

ACADEMIC DEPARTMENTAL END OF YEAR REPORT

Submit by June 30, 2025 to the Director of Academic Assessment.

Program / Department: General Education

Submitted by: Richard M. Riss, Ph.D.

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRAM STUDENT LEARNING GOALS and OUTCOMES

I. List the Program Goals in the first column and indicate in which year those goals will be assessed.

Program Goals = what the program aims to achieve and what it should offer students who take it.

[For General Education, each goal should be assessed at least once over a 6-year cycle – indicate by X]

Goals for General Education	Year	2024-2025	2025-2026	2026-2027	2027-2028	2028-2029	2029-2010
Goal 1: Faith Perspective and Spiritual Formation			X				
Goal 2: Humanities Perspective		X					
Goal 3: Global and Cultural Awareness				X			
Goal 4: Oral, Written, and Media Communication Skills			X				
Goal 5: Critical and Creative Thinking		X					
Goal 6: Problem Solving					X		
Goal 7: Scientific and Quantitative Literacy							X
Goal 8: Information and Technological Literacy						X	

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II. Program Goals and Specific Student Learning Outcomes for assessment in 2024-2025

Program Goals to be assessed this year	Specific Student Learning Outcomes to be assessed (Typically taken from course syllabus)	Which course will these be assessed?	How assessed? (eg. Rubric, survey, focus group)	Does assessment tool already exist? Y / N?	If NO, who will create it?	By when?	When will data be collected & analyzed?
Goal #5: Critical and Creative Thinking	Outcome i: Locates the thesis and main points of a piece of writing	HIST 231 Western Civ I in Trad; Various cohorts in LEAD	Instrument #3 (Standardized Test)	Y	(Does Not Apply)	(Does Not Apply)	Data Collected in May 2025
	Outcome ii: Identifies logical fallacies, observes bias, and notes the strengths of an argument; identifies unstated assumptions	HIST 231 Western Civ I in Trad; Various cohorts in LEAD	Instrument #3 (Standardized Test)	Y	(Does Not Apply)	(Does Not Apply)	Data Collected in May 2025
	Outcome iii: Connects core ideas to other core ideas and understands how concepts interrelate and applies them to everyday life	HIST 231 Western Civ I in Trad; Various cohorts in LEAD	Instrument #3 (Standardized Test)	Y	(Does Not Apply)	(Does Not Apply)	Data Collected in May 2025
	Outcome iv: Reaches logical conclusions,	HIST 231 Western Civ I	Instrument #3 (Standardized	Y	(Does Not	(Does Not	Data Collected in

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	makes proper inferences, and perceives correct implications and consequences	in Trad; Various cohorts in LEAD	Test)		Apply)	Apply)	May 2025
	Outcome vi: Synthesizes divergent perspectives into original thought	HIST 231 Western Civ I in Trad; Various cohorts in LEAD	Instrument #3 (Standardized Test)	Y	(Does Not Apply)	(Does Not Apply)	Data Collected in May 2025
Goal #2: Humanities Perspective	Outcome ii: Demonstrates mastery in the humanities and knowledge base displays a scope, thoroughness, and quality in considering topics from the breadth of the liberal arts	HIST 231 Western Civ I in Trad; Various cohorts in LEAD	Instrument #3 (Standardized Test)	Y	(Does Not Apply)	(Does Not Apply)	Data Collected in May 2025
	Outcome iii: Clearly and reflectively applies appropriate argumentation and methodology of a given discipline	HIST 231 Western Civ I in Trad; Various cohorts in LEAD	Instrument #3 (Standardized Test)	Y	(Does Not Apply)	(Does Not Apply)	Data Collected in May 2025
	Outcome iv: Demonstrates an understanding of different themes, subjects, styles and cultural expressions in art, music, or literature	HIST 231 Western Civ I in Trad; Various cohorts in LEAD	Instrument #3 (Standardized Test)	Y	(Does Not Apply)	(Does Not Apply)	Data Collected in May 2025

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III. Rationale for decisions

[Include a brief explanation of the rationale for your decision to assess outcomes for these program goals and specific learning outcomes in the way(s) indicated. Why is this course/essay the best place to assess this goal/outcome? Why is this method (eg. survey, rubric) the best way to assess the goal/outcome?]

In order to coincide more neatly with the two three-year cycles of assessment recently implemented at Pillar College, the Office of Institutional Effectiveness suggested that the general education goals be evaluated on a six-year cycle as opposed to the five-year cycle formerly in use. The assessment plan provided in section I of this report was adjusted accordingly, expanding the number of academic years indicated from five to six.

In last year's general education assessment report (2023-2024), the humanities perspective goal (goal #2) was scheduled to be assessed, so in keeping with that plan, that goal was assessed. Outcome i for goal #2 (views the richness of life through art, history, music, theater, literature, philosophy and religion; and/or seeks competence in the use of a foreign language) was not assessed due to its similarity to outcome ii, and also due to the fact that a very large percentage of Pillar College students are fluent in either Spanish, Korean, Chinese, or contemporary Hebrew in addition to English. Goal #5 (critical and creative thinking) was assessed last year, but some of its outcomes were assessed again this year in order to determine the effectiveness of the measures taken during the 2024-2025 academic year to address deficiencies in outcomes i, ii, iii, iv and vi.

There was a comprehensive assessment made in the 2022-2023 academic year indicating that, of all eight of our general education goals, students were struggling most with critical and creative thinking. On the other hand, at that time (2023), on average our students scored highest in outcome vii (collaboration) at 72%, significantly higher than in any other of the categories tested that year. For this reason, further assessment of goal #5 outcome vii, which deals with collaboration, was deferred until spring of 2025 or later.

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According to last year's gen ed assessment report, goal #5 outcome vi (synthesizes divergent perspectives into original thought) was to be measured in 2025, whereas outcome v (exhibits a high level of originality and imagination, curiosity and openness), was well above our benchmark target. For this reason, last year's report indicated that this outcome (v) would not need to be included in our 2025 reassessment. Accordingly, neither outcome v nor outcome vii (see previous paragraph) was assessed in 2025.

The course, HIST 231 Western Civilization I, was chosen for this year's assessment because most of the relevant outcomes are listed as outcomes in the syllabus for that course. There was also an assessment of the same general education outcomes in the LEAD program because Pillar College recently tweaked its assessment policy to include LEAD in its general education assessments. (In previous years, assessment of general education in LEAD was done by the LEAD department.)

The assessment plan as outlined in section I above is subject to change based upon further assessment results and/or ongoing developments in the workplace.

IV. What conclusions can be drawn based on your assessment results?

Pillar College has three internal instruments currently in use for the purpose of assessing general education. Instrument 1 is a standardized multiple-choice test which consists of 111 questions and covers all institutional goals and outcomes. Instrument 2 consists of a subset of 40 of the same questions that appear in instrument #1, while instrument 3 consists of a different subset of 20 of the same 111 questions. In 2013, the following benchmarks were established for all three of these instruments:

70% of Freshmen should receive a score of 42.5% or higher by end of their first year of study.
70% of Sophomores should receive a score of 48% or higher by the end of their year of study.
70% of Juniors should receive a score of 55% or higher by the end of their year of study.

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70% of Seniors should receive a score of 61.25% or higher by the end of their final year of study.

Because the questions in these instruments are intentionally difficult, the percentage scores in all cases are expected to be low. Using these instruments, expected student scores generally fall between 40% and 65% depending upon both the specific goal involved and the class level(s) of the students being assessed.

Instrument #3 was specifically designed to measure goals #2 and #5. The results using this instrument are tabulated in four separate documents. The first document tabulates the results for goal #2 (humanities perspective), the second tabulates the results for goal #5 (critical and creative thinking), the third combines these into a single document with aggregate results, and the fourth provides disaggregation results. For goal #2 (humanities perspective) the average score achieved was 76.67%, well above our benchmark expectations.

As mentioned in section III above, last year (2023-2024), goal #5 (critical and creative thinking) was assessed because of poor results for this goal in the prior year (2022-2023). An internally developed instrument (Instrument #1) consisting of a standardized test of 111 questions designed to assess all of Pillar's general education categories had been administered in the spring of 2023. On average, students scored only 31.45% in creative thinking and only 37.33% in critical analysis and reasoning. Last year's assessment (2024) therefore focused upon goal #5 (critical and creative thinking). The 2024 assessment was done by means of rubrics applied to student writing assignments designed to measure performance for each learning outcome. At that time, the average score for outcomes i-vi of Goal #5 was only 2.7, between marginal (2.0) and proficient (3.0), well below our target of 3.0 (proficient), indicating that the students were still not sufficiently proficient in the area of critical and creative thinking at the time of last year's assessment (2024).

For the current academic year (2024-2025), a 20-question instrument (Instrument #3) consisting solely of the relevant subset of the 111 questions of Instrument #1 was used to assess goal #2 (ten questions) and goal #5 (ten questions). For goal #5 (critical and creative thinking) the average score achieved was 73.33%, well above the 2023 average scores of 31.45% in creative thinking or 37.33% in critical analysis and reasoning, using exactly the same set of multiple-choice test questions in both cases. Although there were more juniors and seniors tested this year than in 2023, the current results

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are significantly better than in previous years and well above our benchmarks, even for seniors. Historically, student performance in critical thinking at Pillar College (including LEAD students) has hovered at an approximate average of 45% using the same set of questions used in this year's assessment.

With respect to specific learning outcomes within goal #5, last year (2024), students were found to be particularly deficient in outcome ii (identifies logical fallacies, observes bias, and notes the strengths of an argument; identifies unstated assumptions). This meant that this particular outcome needed special attention. For this outcome, this year's (2025) assessment actually yielded an average student score of 69.44% for its four component elements, well above the average score in 2023, which at that time was only approximately 30%.

Creative thinking is covered by goal #5 outcomes v, vi, and vii, but as explained above, outcomes v and vii were not assessed in 2025. However, outcome vi was measured this year, and the average student score for this outcome was as high as 88.89%, a stellar result.

During this academic year (2024-2025), a number of steps were taken to improve student performance in the area of critical and creative thinking. All faculty teaching courses relevant to this goal were asked to incorporate into their syllabi one or more of the institutional learning outcomes related to critical and creative thinking, with special emphasis upon goal #5 outcome ii (identifies logical fallacies, observes bias, and notes the strengths of an argument; identifies unstated assumptions). In some cases, members of the faculty were mentored as to how to help students to achieve proficiency in critical and creative thinking. One tool used for this purpose was a standard work, Richard Paul and Linda Elder, *Critical Thinking: Tools for Taking Charge of Your Learning and Your Life*, 4th ed. (Santa Barbara, Ca.: The Foundation for Critical Thinking, 2022).

In order to sustain student proficiency in critical and creative thinking, it will be necessary to continue with the implementation of the steps outlined above for the foreseeable future, otherwise test results are likely to diminish as time passes, especially as new students matriculate.

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One of the four documents accompanying this document is a disaggregation report. When disaggregated, all scores were well above our benchmarks, ranging from 60% to 100%, so it appears that no attempts at remediation are warranted at this time.

However, because this year's results are so far superior to previous results, we must be open to the possibility that other factors may have contributed to the superiority of this year's results. While it is true that a large number of seniors were included in the test sample, this would probably not explain why this year's results were so exceptional, since the seniors tested did not do significantly better than the freshmen, sophomores, and juniors (see the first table of the disaggregation report, which compares the performance of freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors).

It is also true that a large number of LEAD students were included in the test sample, and it could be argued that as older adults, these students are likely to achieve higher scores than other students tested. However, substantial numbers of LEAD students have always been included in almost all previous institutional assessments, and when their test scores are examined individually, it turns out that students in LEAD who were previously tested did not do significantly better than students in other programs.

The questions on our three instruments have not changed at all, so a change in the instrument cannot be an explanation, either. Perhaps another possible explanation for this year's high scores may be that only those students who knew that they would do well were willing to be a part of the testing sample. However, for the most part, a similar self-selection process has occurred in previous administrations of these tests.

There is also the possibility that this year's results are purely a statistical anomaly, which can actually happen for samples under a few thousand. In any case, it is probably not possible to determine with 100% certainty whether one or more of these factors were involved, but since Pillar College has been intentional in teaching critical thinking skills to students during the 2024-2025 academic year, this is most probably a key factor.

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V. Based on your analysis of the assessment results, what curricular or instructional changes will be made to improve student learning outcomes?

Based upon this year's results, no curricular or instructional changes will be necessary. Pillar College is to be commended for its excellent work in addressing deficiencies in the important area of critical and creative thinking.

VI. Please evaluate the quality of program-level assessment in your area and specify any steps needed for improvement. When, and by whom will these steps be implemented?

For general education, both institutional-level and program-level (A.A. in general studies) assessments are done manually, so it is recommended that methods be sought to automate various aspects of the assessment process.

VII. Action Items (include dates of completion and indicate personnel responsible)

There are five recommended action items:

- (1) to conduct a study to determine what methods may be used to automate the assessment process and determine what human, financial, and/or technological resources would be needed for this purpose. The personnel responsible would include the Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness, the Executive Director of Academic Effectiveness, and the Director of Academic Assessment. The recommended date of completion would be on or before March 31 of 2026, to enable implementation of any resulting recommendations prior to the normal time for our yearly assessment.
- (2) to continue to emphasize Pillar's critical thinking outcomes in all relevant courses and syllabi, and continue to mentor faculty to teach critical thinking skills to students. All administrators and faculty are responsible, with

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coordination by the director of academic assessment and/or by the office of institutional effectiveness. Since this is an ongoing effort, there is no deadline involved.

- (3) to review and revise all goals and outcomes with a view to keeping up with rapid changes in the workplace, including those changes related to working with artificial intelligence. The recommended date of final approval would be on or before March 31 of 2026, in order to enable implementation prior to the normal time for our yearly assessment.
- (4) to assess outcome vii of goal #5 in 2026 or 2027. This item currently has a low priority since in 2023, students performed well in standardized testing which assessed collaboration, and in 2025, students performed extremely well in a related outcome (vi). Since two general education goals are scheduled to be assessed in 2026 but only one gen ed goal is scheduled to be assessed in 2027, it would probably make sense to defer the assessment of outcome vii until the academic year 2026-2027. Responsibility for this would fall to the Director of Academic Assessment.
- (5) to ensure that BLEND is included in the institution-wide 2025-2026 gen ed assessment. This year, the BLEND program assessed and reported on certain gen ed goals. However, where appropriate, in succeeding years it would probably be a good idea for there to be collaboration and coordination of BLEND with the general education assessment taking place institutionally according to the schedule in section I of this report. This collaborative assessment would be scheduled for completion on the normal due date, June 30, 2026. This year, instrument #3 was translated into Spanish, but an assessment was not actually made. Responsibility for this item would fall to the Director of BLEND, with heavy assistance from the Director of Academic Assessment.