST	Concurrent	4	38%	63%	16%	34%	45%
2024	HIST	Online	3	54%	50%	42%	54%	60%
2024	HIST	Virtual Arkansas High School	2	38%	63%	44%	38%	28%
2024	MUS	All	5	43%				
2024	MUS	Online	5	43%	45%	43%	50%	40%
2022	PHIL	All	19	72%				
2022	PHIL	Honors	13	76%	77%	76%	72%	77%
2022	PHIL	Russellville Campus	6	63%	75%	56%	65%	63%
2024	PHIL	All	4	40%				
2024	PHIL	Online	2	57%	75%	44%	56%	59%
2024	PHIL	Russellville Campus	2	22%	50%	19%	13%	22%
2024	SOC	All	6	50%				
2024	SOC	Mixed Technology	6	50%	71%	52%	56%	42%

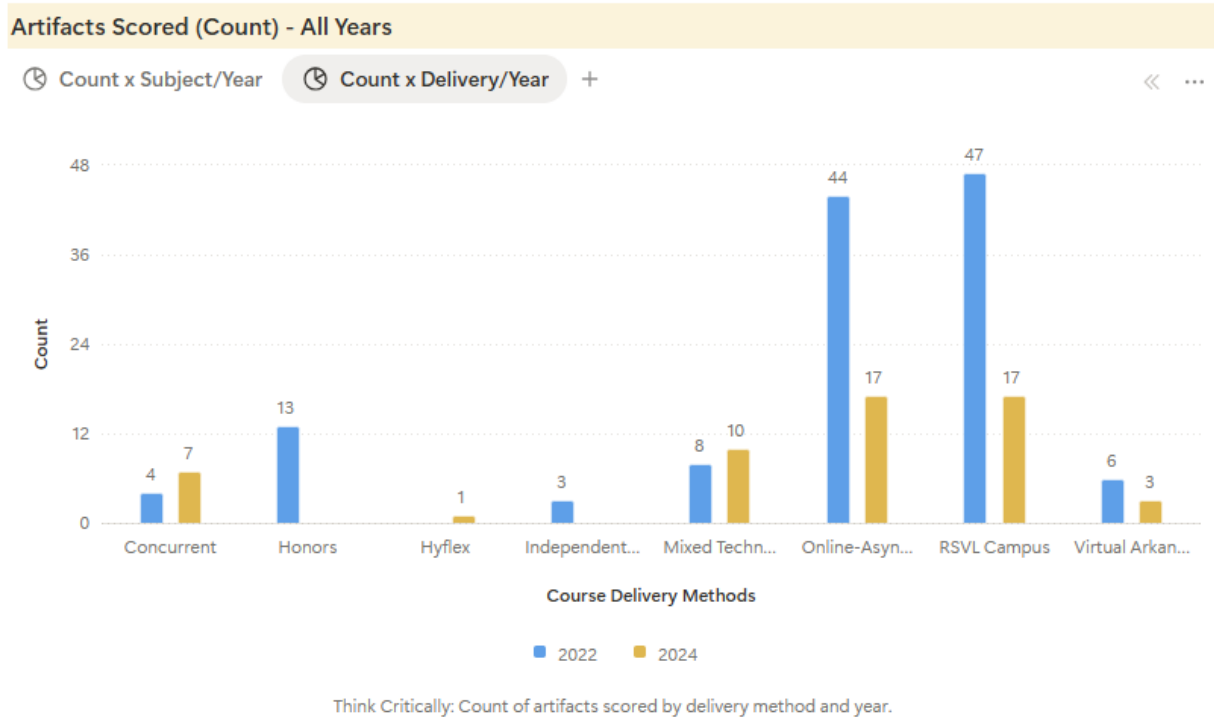
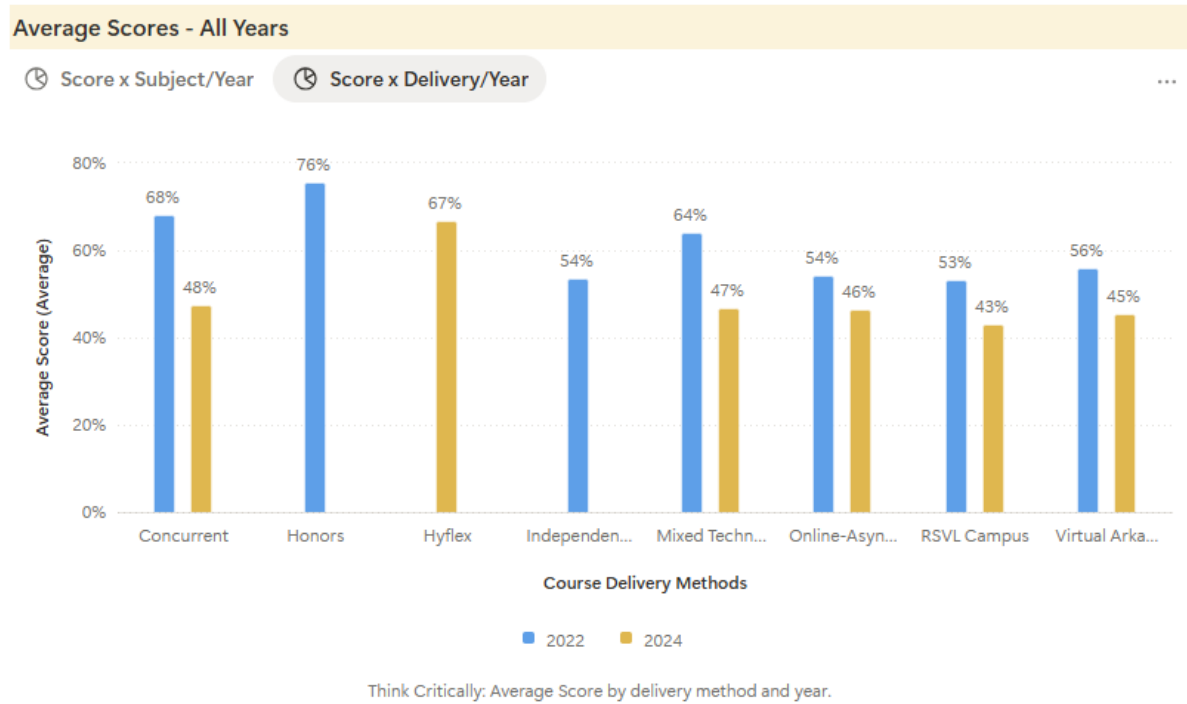
The following two charts visualize average score and count by subject and year.

Chart 3: Think Critically Subject-Average Score and Count by Year



The following two charts visualize average score and count by delivery method and year.

Chart 4: Think Critically Delivery-Average Score and Count by Year



The following charts visualize Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) scores for the four subjects that were reviewed in both 2022 and 2024.

Chart 5: Think Critically PLO Scores by Subject and Delivery

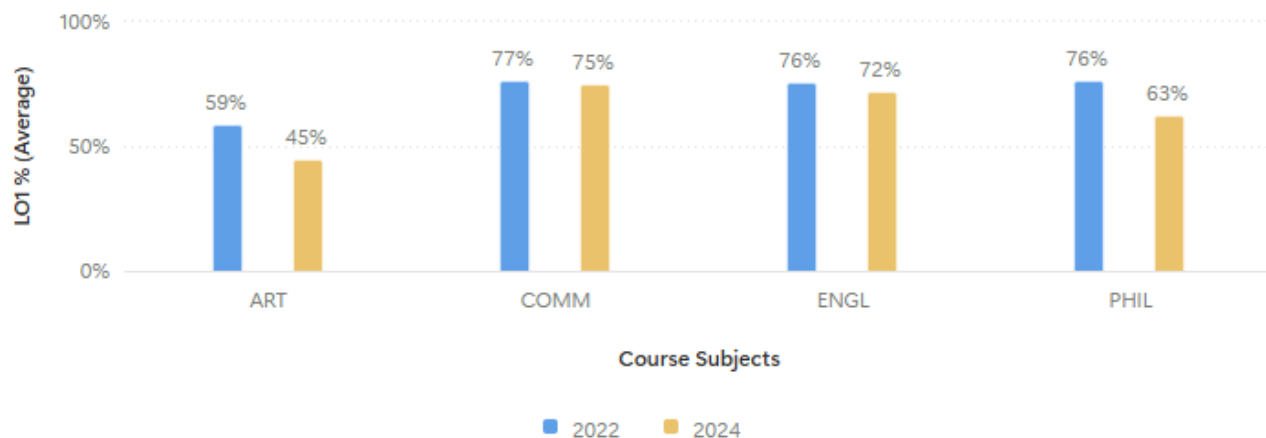
Program Learning Outcome 1: Identify an underlying argument.

PLO 1 x Subjects/Year

PLO 1 x Delivery/Year



New ▾



Think Critically: PLO 1 Scores by Subject

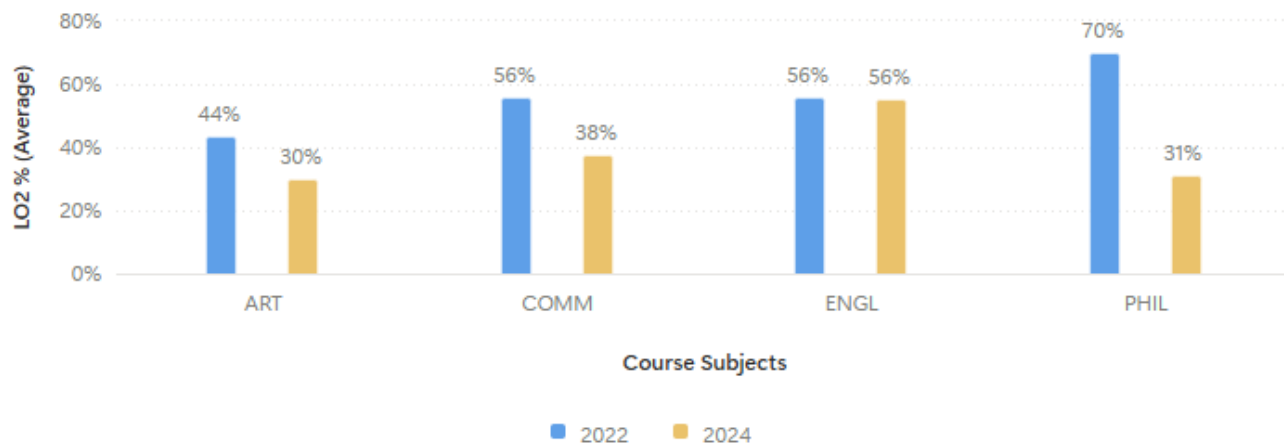
Program Learning Outcome 2: Assess the quality of evidence.

PLO 2 x Subjects/Year

PLO 2 x Delivery/Year



New ▾



Arts & Humanities: PLO 2 Scores by Subject

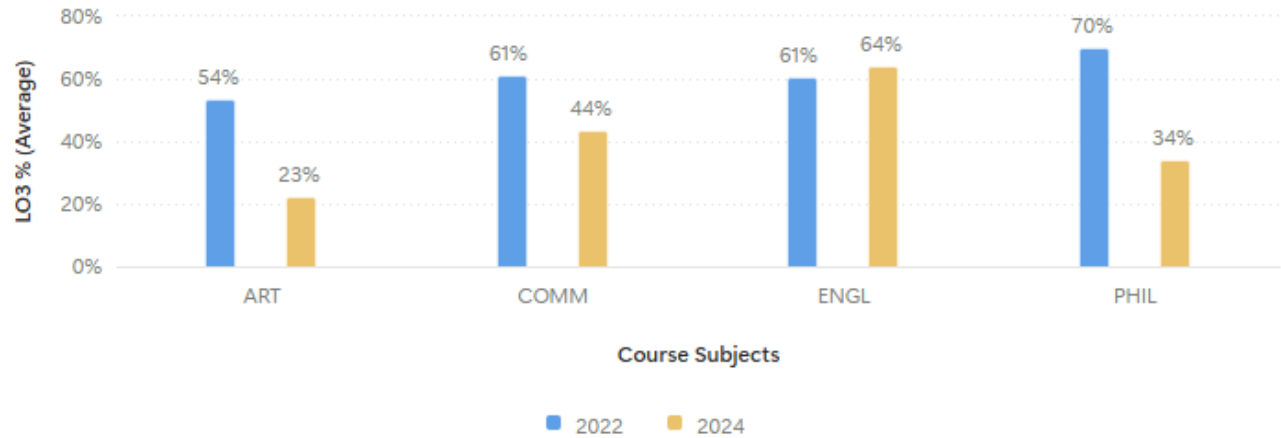
Program Learning Outcome 3: Make reasonable inferences from an argument.

PLO 3 x Subjects

PLO 3 x Delivery



New ▾



Think Critically: PLO 3 Scores by Subject

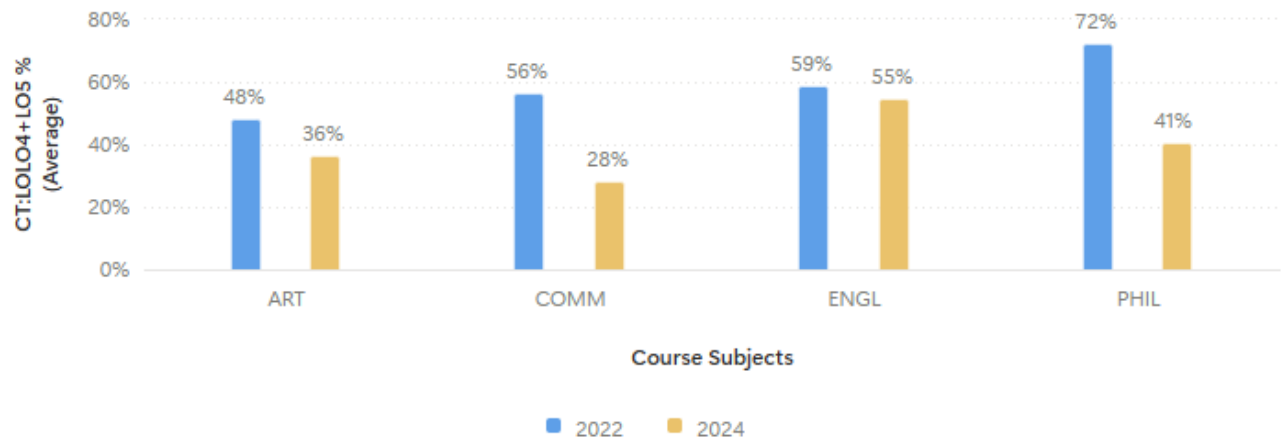
Program Learning Outcome 4: Identify the thesis and conclusions in an argument.

PLO 4 x Subjects

PLO 4 x Delivery



New ▾



Think Critically: PLO 3 Scores by Subject

Overall Performance and Trends (2022 vs. 2024)

The assessment data for Goal 4 reveals a consistent and concerning decline in critical thinking performance across multiple subjects and delivery methods. The overall average score dropped significantly from 57% in 2022 to 46% in 2024. While the number of subjects assessed in 2024 was broader, a downward trend is clear for subjects consistently evaluated across both years.

The analysis of Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) highlights clear strengths and widespread weaknesses. **PLO1**, which focuses on a student's ability to **identify an underlying argument**, consistently remains the strongest performing outcome. In contrast, **PLO2**, assessing the ability to **evaluate the quality of evidence**, appears to be the most significant and persistent challenge. This PLO frequently records the lowest individual scores and points to a widespread weakness in students' capacity to interpret sources and question expert viewpoints.

This decline is evident in subjects like **Art**, where the online modality experienced a drastic drop from a 40% average in 2022 to a very low 26% in 2024. The most significant decline was in **PLO3**, which fell to a mere 16%. **Communication** saw a similar decline, with a notable drop in **PLO2** from 63% to a concerning 25% in the online modality. Performance in **English** varied, with the online modality showing significant improvement from 61% to 75%, while the Russellville Campus experienced a sharp decline from 60% to 44% across all PLOs.

The most substantial drop was in **Philosophy**, where the Russellville Campus saw its overall average score plummet from 63% to a very low 22%. All PLOs showed a significant decline, with PLO2 falling to 19% and PLO3 dropping to a mere 13%. This is a sharp contrast to the strong and balanced scores achieved in the Honors sections in 2022, underscoring the urgency of understanding the causes of this decline. It is also important to note that many of the 2024 data points, especially for Communication, English, and Philosophy, are based on very small sample sizes, which can disproportionately influence the reported scores.

Recommendations for the Next Assessment Cycle for Goal 4 Think Critically

1. **Prioritize Targeted Interventions for "Assessing the Quality of Evidence" (PLO2):** Given that this outcome consistently appears as the most significant challenge across numerous subjects and delivery methods, faculty should collaboratively explore and integrate more explicit instruction and diverse practice opportunities aimed at strengthening students' ability to assess the quality of evidence. This direct action addresses the most persistent and widespread weakness in critical thinking outcomes.
2. **Leverage Strengths in Argument Identification (PLO1) to Scaffold Higher-Order Skills:** Building on students' observed strength in "identifying an underlying argument" (PLO1), faculty are encouraged to design learning activities that explicitly bridge this foundational skill with the development of more complex critical thinking abilities, such as making reasonable inferences (PLO3) and identifying clear theses and conclusions (PLO4). Capitalizing on existing strengths can create a more effective pathway for developing comprehensive critical thinking skills.
3. **Investigate the Overall Decline in Critical Thinking Scores (Goal 4):** Given the significant general decrease in critical thinking scores (from 57% in 2022 to 46% in 2024) across multiple subjects and delivery methods, further qualitative and quantitative research should be pursued to understand the underlying causes of this widespread decline. This could involve faculty workshops, curriculum review,

or surveys to identify contributing factors, as the quantified decline underscores the urgency of understanding its root causes across the institution.

General Recommendations for Enhancing the Assessment Process

1. **Ensure Consistent and Sufficient Artifact Collection:** Reliable and representative data collection is foundational for accurate assessment and meaningful trend analysis. Therefore, we recommend re-emphasizing the importance of timely and sufficient artifact submission and exploring strategies to achieve consistent or increased sample sizes for more robust year-over-year comparisons.
2. **Review Assessment Rubrics and Scoring Consistency:** The absence of 100% scores in Goal 4 in 2024 suggests a potential shift in scoring. To ensure reliable assessment results and valid comparisons over time, we recommend reviewing the rubrics for clarity and rigor. Additionally, inter-rater reliability training for reviewers could ensure the consistent application of these rubrics.
3. **Analyze the Impact of Delivery Methods on Outcomes:** Significant variability in student performance was observed across different course delivery methods for both Goal 3 and Goal 4. We recommend continuing to analyze this data to understand how delivery methods impact learning. This includes exploring best practices from successful online and virtual courses and investigating the unique challenges faced by those with weaker outcomes.
4. **Expand Year-over-Year Comparative Data Consistency:** To better understand long-term trends for both goals, we recommend assessing a more consistent set of subjects and delivery methods across future assessment cycles. This consistency in assessed populations will allow for more comprehensive and reliable trend analysis.
5. **Continue and Expand Collaboration:** The collaboration with the Student Learning Assessment Committee in Spring 2025 was a positive step that increased the scale and breadth of evaluations. We recommend continuing to leverage such inter-committee collaborations to strengthen the assessment process and foster broader engagement in future cycles.